

Universities look to Facebook in emergencies

BY JOHANNA YUEH
STAFF WRITER

Colleges nationwide are starting to tap into popular social networking sites to supplement emergency response efforts.

In addition to cell phone and e-mail alerts, some universities are considering using sites like Facebook and MySpace as another way to reach students when a crisis hits.

"The reason we wanted to try out Facebook was because students are now getting information in nontraditional ways," said Maj. Jay Gruber, of the police department at the University of Maryland at College Park.

"Social networks are what people are using, and we need to be able to leverage that technology for public safety."

UNC officials and student leaders met over the summer and dis-

cussed the possibility of using social networking sites, but they are more focused with perfecting the existing emergency response system than exploring the new avenue.

"We're trying to build pipelines for sharing information any way we can," said Mike McFarland, director of University communications.

UNC student government leaders created a Facebook group last week to publicize Alert Carolina, the University's emergency notification system. There is no University-sponsored group yet.

"We already have a great system in place," Student Body President J.J. Raynor said. "People don't trust Facebook all the time and not everyone is on there."

Jess Kaplan, a senior psychology major, said that she would join a UNC emergency awareness group if it was created, but that she doesn't

think it would alert students quickly enough to be effective.

"I think text messaging is more efficient," said Kaplan. "If you go and sit down at a computer, it could be hours after the emergency happened."

UM created an emergency awareness Facebook group last month. The group has photographs of emergency staff performing drills, videos of emergency management and tips on what to do in various situations.

Social networking sites might not become the primary mechanism for alerting students, but they could be useful for following developments, especially because their sites can often handle more traffic than university Web sites.

In the hours following the Virginia Tech shooting, the university Web site crashed because

it was overwhelmed by the high volume of visitors.

Right now, only UM campus police officials are allowed to post items on the group's main discussion area, but Gruber said he hopes to open up another discussion section for students to exchange information and resources in the aftermath of a crisis.

However, that raises some con-

cerns about the possibility of misleading rumors being circulated on social networking sites.

The University of California at Los Angeles is working with MySpace developers on creating a similar program, but its site won't allow user comments.

David Burns, emergency preparedness manager at UCLA, wants to reserve the MySpace

page for official information only in order to prevent misinformation and the leaking of victims' names.

"Once you open comments, you have to staff the page to monitor, edit or pull content from the site," Burns said. "We simply don't have the staffing to do that in a crisis."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

UNC nutrition lab opens

Private, public partnerships key

BY GREG SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The doors of a UNC-Chapel Hill laboratory in Kannapolis opened last week, signaling the onset of groundbreaking research in health and nutrition.

The Nutrition Research Institute is part of the N.C. Research Campus, a scientific complex that houses projects by private businesses and seven N.C. universities.

The philosophy behind the research campus is to provide state-of-the-art laboratory space for interdisciplinary collaboration between scientists and universities.

"It's an experiment in how to do science differently across different disciplines," said Dr. Steven Zeisel, director of the NRI. "It's probably the new way that science needs to be done."

Zeisel has already moved into the NRI and will begin work in September. His first research project will focus on DHA, a fat in

infant formulas. He will work with an expert psychologist on how the nutrient affects brain development in children.

However, before universities are able to take advantage of the research campus, administrative issues have to be ironed out.

The brand new facilities are facing challenges unique to the nature of such a project, said Jana Harrison, deputy director of the NRI.

"I think for us the biggest challenge has been coordination," Harrison said.

"Obviously the benefit is that you can collaborate with, but there's a downside because everyone is used to doing things a little differently."

Harrison said everything from setting health and environmental standards to dividing utility costs has to be coordinated with UNC-Greensboro, N.C. Central University and N.C. Agricultural & Technical State University. Those three schools use about 20 percent of UNC-CH's building.

Kannapolis was economically devastated in 2004 when the local company Pillowtex went bankrupt.

"Kannapolis was classically a company town," Harrison said. "The mill owned practically everything."

Dole Foods Co. owner and billionaire David Murdock decided to create a biotechnology campus that would reinvigorate the city and aid research in health and nutrition, she said.

"I would also say that the (Research) Triangle is to some extent an inspiration for him. He would like (this) to become the Triangle for nutrition," she said.

Residents are excited about the opportunities that the campus will bring to the town long identified as a manufacturing hub, said Karen Whichard, Kannapolis' communications director.

"I think they're hopeful and starting to view the campus as part of their community," she said.

Whichard said that the universities alone will hire 415 people in the first 24 months in operation.

"(The city is) getting new professionals, creating new opportunities," she said. "And that ripples throughout the community."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

National and World News

FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Romney critical of Biden's record

DENVER (MCT) — He may or may not be John McCain's running mate, but former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney on Tuesday gave a strong preview of how he might attack Barack Obama's presumptive Democratic running mate, Joe Biden.

