

MYSPACE/ Often time-consuming



Felix, 17, an Alvarez High student, pulls up his MySpace page in his Salinas home Jan. 10.

SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

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a MySpace account to stay in touch with a sister in college.

"Mainly I like messing with my page layout and photos," said Chelsea, whose colorful, eclectic clothes reflect her passion for style. "It's more fun than e-mail, because you have your own designs. It's like your own personal Web page."

Not everyone is thrilled with MySpace, which gains about a million users per week.

"I think it's a waste of people's time," said Jessica Contreras of Salinas, an Alisal High School senior and "Our Eyes" writer who said she wants nothing to do with online forums. "People are always trying to fix their profile and meet people instead of doing their homework."

Pablo said he also has seen people go crazy with it.

"Some people are on all day, and don't concentrate enough on school," he said. "They call them 'MySpace freaks.'"

Pablo, who belongs to several Salinas Valley-related groups on MySpace, nearly fell into the "freak" category. After joining, he at first added anyone who "friended" him, until his page included links to more than 300 other profiles.

"I didn't know most of the people," he said. "But I erased them all, and now I look at their profile to see if I know them first."

He said he now has links to 48 friends.

Potential for drama

Another dark side of MySpace and other online groups is their potential for abuse, from computer hacking to online harassment.

"I'm always afraid someone's going to put a virus on the site, because so many people use it," Chelsea said. "And it can cause a lot of (social) drama at school if someone leaves a 'he said-she said' comment on MySpace."

Warnings and rules

Jessica said some of her friends' boyfriends became jealous when potential rivals posted comments to their pages.

MySpace "bulletins," sent to all of a user's friends at once, makes it easy to post more than just party invitations.

"I saw a picture of four girls from school posted on everybody's page, with sick drawings on their faces, stuff I can't say," Pablo said. "You can embarrass people, and it can happen to anybody."

Some protections are avail-

able. MySpace prohibits users under the age of 14, and special software weeds out information in users' profiles and posts to identify people who lie about their age.

A link to MySpace's safety tips is posted at the bottom of every user's page, including a warning: "That cute 21-year-old guy may not be cute, may not be 21 and may not be a guy!"

The Salinas Union High School District takes it a step further, blocking MySpace sites through the district's Internet firewall. Jessica said classmates have sometimes broken through, "but the next day it's blocked."

In the meantime, MySpace membership continues to grow. As one Salinas teen's site proclaims: "Why the (expletive) did I do this? Because it's fun."

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SHOUT OUT/ Walk in shoes of ASB student before criticizing

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out, they will never fail to take it. They dish out phrases such as "like, whatever," and "oh my God, how grody!" with as much care and concern as they use while insulting a victim.

They rig all the student competitions to sway in the direction of their own personal, petty wants. Year after agonizing year, they win homecoming elections and pick on all else who don't, all while maintaining a shining, triumphant smile on their perfectly glossed lips.

They are the Associated Student Body, elected by their peers to govern their school, and these are the most common stereotypes ASB is faced with every day they serve in their position. ASB students, hands down the most stereotyped and over-generalized group on campus, do a lot more than win their school elections, which many see as a popularity contest.

ASB is by no means composed of ditzzy, over-the-top airheads with no goal other than partying. Other than maybe the honors students, I have never met any other group more hardworking and dedicated to their school and futures than ASB students.

I would have scoffed at anybody who would imply that ASB students were anything but vivaciously annoying, but then I brought the cliché "a walk in their shoes" to life by joining ASB.

Walking around school at 2 a.m. cleaning up after every

dance and being back at 6 a.m. to put up decorations for the rest of Spirit Week is hardly the glamorous lifestyle all imagine ASB students to lead. I had never had to run off of less than four hours of sleep before I joined this group.

If the school's budget is ever undergoing trouble or there are complaints about school events, the problem is not handed over to the principal or the secretaries, but to the activities director, who then hands it off with an evil smirk on his face to ASB, who will most likely still be scraping popcorn off their tired feet from cleaning up after their last event.

Applying for ASB is much like applying for a job. Applications are filled out, interviews attended, and skills proven useful. Once in ASB, in between planning out dances and attending formal meetings, students must brainstorm creative ways to get attendance up at sports games and promote tolerance and respect at school.

It is my firm belief that anybody who joins ASB with the intention of remaining in ASB is either a relentless psychotic or a true over-achiever. On top of their governing duties, ASB students balance out time for homework, sports and other clubs they might be involved in.

So next time you're at a fun school dance or enjoying Spirit Week, remember it's the ASB students who made it happen.

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