



See you on Facebook!

by Phillip Jeffrey



facebook

More than likely, your graduate experience has been different from what you expected.

You have discovered that there are fun times, there are sad times, there are moments when you love what you do and there are moments when you wonder what you are actually doing with your life. (Your parents may wonder that as well.) You find you are spending a lot of your time in your room or in a lab doing research and thinking that your life is quite lonely. You welcome the opportunity when you can take time away from your academic life and engage in social interaction with colleagues and friends. You crave the opportunity to tell anyone about your research, whether it is the best friend, your roommate, or a stranger you met at Starbucks, because you really love what you do, although you do feel lost sometimes. You may actually wonder whether you are becoming bipolar. I want to tell you that you are not alone; there are others just like you – me, for example. These emotions are all a part of the graduate school experience, and how you deal with it defines who you are and makes you stronger in order to handle your post-UBC life. Yes, eventually you will have to leave graduate school, and if you are really lucky, you'll leave with a cool degree.

I am here to share advice. I have discovered the secret to remaining happy, healthy, and sane in graduate school. Come closer, I have to whisper it. It is called Facebook. "Facebook?" you say, "What is that?" It will change your life for the better, it will make you feel good inside, it will give your day purpose, and enhance your UBC experience. And it's free. Some say it is addictive,

that it will consume your waking hours, distract you from your classes, disrupt your thesis work, and give you feelings of guilt when you realize that your all-nighter was mostly spent on Facebook. Others say that it messes with your mind as you treat every student you meet as a potential (+1 friend). Ignore the naysayers. Facebook is no more addictive than chocolate or ice cream. On the small chance that you feel you are becoming addicted, there are groups on Facebook to help you cope such as Addicted to Facebook.

For those that don't know, Facebook (<http://facebook.com>) is the hottest trend rolling through university campuses. It is an online social networking service originally restricted to college and university students that was launched in 2004 by undergraduates at Harvard University. Through word of mouth and requests from students, universities were added to the list of supported academic institutions enabling it to spread to other Canadian and American universities and subsequently beyond North America. It has become popular by providing a social service for students. Users remain aware of events and activities within the daily lives of friends, acquaintances, and fellow students through the sharing of content such as photographs, program courses, and status updates (e.g. "Phillip is studying in Koerner Library").

I would like to highlight three groups to which I subscribe. I am a resident of Green College, an interdisciplinary graduate residence (<http://www.greencollege.ubc.ca>). Green College provides a community for about 92 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. It has a special academic emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration,

and traditionally the residents have participated in a significant amount of self-governance. We have created a Facebook group called Green College in order to provide an online space for interaction beyond our dinner conversations, to share relevant events, and to enhance our existing community along the lines of our "Ideas and Friendship" motto. I recently joined a new Facebook group called Graduate school is making me bi-polar which was created by a fellow Green College student. It has become a support group for myself and other members as we struggle with the challenges of graduate school. As membership extends beyond UBC, users can draw on local experiences as we discuss common concerns we face. I browse the group, You know you go to UBC when..., when I feel the need for a study break. There I am able to laugh at some of the comments left by other UBC students regarding unique quirks at our university. For example, "You know you go to UBC when a squirrel has jumped on your bed and woken you up in the morning".

Although many people think of Facebook as a social space, it can be an excellent networking resource for graduate students, such as mature students who may be juggling work, university, and family commitments. It is sometimes difficult to find time for socialization in a common graduate space. Facebook is also useful for remaining in contact with students one has met at international conferences and academic workshops.

So, stop reading this and go register. I'll see you on Facebook.

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