Social media a growing concern when applying to college

By Natasha Singer, New York Times

At Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, admissions officers are still talking about the high school senior who attended a campus information session last year for prospective students. Throughout the presentation, she apparently posted disparaging comments on Twitter about her fellow attendees, repeatedly using a common expletive.

Perhaps she hadn't realized that colleges keep track of their social media mentions.

"It was incredibly unusual and foolish of her to do that," Scott A. Meiklejohn, Bowdoin's dean of admissions and financial aid, told me last week. The college ultimately denied the student admission, he said, because her academic record wasn't competitive. But had her credentials been better, those indiscreet posts could have scuttled her chances.

"We would have wondered about the judgment of someone who spends their time on their mobile phone and makes such awful remarks," Meiklejohn said.

As certain high school seniors work meticulously this month to finish their early applications to colleges, some may not realize that comments they casually make online could negatively affect their prospects. In fact, new research from Kaplan Test Prep, the service owned by the Washington Post Company, suggests that online scrutiny of college hopefuls is growing.

Of 381 college admissions officers who answered a Kaplan telephone questionnaire this year, 31 percent said they had visited an applicant's Facebook or other personal social media page to learn more about them — a five-percentage-point increase from last year. More crucially for those trying to get into college, 30 percent of the admissions officers said they had discovered information online that had negatively affected an applicant's prospects.

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