

Students focus Web cameras on everyday dorm life

by Elizabeth Simmacher
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Carri Brodnax recently was talking long-distance from her Florida home to her boyfriend Ryan Scott, a Southern Methodist University senior, when the connection suddenly went dead.

Luckily, Brodnax's brother had already been online, so she quickly clicked on Scott's home page because she knew that her boyfriend's dorm room would be visible, thanks to a Web camera that was up and running.

There, Brodnax could see a seconds-old photo of Scott. "She saw me leaning back in my chair against the wall," Scott says.

Scott, who was diagnosed as an epileptic when he was in high school, had experienced a grand mal seizure.

Brodnax called Scott's mother, who managed to get medical attention for him in Dallas by calling 911 in Orlando, Fla. He received help fast, thanks partly to the Web camera connected to the PC in his dorm room.

College students such as Scott are using some of the millions of inexpensive Web cameras to transmit pictures of dorm rooms and apartments on their Web pages, mostly just because they can.

Three popular sites featuring student home pages equipped with Web cams are Real College Life (www.realcollegelife.com), College Cams (www.college-cams.com) and WebDorm (www.webdorm.com). Many feature shots of the staples of college life: messy rooms and dirty dishes in the sink.

A 1999 Logitech-Greenfield Online study of teens and college students found that 63 percent keep in touch with their families and friends more now than three years ago, thanks in part to Web cams. The same study found that 39 percent either used or were familiar with Web camera technology.

A study commissioned by Intel estimated that 2.5 million Web cameras

were sold in 1999, up from 350,000 in 1997. By 2001, the projected sales will be 10 million cameras, according to the same study.

Typically, Web cameras capture everyday events in a student's life.

Amanda, 19, is a sophomore at the University of Minnesota and a devoted Web cam user. She asked that her last name not be used. She says she gets messages from viewers such as, "I saw you folding your clothes."

Inevitably, there are long, boring stretches: "I let people watch me sleep," Amanda says.

"It's just fun," she says when asked why she photographs her life and puts it on the Internet. Her friends generally don't mind, she says. "We're a crazy bunch."

But why broadcast your life?

Lillian Beeson studies communication at the University of Pittsburgh, Greensburg campus, where she is an associate professor and the director of the Humanities Academic Village.

"I don't understand this usage myself," says Beeson. "I guess this is the age of exhibitionism for some. Look at the talk shows."

Or perhaps students are experiencing the same sense of community that mass media generated when a good portion of us watched the same television shows at the same time, Beeson says. Or, simply put, maybe "they get a kick out of watching each other."

For several reasons, college students are a natural market for Web cameras.

"College students are consummate communicators," says Bruce Friedrichs, senior vice president of worldwide marketing at Logitech, a company that makes PC peripherals, including a Web camera called Quick Cam. "You're looking at a generation that grew up on the Internet," he says.

"College students probably are the most Internet-heavy group, and they have good Internet connections in their dorm rooms," says Allison Mahoney, a spokeswoman for the college-oriented Web site WebDorm.

The Web cameras are "embraced by popular culture," says Friedrichs. In the last six months, Web cameras have appeared on television shows including *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Beverly Hills 90210* and in the movie *American Pie*.

These days, a basic Web camera and software cost about \$50 — around the price of a college textbook. Besides Logitech, makers include Intel, Kodak, and Creative Labs. All also offer models in the \$80 to \$150 range. These offer higher resolution and more features.

Finally, college students are psychologically ripe for the Web camera phenomenon.

"They're in a very social part of their lives," says Friedrichs. They may be separated from family and friends for the first time.

Scott bought his Web camera as a way to keep in touch with his girlfriend and mother in Florida.

With the increase in geographically separated families, Web cams have become a new tool.

"In that sense, I think it could help families get closer together," says Dr. Beeson.

Katie Maris, 24, a graduate student in business and journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, uses her Web cam exclusively as a videophone. She communicates with her parents, who live about an hour's drive away.

Not only can she see her parents while they talk, "it's free that way" because calls are just another Internet activity, she notes. Video calls must be prearranged, but the process is pretty self-explanatory, she says.

