

PROPOSAL TO MODIFY COLUMBIA'S ONLINE DIRECTORY

Observation:

The online directory is one of the most frequently utilized functions on the Columbia web site. Anyone with Internet access can obtain information about any Columbia affiliate (student, faculty, staff member, or administrator) by searching with his/her name or UNI. If the query returns a student, the following information is displayed: name, email address, school, department, mailing address, residence hall, phone number, and home page.

To remove oneself from the directory, a student must visit the Registrar's Information Center in Kent Hall. This opt-out policy is stated at the bottom of the directory web page, and is also detailed in the student handbook FACETS, but many students remain unaware of this option.

Argument:

The personal information stored in the online directory lacks several fields that would be of use to students who are searching for other students. Many Columbia undergraduates have expressed the need for a search function that would return a fellow student's class year, photo, and birthday, for example.

However, many students express concern over the fact that the online directory is currently accessible to anyone outside of the Columbia community, and that anyone can gain access to private and potentially sensitive information.

Peer institutions, such as Yale University, have solved both of these problems by creating two separate directories. The Yale Phonebook (www.yale.edu/phonebook) is accessible to anyone with Internet access, is searchable by name, and returns the following information: name, email, mailing address, residence hall, phone number, and class year. The Yale Facebook (www.yale.edu/facebook) prompts a user to login with a username and password. Only undergraduate students have access to the Facebook. It is searchable by name, and returns the Phonebook's information as well as the following information: photo, residential college, home address, birthday, and major. The search results can be sorted on any of these fields.

Proposal:

1. The Columbia online directory should remain accessible to anyone with Internet access, but should only display the following information: a student's name, email, mailing address, phone number, and home page.
2. A second directory should be created for undergraduate students. This directory, to be called the online facebook, will require students to log in with their Columbia UNI and password. The facebook will store more information about each student, but only fellow students will be able to search for and view this information. The following information should be displayed within the facebook: name, email, mailing address, phone number, and home page, as well as CUID photo, residence hall, class year, department/major, and birthday.

3. The choice to opt out of the public directory or edit information should be available to students online, via a web page within SSOL. This option, as well as the option to opt out via the Registrar's office, should be better advertised to students.

4. The process of removing and/or editing the information stored in the online facebook should be easy for students to complete. Following the Yale model, a link to a web page within the online facebook should allow a student to check or uncheck fields that would be displayed in the search. Thus, if a student wanted their name, email, and class year to be displayed, but did not want their birthday displayed, their facebook entry would reflect this preference.

Author:

Jennifer Schnidman

University Senator, C'06