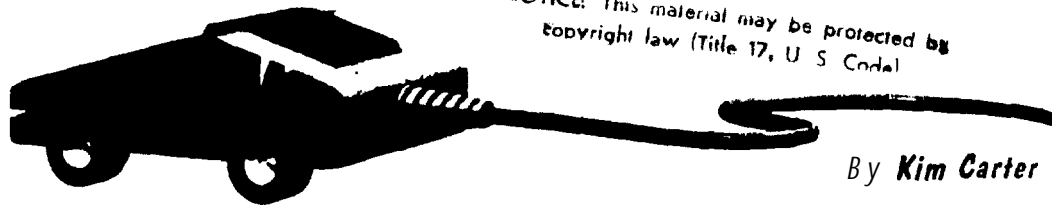


How to Teach Students the Rules of the Online Road



By Kim Carter

Fine-tuning your school or district's Acceptable Use Policy can help your students become citizens of the digital world,

Opening your school to the

Internet can be daunting. Can it really be a good idea to give students so much freedom-browsing the Web, sending and receiving e-mail-when even an old-fashioned analog trip to the library or media center finds a few kids giggling by the dictionary? Just as students must learn to make, *ahem*, better use of their time in the library, so educators face a similar "teachable moment" when confronting the Internet.

The questions raised by Internet access are thornier than those faced in the library, however. How private is e-mail? Who's liable if the messages students send contain hate speech? It's so easy to lift code from a well-designed Web site, or to incorporate popular music and other multimedia into presentations, so how do you make copyright issues real? What consequences are appropriate when students (or staff) cross the line?

The school or districtwide Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), when thoughtfully crafted, can provide guidance to these difficult questions. First, it can define the skills students need to develop in order to benefit educationally from the Internet's resources. Second, it frames the use of the school or district's network. Third, it establishes do's and don'ts for online behavior, as well as the consequences when these norms are violated.

AUPs also define acceptable use of

electronic information and minimize institutional liability. As the Virginia Department of Education "Acceptable Use Policies-A Handbook" (www.pen.k12.va.us/go/VDOE/Technology/AUP/home.shtml) states, "The Internet is a virtual community based simply on courtesy and commonsense. A local AUP clearly defines what constitutes local responsible use of information networks."

School Policies in Cyberspace

An AUP blends a school or district's policies for student behavior and its policies for selecting instructional materials. The Phillips Exeter Academy policy (www.exeter.edu/public/aup.html) states, "All Academy rules, but particularly those pertaining to dishonesty and hazing, are applicable to all uses of computers and related technologies. This document [the AUP] is intended to clarify those rules as they apply specifically to network usage."

Districts have selection policies for instructional materials which establish how financial resources are used to support educational activities. At the same time, these documents establish a process for complaints regarding materials. A selection policy thus ensures certain rights to members of the educational community, including

the right of intellectual freedom, while providing limits and processes for addressing individual differences. An AUP functions in much the same way. It applies to a broader, less controllable range of resources, however, as well as to essentially unfiltered user communications.

Nancy Willard, of the Center for Advanced Technology in Education at the University of Oregon, identifies AUPs as the "standard process through which districts manage student and employee use of the Internet." In her "Acceptable Use Policy-Legal and Educational Analysis" (www.erehwon.com/k12aup), Willard cautions that "the use of an AUP to govern student and employee behavior raises a number of constitutional concerns. It must be recognized that students do not shed their constitutional rights on the school district's on-ramp to the informational superhighway."

Most school districts today have developed Board policies that ensure the constitutional rights of their students and employees while setting expectations for behavior. AUPs should reflect these guidelines. How AUPs are developed depends on the school culture. In some cases, administrators, such as the principal or the systems administrator, develop the AUP. In others, the document is the work of the broader school community. The greater the involvement of

appropriate stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, administrators and staff. the greater the likelihood of ownership and adherence to the policy.

What's in There?

While the components and language of an AUP will vary depending on the school and the document's audience, the basic elements include an introduction that explains what the AUP covers and the reason for having it. It should identify who is covered by the policy, provide specific examples of acceptable and unacceptable use, along with potential consequences for violations. The process for reporting inappropriate use should be clearly stated as well in the policy.

The statement of purpose is particularly important to an AUP because it establishes the reason for making the technologies available in the first place, thus providing the ultimate measure of what constitutes acceptable use. Willard believes school boards "should make it clear that the district Internet system is being established for a limited educational purpose." However, she cautions, what constitutes "educational purpose" must be further clarified.

