



State of New Jersey
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Attorney General

August 26, 2008

Dr. Richard L. McCormick
President
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Old Queens
83 Somerset Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1281

Dear Dr. McCormick:

As a new school year is about to commence, I write to express my concerns about the online safety of your students. The Internet is a terrific tool for communicating and expanding our horizons; however, it also provides a forum for predatory, fraudulent, and harassing behavior. Bad actors online include dangerous sexual predators who use the Internet to identify and contact potential victims, and students who use the Internet to engage in cyber-harassment. To meet these challenges, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office has adopted an aggressive, multi-pronged approach ranging from criminal investigations and prosecutions, to civil enforcement actions, to the creation of educational programs, to cooperative efforts with industry. Yet more can and must be done. Whether we are law enforcement officials or school administrators, we have a role to play in reducing inappropriate content, conduct, and contact on the Internet.

Under my Office's mandate to protect residents of the State, we opened an investigation of www.JuicyCampus.com, a website that promotes online anonymous gossip and provides a platform where users can post malicious and untrue comments about others' personal lives, including sexual behavior and physical characteristics. Such postings can do more than temporarily harass. Once an item is posted on the Internet, regardless of veracity, it becomes part of one's "permanent cyberspace record," subject to review by everyone from college admission officers to prospective employers. Moreover, in the wrong hands, the combination of Internet gossip about a 17-year-old college freshman's alleged sexual activities, and that student's campus address, telephone number, and other personal details, could have dangerous consequences.



While www.JuicyCampus.com is an example of a gossip website that causes harassment and safety concerns, danger also exists for college students on other similar gossip websites and social networking websites. As personal information regarding students is posted on the Internet using these forums, increased harassment of students has occurred. Accordingly, we all have to make certain that students are protected – both by limiting access to their personal information if they so request, and through education, codes of conduct and strong support from colleges and universities in our State.


I ask that you check that your policies provide appropriate protections to your school's community by ensuring that you do the following:

- Issue a statement to the school community concerning your administration's position regarding websites that provide forums for cyber-harassment, which includes stalking, bullying, and/or sexual exploitation.
- Limit access to the school directory information by providing clear and prominent instructions allowing students to "opt out" of listing all or part of their personal information, at any point in time, including before the directory is published. In addition, students who are being harassed online should be able to contact the school and have their information immediately removed from the directory.
- Establish and advertise the availability of resources for students who are the victims of cyber-harassment, which includes stalking, bullying, and/or sexual exploitation, and provide appropriate training for staff.
- Incorporate the topic of cyber-harassment, which includes stalking, bullying, and/or sexual exploitation, into your school's code of conduct, with consequences for those who engage in these activities.

The arrival of the freshman class presents an opportunity to educate students about the school's policies and resources regarding these issues and about the Internet. I look forward to hearing more about your school's efforts and to working with you to help protect the campus community.

If you have any questions, please contact Jason Orlando, Special Assistant to the Attorney General, at (609) 292-8640.

Sincerely,


Anne Milgram
Attorney General