Maris also has used her Web camera to have videoconferences with other students from Japan, Spain, and Latin America, she says. She has used video phone calls to brush up on her Spanish.

On many sites with Web cams, it's possible to summon the cam owner for an impromptu plain-text chat.

Darren Rose, 21, a senior from

Houston at the University of Texas at Austin, got a camera to communicate with a girlfriend. He says he likes to update the photo on his home page frequently so people know that he uses it a lot. He has counted many more "hits" — visits to his page — since he installed the cam, up to a couple hundred a day, he says.

At first, Rose would forget that he was on camera and do things he didn't want to broadcast — like change his clothes, he says. Now when he wants to shut the world out, "I just turn it off or point it up at the ceiling."

There's just one little problem.

"My roommate doesn't like it," says Rose. His roommate runs past the camera hoping that the Web cam will miss him. But his girlfriend has really gotten into it and friends are OK with it, he says.

But not everybody gets a warning. "Sometimes," he admits, "I like to surprise them."

Other students with Web cameras say friends and roommates don't mind or like the Webcam.

Right now, it's a wild, wild world out there, and some Web cameras record nudity and even sex.

The nudity issue could be the reason there seem to be more male students with Web cams than females, Amanda, the student at the University of Minnesota, agreed. She has a FAQ, or frequently asked questions, page that explains she doesn't do nudity.

Scott says the same: "I'm conscious of it [the cam] if I'm doing something I wouldn't want my mother to see."

WebDorm has an agreement binding its WebDormers to non-offensive images only. This agreement is only a preventive measure, according to WebDorm spokeswoman Mahoney.

"We have not had any problems with obscenity or indecency," she writes.

"In fact, the worst thing that happened was some frat boys came home a little drunk one night and mooned the camera."

Numbers for students binge drinking, abstaining up on college campuses

by Dane Schiller
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DALLAS — College campuses are becoming more divided into camps of serious drinkers and nondrinkers, a new national survey suggests.

The number of frequent binge drinkers and the number of students abstaining from alcohol both are increasing, according to a national survey by the Harvard School of Public Health released Tuesday, March 14.

The survey of 14,000 students showed that almost one-fourth are frequent binge drinkers and almost one-fifth abstain from alcohol, said Henry Wechsler, director of college alcohol studies at Harvard.

"Revelation against the more extreme forms of drinking may be driving some students away from the binge-drinking scene entirely," he said.

On South Padre Island, Nadia Trevino, 23, said she agreed with that conclusion, even as other students around her celebrated spring break as a traditional drunken rite of passage.

"I have cut down. People are saying no," said Trevino, a junior at the University of Texas at Austin. "I am

having more fun sober and watching everyone else get plastered."

Wechsler's study did show that serious college drinkers are getting drunk more often. The study was conducted at 119 four-year schools in 39 states.

Binge drinkers account for two-thirds of alcohol consumed on campus and were defined by the study as men who chug at least five drinks back-to-back or women who have at least four drinks back-to-back at least every other week.

Wechsler concluded that frequent binge drinkers increased from 20 to 23 percent from 1993 to 1999, while the number of abstainers increased from 15 to 19 percent during that same period.

Schools have had some success with on-campus programs to reduce drinking, but more could be done to counter establishments that offer low-priced, high-quantity drinks, said Wechsler, the study's chief investigator.

In North Texas, some students said drinking has played a lesser role in their lives in recent years, but for some of their classmates, getting drunk seems as much a college pastime as ever.

"I can have fun without alcohol," said one Southern Methodist University pre-med student who gave up alcohol his freshman year. He asked not to be identified. "There's a lot of people who party a lot and go to the bars. It is pretty normal at a college," he said.

The University of North Texas chapter of Theta Chi fraternity was suspended by the school and by its national headquarters earlier this month after several arrests for violations of alcohol and hazing policies. According to police, some underage pledges were given alcohol during hazing.

Jay Perrin, who is pursuing his doctorate in speech and hearing science at the University of Texas at Dallas, said there's little time to drink among his friends.

"I am around more serious people," Perrin said at the Coffee Haus on Hillcrest Avenue. "But I get a glimpse of the younger people, and it seems they are doing just as much partying."

