Do Colleges Examine Your Online Presence? *Excerpted from fastweb.com, E Hoyt, Feb 2016,* *http://www.fastweb.com/college-search/articles/do-colleges-examine-your-online-presence#.V91uPHkRFVc.email*

You should undoubtedly clean up your social media presence, but how much do colleges really look at your posts? You'll be relieved to learn they don't – at least not in the usual circumstances. In fact, fewer than one in three admissions officers say they check applicant's social media posts and/or Google them when evaluating their applications, according to a Kaplan survey conducted in 2014. The survey found that "over a third (35%) of college admissions officers have visited an applicant's social media page to learn more about them, according to Kaplan Test Prep's 2014 survey of college admissions officers." However, they've been tracking this college admissions factor since 2008 and back then it was one in ten admissions officers. Then, that number was one in five – so don't count out the possibility entirely. This is the highest percentage since tracking this – so the number is likely even higher now.

A Moral Dilemma For the most part, admissions officers felt it was an invasion of the student's privacy. The majority of admissions officers were "appalled" at the practice of looking into a student's private online presence. "I just think it's wrong to do," said Richard Shaw, dean of admissions at Stanford University. But, then again, *you never know*. In addition to the morality of the issue, admissions officers also say there are far too many prospective students to Google or search on social media platforms for each individual. Consider a small school – the admissions officers would have to evaluate thousands of profiles online, assuming they were looking into each student. Also, because they want to remain consistent, most officers feel that it's unfair to Google a portion of the applicants, so it's

When Asked… If you specifically ask a college to look at something you're proud of on the internet, they *are* more likely to do so, assuming the admissions officer has time. According to Christine Brown, executive director of K12 and college prep programs for Kaplan Test Prep, "There's no doubt social media has become increasingly a part of the admissions process, but students should recognize that it still plays only a peripheral role. The majority of admissions officers are not looking at Facebook for applicant information, and even those who are typically do so as an anomaly — because they were flagged, either positively or negatively, to particular applicants." "Admissions chances are still overwhelmingly decided by the traditional factors of high school GPA, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, personal essays and extracurricular activities. Applicants' online personas are really a wild card in the admissions process: the bottom line for students is that what you post online likely won't get you into college, but it just might keep you out," said Brown.

Safety First Many students become more cautious of their web presence when submitting applications. Rightfully so: clean up your posts, **just in case**, because **you never know who's looking**!

Increasing the Odds Once you get into smaller numbers like, say, becoming a finalist for a scholarship or internship, the likelihood of your personal online presence will increase.

So, a basic rule to follow is: the more you put yourself out there, the less you should put yourself out there online. Unless of course you want to put yourself out there and be noticed for positive reasons. To learn more about what you should or should not post online, check out these social media do's and don'ts for students.