During a luncheon with reporters Tuesday in Denver, Romney went right at Biden's purported strength, his long record in foreign policy. He said Biden's been "wrong for 30 years."

As for his own prospects, Romney was tight-lipped.

Florida's voters still want McCain

MIAMI (MCT) — A new poll shows Barack Obama trailing John McCain 47 percent to 43 percent in Florida, even as Obama spent millions in the state trying to introduce himself on local TV, while McCain has yet to spend a dime.

The statistic gives McCain a slightly stronger edge than he had in July, but the poll shows Florida voters want a Democrat in the White House by a 44 percent to 39 percent margin and consider the economy the most important election issue.

Pakistan leader's break from coalition government could cause instability

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (MCT) — Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif pulled his party out of Pakistan's coalition government and joined the opposition Monday, a blow to chances for political stability in the nuclear-armed country.

The dramatic break came one week after Pervez Musharraf resigned the presidency under pressure and amid a growing Islamist insurgency, which threatens Pakistan's stability and that of neighboring Afghanistan.

The attempt to create a

national unity government began after democratic elections in February in which no party won a majority. However, the coalition, under Asif Al Zardari's leadership, was always fragile, held together in part by a commitment to ousting Musharraf. After Musharraf resigned to avoid impeachment, there was little to hold them together.

The government won't fall for now, but the Pakistan People's Party will have to rely on the support of new partners, including a party that was close to Musharraf.

Gunmen ambush U.S. diplomat

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (MCT) — Gunmen opened fire on a vehicle carrying the top U.S. diplomat in the volatile northwestern city of Peshawar on Tuesday. But consul-general Lynne Tracy was unhurt as were the other two U.S. consular employees.


Gunmen leaped out of a Toyota Land Cruiser jeep, which blocked her vehicle, and sprayed it with bullets from automatic weapons, NWFPA police chief Malik Naveed Khan said.

"The people never pursued her," Khan said. "It's early to say (who was behind it), we are looking into all aspects."

Georgian regions formally accepted

MOSCOW (MCT) — Russia on Tuesday formally recognized the independence of the two Georgian regions that its military now occupies, further inflaming relations with the U.S.

The announcement by President Dmitry Medvedev, in disregard of repeated U.S. warnings, confirmed Russia's return to the world stage as a military power willing to use force to recapture former Soviet territories. It raises the prospect that the two breakaway areas, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, eventually will join the Russian Federation or operate as satellites.



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Wednesday, August 27
5:45 p.m.
Pleasants Family Assembly Room
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Free and open to the public

Event information: (919) 962-4207
www.lib.unc.edu

In association with *Hecho a Mano: Book Arts of Latin America*, showcasing 100 handmade books from Cuba, Mexico and Argentina. On exhibit in Wilson Library July 14 - October 12, 2008.

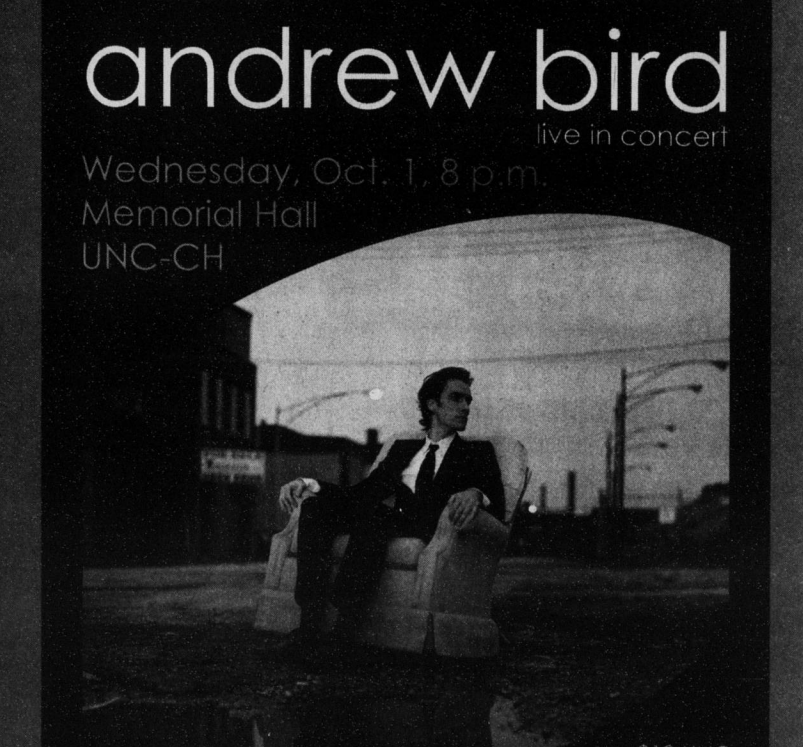
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