Gage Paine, SMU's dean of student life, didn't have ready statistics on drinking by SMU students but said binge drinking "is still a concern, no doubt about it."

Paine said students are at least talking more about choosing not to drink. "I am hearing more conversations by students choosing to abstain," he said. "It is becoming more of an option."

Among the steps SMU has taken to encourage sobriety are a zero-tolerance policy at residence halls and programs to help students combat alcohol abuse and understand the risks of heavy drinking.

Mandalyn Clark, an SMU sophomore, said she believes figures on binge drinking are overstated. She said she believes most binge drinking occurs at get-acquainted parties and rush parties at the beginning of the school year.

"But then it goes down," she said. "As far as I have seen, people don't sit around partying. . . they drink, but it's more social drinking."

Shawn Fouch, a senior at SMU, said the amount students drink depends on their social circle.

"You see more of it on fraternity row," he said. "I'm part of the theater department, and there's more problems with drugs than alcohol." Dallas Morning News correspondent David Flick contributed to this report.

U.S. to track foreign students and professors

by William Lee
Campus Correspondent
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CHICAGO (TMS) — The threat of terrorism has prompted the Immigration and Naturalization Service to implement a surveillance plan aimed at tracking foreign students in the United States.

The plan, called the Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students program, ended its trial status with INS on Feb. 22 and has since been extended nationwide. The program, tested at institutions such as Auburn and Duke universities, requires foreign students and scholars in the

U.S. on temporary visas to pay colleges and universities a \$95 fee. Institutions forward that money to INS to pay for a database tracking the foreign scholars as they move within the country. The database is expected to be fully functional in 2002.

INS officials say CIPRIS will help modernize and streamline the current process of bringing foreign students and scholars into the U.S. It also will enable colleges and universities to share important information about students — such as their fields of study and the means by which they're paying for their education — with governmental agencies.

But several professional associa-

tions, such as NAFSA (Association of International Educators), which is based in New York, say the program unfairly targets foreign students as potential threats to national safety and security.

"I am concerned about the message that we'll be sending out to other nations," Daphne Osayade-Dumas, associate dean of multicultural affairs at Sarah Lawrence College, told the *Westchester County Weekly*. "I think it sends the wrong message."

So does Mary C. Martin, director of the University of Chicago's office of international affairs. She said the database overshadows the positive contributions foreign students make to their campuses and

surrounding communities.

"International students add billions to the economy," she said. "They don't just pay tuition. They pay for their apartments, they buy groceries, they take public transportation, and you can really see the impact in small [college] towns."

Aside from unfairly targeting foreign students, university officials also say the INS tracking program also requires already beleaguered foreign-student advisers to complete a mountain of paperwork — something Martin said they shouldn't be required to do.

"The program is making universities a bill collector for the federal government, and it's not a comfortable thing for us," she said.

Antioch College student, friend found shot to death in Costa Rica

by Elaine De Valle
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MIAMI — Two 19-year-old American women were found shot to death near a popular beach town in Costa Rica that has increasingly become notorious for criminal activity, Costa Rican police reported Tuesday, March 14.

The Judicial Investigation Agency identified the victims as Emily Brook Howell of Lexington, Ky., and Emily Rachel Eagen of Detroit.

The bodies were found along a highway near the Caribbean seaside village of Cahuita — in one of the country's most crime-ridden areas — about 90 miles east of San Jose, according to Jesus Urena, a spokesman for the Public Security Ministry.

Urena said one of the victims had been shot twice in the head and the other three times in the back. He said one of the victims was found nude.

Scott Warren, dean of students at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, said Howell was a student at the college who had been in Costa Rica since January on a photography project. Eagen was a former student who was visiting her and had been in the country 15 days.

He said authorities were uncertain about the motivation for the attack.

"It appears to be a random, tragic incident," he said. "It's a horrible loss and cause for mourning for all of us."

An American woman who lived with Howell and Eagen was identified as Shawna or Shawn Sellers. She was also in Costa Rica but was elsewhere when the killings occurred, Warren said. She has since been reunited with her father, he added.