In the Bellingham, Washington, school district policy for "Student Access to Networked Information Resources"* (www.bham.wednet.edu/2313inet.htm), the Introduction states, "In a free and democratic society, access to information is a fundamental right of citizenship.... Electronic information research skills are now fundamental to preparation of citizens and future employees during an Age of Information... The network is provided for students to conduct research and communicate with others."

Identifying the reason for the policy provides the opportunity for identifying the potential pitfalls of these resources. As the Bellingham policy points out, "Telecommunications, because they may lead to any publicly

available tileserver in the world. will open classrooms to electronic information resources which have not been screened by educators for use by students of various ages."

It is also essential to identify who is covered by the policy. Some districts choose to have separate AUPs for students and employees. In others, such as Souhegan School District, one AUP covers all members of the educational community. If a district does not require employees to sign AUP agreements, then other steps must be taken to make sure everyone understands the expectations. Teachers will be most responsible for implementing and enforcing AUPs, so it is critical that they are not just compliant with the policies, but understand the concepts sufficiently to guide their students.

Do and Do Not

The specific do's and don'ts are the heart of the AUP. Cyberspace is a whole new world for many users and the AUP can provide novices with tips and warnings about what they may encounter, along with examples of appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

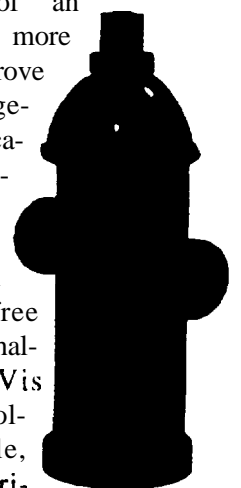
Expectations should cover two areas: what users can expect and what is expected of them. Different school cultures require different approaches. The Bronx High School of Science Computer Resource Policy (www.bxscience.edu/orgs/bsc/NetworkPolicy.html) contains the introductory statement, "Appropriate Use should always reflect academic honesty, high ethical and moral responsibility and show restraint in the consumption of shared resources." Such a statement clearly identifies the school's expectations for students' behavior. The Do's and Don'ts that follow, such as "Do use ONLY...your own user-id and password to access the network." and "Do keep your password confidential," provide specific examples to assist students in translating dictates into practical, daily behaviors.

Once students receive accounts and passwords they essentially have direct control of their own communications with the outside world. "One of the greatest, non-technical conceptual leaps that people have to make online," says Chris Williams, the 16-year-old proprietor of the consulting group GEEKS, "is that online interactions with people are 100 percent as real as those in 'real life.'" He echoes the concerns of many who find that students (and adults) will do things over a network that they wouldn't do if the other person were standing in front of them. "There's an attitude," says Williams, "that people met online are not 'real people'; they can be turned off with the power switch."

As the Learning through Collaborative Visualization Project (CoVis) reminds administrators (typhoon.covis.nwu.edu:80/Papers/Fishman&Pea1993.html), "the biggest problem that your students will face on the Internet stems from the cultural clash they will encounter between their familiar ways of talking to each other and the way people communicate in virtual environments." For this reason, it is important to teach users of information networks "Netiquette" or the social conventions in the virtual community.

Free Speech or Speak Freely?

The more specific the language of an AUP can be, the more effective it will prove as both a management and an educational tool. However, walking the fine line between specificity and abridgment of free speech can be a challenge. The CoVis Network Use Policy, for example, defines "appropri-



ate language” as “language appropriate for school situations as indicated by school codes of conduct.” The more an AUP can refer to the school’s established behavior codes, the stronger the policy will be and the more readily understood.

The Souhegan policy states its network “is a free and open forum for expression,” while referencing the school’s behavior guidelines: “The use of your account is subject to the Souhegan Six Standards.” The CoVis policy likewise states support for intellectual freedom, “including viewpoints that are strange, unorthodox, or unpopular.” The policy goes on, however, to warn that such opinions are subject to open criticism, some of which may be harsh, “a practice known as ‘flaming.’ It is best not to respond to such attacks, unless you believe you are capable of a measured, rational reply.”

The recent Supreme Court decision declaring

hate speech, and pornography. In short, the kinds of behavior common in other arenas on campus are appearing in electronic communications.” Such behavior must be clearly distinguished from free speech.

