Faculty’s use of Facebook and implications for e-Professionalism in Thailand

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Abstract: This study aims to describe Thai faculty’s use of Facebook. Using Facebook’s Graph Search, data from faculty members in two universities were collected and analysed. The qualitative content of the profiles such as photos, wall posts, and Facebook pages were examined and found that many faculty members used Facebook for personal reasons. However, the study also found evidence of professional ethics violations ranging from borderline to outright inappropriate. The study gives a glimpse of the reality of e-professionalism challenges in Thailand and urges open discussion among administrator and other stakeholders including human resources department and the student representatives.

Subjects: Higher Education; Ethics; Education Policy

Keywords: e-Professionalism; ethics; social networking; Facebook; higher education

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The advent of the internet has dramatically affected the notion of ethics and morality, especially social networking services, as drivers in blurring the interface between workplace and personal space. In most Thai higher education institutes, social media policies are not available, so the faculty are left to their own devices. The authors collected and analysed data of Facebook users who identified themselves as a lecture. Evidence of professional ethics violations among university faculty was found, ranging from borderline to outright inappropriate. Understanding these realities could help administrators, and other stakeholders see the importance of human resources policies and practices to cope with these challenges.
1. Introduction
Navigating professional life as a university faculty is not an easy undertaking. Faculty around the world are juggling multiple responsibilities including research, teaching, and service. In many places, they are also expected to behave professionally and ethically beyond any other professions.

Governing bodies in many countries have provided clear guidance to faculty members in navigating the academic landscape. For example, in the proposal of Higher education standards framework from Australia’s Department of Education and Training, Australian Government (2014), guidelines regarding teaching, research, and institutional quality assurance were drawn. In the UK, professional standards framework specific for teaching and supporting learning in higher education was proposed (Higher Education Academy, 2011). Several professional organizations in the US were also active in guiding higher education institutions and faculty members (American Association of University Professors, 2016; Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2014; Phillips, 2004). A large-scale study on social media policies in the United States (Pomerantz et al., 2015) reveals that less than one-quarter of institutions provide such policies. The survey also reports it is more likely to find social media policies at doctorate-granting institutions and health, athletics, and library units.

In Thailand, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), a government agency, and Professional and Organizational Development Network of Thailand Higher Education (ThaiPOD), a professional organization, are promoting professional ethics among higher education institutions. Many Thai universities also provide their versions of professional ethics for their faculty. However, specific policies regarding social media are yet to be found in Thai higher educational landscape.

2. Literature review

2.1. Ethical standards for faculty
Governing bodies in several countries provide some form of ethical guidelines for faculty members. In Australia, the proposal of the higher education standards framework by the Department of Education and Training, Australian Government (2014) highlights several ethical issues in research. Specifically, it states that codes of conduct, ethics, occupational health and safety, and intellectual property.

In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education provides guidelines for the quality assurance including setting up the standards, assuring and enhancing of academic quality, and higher education provision. The agency also provides a toolkit for institutions to build their quality code based on their missions and characteristics (2015).

Higher Education Academy (HEA), a UK non-profit organization, includes three dimensions in their professional standards framework which are areas of activity, core knowledge, and professional values (2011). While the first two dimensions focus on instructional design activities and subject content, the last dimension addresses four professional values including (a) respect individual learners and diverse learning communities, (b) promote participation and equality of opportunity for learners, (c) use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship, and continuing professional development, and (d) acknowledge the wider context in which higher education operates recognizing the implications for professional practice (p. 2). The publication titled Ethics and employability (Robinson, 2004) from HEA also outlines how ethics, far from being opposing to business or merely an addition of employability, is vital in making graduates more employable.

In the US, academic integrity or honour code can be dated back to the late 18th century (Gallant, 2008). Ethical issues are frequently discussed in American professional organizations. For example, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) had developed 45 sets of
functional area standards and self-assessment guides for higher education programs and services (2015). CAS has also set up general standards to help institutions identify criteria and principles to assess and enhance various areas including academic, administrative, or student affairs programs and services (2014). One part of the general standards document is devoted explicitly to ethics. This section stresses that the programs and services must set up and publish their statements of ethical practice. Further, new personnel must be oriented to ethical standards and policies relevant to them, including policies regarding ethical and legal use of technology.

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business or AACSB International, which is regarded as the benchmark for business school quality among the academic community (Burnsed, 2011), has also made available the Ethics Education in Business Schools report (Phillips, 2004). It provides detail guidelines for ethics education and identifying the past and current AACSB accreditation standards related to ethics and further extends the meaning of code of conduct to prevent conflicts of interest among their employees, contractors, and volunteers during accreditation efforts (2015).