Jorge Rojas, director of the Judicial Investigation Agency, said the women had been living in an apartment on Colon Boulevard in San Jose, the capital, but traveled to the Caribbean coast on weekends.

Eagen left Ann Arbor, Mich., about three weeks ago to join Howell and the other woman in San Jose, said her mother, Shirley Eagen. She said the family had researched Costa Rica and believed it was safe. "This could have happened anywhere," she said.

According to the surviving woman — who reported last seeing her roommates Sunday evening, March 12 — the three had gone to Limon province on Friday, March 10. On Saturday, March 11, they rented a Hyundai Galloper. The sport utility vehicle was found burned near Guapiles, about 60 miles from the crime scene, only hours before the bodies were discovered.

A local woman found the bodies in bushes about three yards from the highway between the coastal town of Puerto Limon and Cahuita. Local residents said they assume the bodies were dropped off there early Monday, March 13, because they heard someone unloading heavy objects from a car.

On Tuesday, March 14, authorities also found a casing from a .38-caliber handgun, the victims' bras, a pair of short pants belonging to one victim, and other personal items about

60 miles from where the bodies were found.

The surviving friend said she was supposed to have accompanied the other two women on a nighttime drive, but at the last moment wasn't feeling well and therefore stayed at their hotel in Puerto Viejo, a small tourist site between Puerto Limon and Cahuita.

Five slayings have been reported this month in Limon province, which includes an economically depressed area where the banana industry once thrived and a string of beaches popular with tourists.

The region — visited by thousands of tourists from North America, Europe, and South America each year — has been called a "no man's land" by angry local residents and business people who complain of poor police protection and a high number of criminals and drug traffickers, according to several sources.

About two weeks ago, area travel agents asked the government of President Miguel Angel Rodriguez to provide more police officers and warned that some hoteliers were ready to take justice into their own hands to stop the increased criminal activity.

According to Costa Rican media reports, business people also complained of two murders earlier this month in the same area. The victims were Austrian hotelier Helmut Waffinger and a high official with the Costa Rican electrical company, Emanuel Barrantes.

One of the leaders of the Chamber of Caribbean Tourism, Edwin Patterson, told authorities that foreign travel agents "have been horrified since before this wave of violence" and could be warning tourists to stay away from the country.

Tourism is the nation's main source of foreign currency. Costa Rica — one of the world's leaders in eco-tourism — welcomed more than one million visitors last year, who brought more than \$1 billion to the country.

Patterson, the Chamber of Caribbean Tourism leader, added that local business people and their employees had opted to buy firearms to protect themselves.

"Everybody is armed here," he said. "In the hotels, the order is to shoot to kill. The aggressiveness of the criminals is such that we have reached the conclusion that it is either their lives or ours."

A State Department travel advisory issued late last year warns about increasing crime throughout Costa Rica.

"At least seven American women have been victims of sexual assaults on beach resorts on both coasts. . . there have been several attempted sexual assaults, including one rape, by taxi drivers."

Travelers are urged to travel in groups during daylight hours, to keep valuables out of sight, and not wear jewelry, in order to lessen their risk.

"Local law enforcement agencies have limited capabilities," the advisory states. Herald translator, Renato Perez, Herald writer Aracely Acosta, wire services, the *Detroit Free Press*, and reporters from *La Prensa Libre* and *La Nacion* in Costa Rica contributed to this report.

Penn State officials, students mull smoke-free campus

TMS Campus
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UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. (TMS) — Smokers with a littering habit have students and administrators at Pennsylvania State University, Park, pushing for a smoke-free campus.

When heads of the university's clean-up efforts recently discovered that the institution spends about \$150,000 a year for janitorial costs associated with picking up cigarette butts and wrappers, they decided to draft a plan to eradicate smoking on campus.

It's not as if the university hasn't given smokers a chance to clean up their act. In December, Penn State clean-up crews placed several new cigarette receptacles throughout campus, but quickly found many student smokers weren't using them.

On an upcoming ballot, the university will gauge student opinion about a campus-wide ban. If student support for the measure is clear, university administrators have agreed to discuss the matter further.

The university already has phased out smoking in all campus buildings and has limited smoking to particular floors in its dormitories.