The right to privacy, although never guaranteed, is as important on the Internet as it is in school. Students and teachers need to understand the distinction, however, between a right and a guarantee. An individual’s e-mail and files need to be respected as individual property. Just as school officials do not have the right to search a student’s locker without just cause, neither do they have the right to monitor a student’s e-mail.

Clearly specifying what circumstances qualify for violating the privacy of electronic information is essential in an AUP. In any system, e-mail occasionally gets hung up or **misd**elivered and the systems administrator may need to view a private message in order to return or resend it. In the CoVis Network, the network has been established for the clear purpose of researching the impact of information networks on student learning and “CoVis researchers may periodically request permission to view your electronic correspondence or files for research purposes.”

Being conscious of use of computer resources is another responsibility. For some, this translates into not copying original messages in their entirety in all replies. For others (especially systems operators), this means not sending chain letters. For **all**, protecting computer resources includes avoiding the spread of computer viruses. While viruses cannot be contracted through reading e-mail or Web sites, downloading (as in files or programs attached to e-mail or utilizing FTP) does carry the risk of downloading a virus along with the file or program. The AUP presents the opportunity to inform users of expectations and limitations on system use, as well as to

educate users about potential dangers such as viruses.

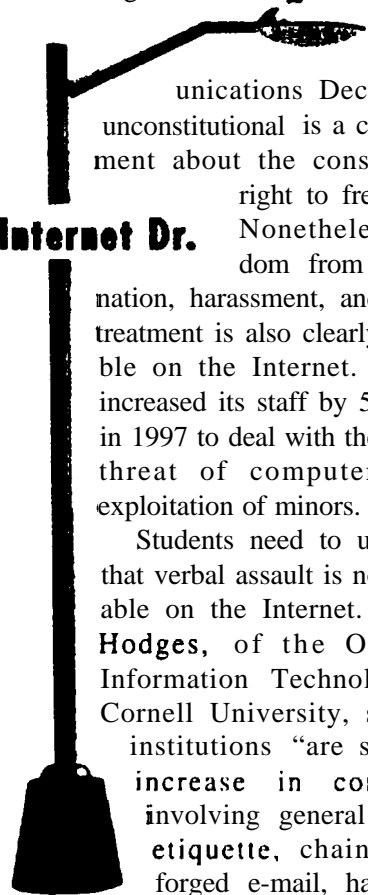
Copyright Not Wrong

Schools have a particularly significant responsibility with regard to copyright. Through modeling conscientious adherence to copyright laws and through direct instruction, schools can teach students to respect the intellectual property of others, a necessity for an Information Age culture.

It is all too easy to find a Web site that you like and use that site’s code as the basis for your own, to borrow an image for a slide show or to incorporate a Popular song into a multimedia presentation. The ease with which the technology allows certain actions contributes to misuse of its capabilities. Copyright is a serious issue in the digital world.

Copyright essentially offers limited exclusive protection of an author’s original work. Fair use provides for limited use of a copyrighted work for certain purposes and is determined by specific guidelines around four basic factors: 1) the purpose and character of the use; 2) the nature of the work; 3) the amount of the work used; and 4) the effect of the use upon the value or marketability of the work.

The Educational Multimedia Fair Use Guidelines Development Committee has developed the Fair Use Guidelines for Multimedia (www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/ccmcguid.htm). Recognizing educational uses of various types of work, particularly music and video, while balancing the rights of the creators of those works, the Fair Use Guidelines strive to find a middle ground that respects the rights and needs of both educators and publishers. Fair use guidelines for Web materials are currently in the works. In the meantime, an excellent resource for information, summaries, further references and links, and current issues, including



Internet Dr. **t h e**
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unications Decency Act unconstitutional is a clear statement about the constitutional right to free speech. Nonetheless, freedom from discrimination, harassment, and abusive treatment is also clearly applicable on the Internet. The FBI increased its staff by 50 percent in 1997 to deal with the growing threat of computer-related exploitation of minors.

Students need to understand that verbal assault is not acceptable on the Internet. Marjorie **Hodges**, of the Office of Information Technologies at Cornell University, says that institutions “are seeing an **increase in complaints involving general network etiquette, chain letters, forged e-mail, harassment,**

Acceptable Use Policy

Web issues. is The Copyright Website (www.benedict.com/).

The most succinct guideline to copyright is: When in doubt, don't. Ask for permission from the person who created or posted the material.