In Thailand, the internal quality assurance manual from the Office of the Higher Education Commission (2011) states that ethical standard for university faculty members are (a) upholding righteousness, (b) honesty and responsibility, (c) transparency and accountability, (d) avoidance of discrimination act, (e) aiming for achievement, and (f) avoidance of abuse of power against students. In short, faculty members are expected to be a role model for the society. The manual also states that one of the critical risks for institutions is damaging reputation due to several reasons such as the lack of professional ethics in their researchers and faculty members, disobeying orders, and being involved in a scandal in a newspaper or online media (p. 88).

According to the OHEC, universities are required to have the code of ethics and are encouraged to hold seminar or workshop regarding ethical issues in the workplace. Many universities in Thailand have written their own versions of professional ethics for their faculty, many of which are merely a list of expectations without much explanation. Most common expectations are expectations for instructors to (a) be a role model for their students and society, (b) instil knowledge and moral values faithfully with kindness and fairness, (c) behave and perform their duty responsibly, (d) keep themselves abreast of academic research and knowledge, (e) be independent of the influence and maintain freedom of inquiry, (f) uphold research ethics, (g) be respectful and supportive to colleagues, (h) provide academic services for society, and (i) promote Thai culture and wisdom (Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, 1999; Kasetsart University, 2006; Phramongkutklao College of Medicine, 2007).

At the national level, the Professional and Organizational Development Network of Thailand (POD 2016) is aiming to develop desired characteristics of university instructors, their career paths, and accountability measures. However, the framework has not been materialized after twelve years of its inception in 2004.

2.2. The new frontier

Although the faculty manuals are readily available in every institute and workshops are held in many places, the advent of the internet has dramatically affected the notion of ethics and morality, especially social networking services as drivers in blurring the interface between workplace and personal space.

Jones et al. (2011) explain that while students consider social networks to be their space, faculty members usually worry about a student-lecturer relationship, information disclosure, and legal and ethical issues. Over the past decade, several higher education institutions around the world realized the need and began to put forth the social media policies to help their staff explore this new territory.

Arguably the first study about social media policy in higher education was done in the UK, McNeill (2012) sampled 14 higher education institutions in the UK with accessible social media
policy. He argues that the primary driver of social media policy is marketization, given that social media policies from half of the sample were developed by marketing and communications departments. Using critical discourse analysis, he argued that explicit marketing language was used. For example, these policies mentioned brand and reputation management, referred to students as customers, and the institution as a service provider. However, three policy documents were developed by human resource departments which focused more on compliance and managerial structures. These policies adopted a defensive stance as they defined acceptable and unacceptable behaviours while offered little practical advice to stakeholders. Although McNeill was not able to find any social media policy from so-called ancient universities such as the University of Oxford and the University of Edinburgh during 2011 to 2012, these policies are now available. The University of Oxford provides guidelines for its personnel (2015) and in pre-employment screening (2014). The University of Edinburgh makes the social policy available and set up Social Media Guidelines wiki as a platform to keep its policy current (2017).

A nationwide study of social media policies in higher education institutions in the United States (Pomerantz et al., 2015) took place during 2012 to 2013. With the help of Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, information of institutions listed in the Carnegie Classification Data File was collected and analysed. The Turk workers were asked to search for and analyse social media policies on the websites. Findings revealed that less than one-quarter offered a social media policy on their sites. The research team also found that compared to any other size of institutions, large institutions were more likely to have separate units with social media policies. Campus units with such policies were medical and health-related units with 54%. While all policies were written for the entire communities, some identified social media policies for specific stakeholders such as students, staff, or faculty.

While the two studies asked similar questions, they took different approaches in collecting and analysing social media policy in higher education institutions. The study from the United States cast a much wider net and reported more detailed findings with quantitative content analysis approach. The categorization of social media policies by units or departments sheds light on how different professionals respond to the new challenge.

Findings from the nationwide study of social media policies in higher education institutions (Pomerantz et al., 2015) indicated medical and health-related campus units were consistently the most likely to have such policies in place. The findings imply that medical educators are at the forefront in responding to the challenge of a new form of professionalism in the social networking era. Several of them voiced concerns about the new landscape medical students must navigate to prepare for their career. For example, Cain and Romanelli (2009) explain that unobserved personal attitudes and behaviours in the traditional sense may manifest themselves as individuals may feel the freedom to express in online environments. These impressions generated by individuals may or may not be in line with behaviours and opinions considered appropriate by membership in a profession. This new kind of professionalism is called e-professionalism.