Web-posted materials compound the dilemma in that users cannot always be certain that the person posting the material is the original creator. Be certain to ask about originality of postings. He or she may be in!

violation of copyright for the very material for which permission is being requested!

In prohibiting copyright violations, the Phillips Exeter Academy policy stresses the **commonalties** between the networked world and other academic areas: "The network is a valid **academic** resource, and use thereof is governed by the same rules as library resources."

When Things Go Wrong

While use of digital technologies, from CD-ROMs to Web resources, often seems to be a private activity, it is in actuality quite public. Therein lies another critical component of any AUP: defining the consequences for inappropriate use. Willard, both an educator and a lawyer, feels the greatest potential difficulty schools will face in preparing students for citizenship in the digital community is also the greatest advantage.

"One of the key components of this environment is the lack of tangible consequences. You are distanced from the harm you may cause. We will have to deal with this issue. But

we can't do that in an authoritarian manner. We have to help students develop the internal control so they will be able to govern their behavior in situations where they could behave [unethically] without feedback or with reduced punishment."

The most immediate and common consequence is the loss of access. A word of caution, however. Digital information resources are quickly becoming integral and necessary to any student's education. Refusing a student access to networked information can be analogous to refusing to give a student a textbook or denying school library privileges. The grounds for such denial must be significant and will rely on the strength, wording, and specificity of the **AUP**. As access moves increasingly away from being a privilege toward becoming a right, alternatives to denying access must be found.

"Consequences should be focused on addressing the students' perceptions about values," says Willard. She suggests consequences may be having "their account terminated until they have written a 3-5 page paper on a sexual harassment or a **personal** responsibility issue."

The Monroe County Community School Corporation in Bloomington, Indiana, specifies the following consequences in its **AUP** (www.mccsc.edu/policy.html): "Disciplinary action related to student access to electronic resources may be determined...in accordance with existing practice regarding inappropriate language or behavior.... Violations of the school and/or MCCSC acceptable use policies may result in a loss of access to electronic resources. . . . When appropriate, law enforcement agencies may be involved."

The **AUP** should clearly delineate process details. How should a student or **teacher report** a possible violation? To whom? What are the procedures for following up on a report? How is a

violation reviewed? Who decides what the consequences will be and is there an appeal process? Answers to all of the above questions should follow existing school processes for behavioral concerns as closely as possible.

Souhegan High School's Acceptable Use Policy currently specifies the reporting process this way: "If you suspect a security **problem**...you must notify a System Administrator, teacher, or administrator at Souhegan High School. The administration, faculty, and staff of SHS may request the System Administrator deny, revoke, or suspend specific user accounts. System Administrator(s) . . . may close your account at any time as warranted. If you feel your privileges have been unjustly denied, revoked, or suspended, you may appeal to the Dean of Students," thus initiating the Community Council Review Board's involvement.

Under Construction

AUPs are dynamic documents, and thus may evolve to handle new situations. A statement of the limit of institutional liability is a common component, as is an agreement form requiring both student and parental signatures. While some schools incorporate blocking or filtering software, they commonly refer to the inherent limitations in such programs as well. Alpine School District in Utah states in its **AUP** (www.alpine.k12.ut.us/ASD/Util/StudentAUP.html): "Alpine School District shall maintain a filtered access point for the Internet. While the district provides a filtered **access** point to the Internet, sites accessible via the Internet may contain material

that is illegal, defamatory, inaccurate or potentially offensive to some people. Users are expected to use appropriate judgment in selecting and viewing Internet sites.”

There are a variety of additional components that could also be included in an AUP. The developers of the CoVis policy, Barry Fishman and Roy D. Pea, believe that an AUP should be “more than a set of guidelines for acceptable network usage,” serving also “as an introduction and brief guide to the services provided by the network.” They therefore have included definitions of terms used and descriptions of services available in the CoVis policy. The Bronx Science High School policy includes an access priority listing based on tasks to be accomplished as well as a detailed Games Policy (the bane of many educational technology staff and faculty!).

Ultimately, AUPs are only as effective as the education that accompanies them and the consistency with which they are implemented. Some schools are incorporating computer or technology ethics courses as a requirement for students to receive or maintain network privileges.

The world of digital information, including the Internet and World Wide Web, is more than just a source of information. It represents a new dimension of our social communities, reshaping existing human interactions and redefining what human interactions will look like in the years to come. As John Dewey said, it is communication that makes a community. The world of networked information resources provides a perfect opportunity.

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