Essentially, e-professionalism is attitudes and behaviours that reflect traditional professionalism paradigms but are expressed through digital media (Cain & Romanelli, 2009; Kaczmarczyk et al., 2013). This is a complex issue that both students, the new generations, and faculty, the old generations, struggle with. Cain and Romanelli (2009) recommend that faculty and administrators should not try to monitor the online personas of students. Instead, they should find ways to address potential e-professionalism issues such as a discussion about how patients, employers, and colleagues may perceive them based on their online personas. In fact, medical professional guidelines are readily available. The American College of Physicians (ACP) and the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) together issued a policy statement on online medical professionalism (Farnan et al., 2013). The guidelines reflect the ever-changing landscape of social media as they stated that their “guidelines are meant to be a starting point, and they will need to be modified and adapted as technology advances and best practices emerge” (p. 626). It is also suggested to
incorporate these guidelines into all educational activities including teaching and evaluation (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2013).

Social media policies published by Thai higher education institutes are not often found. To date, only the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chulalongkorn University (2016) from Chulalongkorn University and Mahidol University (2018), the first medical school in Thailand, have made such policies available. Like the medical profession in other countries, the Thai medical profession is making headway in adopting e-professionalism practices. These policies discuss the importance of keeping separate accounts for personal and professional uses, providing disclaimer when engaging in personal issues on the services, protecting the reputation of the organization, and avoiding sensitive issues such as politics and religion.

2.3. e-Professionalism issues
Several studies have raised issues regarding professionalism and faculty/student relationship. Back in 2010, a study of faculty in a pharmacy college found that roughly half (46%) of the faculty members, especially those with the short-serving year of service (i.e. an average of 8.6 years) had a Facebook profile. The majority of respondents reported that they were not friends with students and that they would decline a friend request from a student (Metzger et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the online relationship among faculty and students appeared to be linked to the nature of their offline rapport (Jones et al., 2011). Specifically, faculty members in professional programs with a strict hierarchical relationship, such as accounting or teacher education, tend to maintain the boundaries with students. Conversely, those in art and media extend their existing offline friendship to social network services.

A more extensive study was conducted by the Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine (CDIM) for its member institutions (Chretien et al., 2011). Thirty-five percent of the clerkship directors who responded the survey reported that they use social networking services. Over half of these respondents who currently use or had used the services indicated they had received a friend request from current students at their institution. However, only 19% accepted such offers. Regarding the respondents’ perceptions, the majority of them felt that sending a friend request from (79%) or accepting a friend request to (76%) a current student was inappropriate. Similar to Metzger et al. (2010), Chretien et al. (2011) reported that younger respondents were more likely to use social networking services.

While there used to be a clear divide between professional and personal life, the social networking services have blurred the line of privacy. Researchers have found those faculty members who embraced social media believe the technology could have a positive impact on student learning (Hull & Dodd, 2017), enhance communication and increase accessibility to practices and expertise in real-world contexts (Smith & Lambert, 2014). However, college students are not particularly keen on having professor’s presence in their social networks (Nemetz et al., 2012). In fact, many students admitted they would feel nervous, worried, suspicious, and concerned if they received a friend request from a professor (Karl & Peluchette, 2011). The balancing act between personal and professional lives is a challenging issue for academia that many find it difficult to do so especially those in their preservice training. Coutts et al. (2007) found that improper uses of Facebook in preservice teachers are not unusual. Steinbrecher and Hart (2012) also reported that instances of sexually explicit, heavy drinking, and conversions revealing identities of their students had been found among the preservice population.

2.4. e-Professionalism issues in Thailand
Like other countries, social networking services have become a crucial part of daily life in Thailand. With 38 million users, Facebook is the most popular social networking service in Thailand (Zocial, 2016) with roughly about 60% of users were young adults (aged 18–34). Young faculty members are joining social networking services just like others in their generation. While some of them are trying to figure out how to integrate this service into teaching and learning (Rachham & Firpo,
others are in for personal reasons. But drawing lines between professional and personal selves while using social networking services are daunting tasks for them. Academics are no exception to this phenomenon.

Similar to McNeill’s work (2012) who did the simple search for social media policy in higher education institutions, the authors searched Google search engine with the search strings in Thai—i.e. “social media policy + university”—and found only three public universities with publicly accessible social media policy documents. Two of them were medical schools, and another one was an IT security policy for university personnel. This rather short list of universities with social media policy reflects unpreparedness for such challenges. Without the policy in place for faculty members and university personnel, it is entirely within their discretion how to approach this new technology. Meanwhile, the prevalence of social media gives them opportunities to express opinion or belief that they would otherwise keep to themselves. It is even more challenging for them to find a proper balance between personal and professional personas given that Thai culture consider teachers and faculty members to be a privileged class and are expected to be professional and have a high sense of ethics (Assumption University, 2012). The lack of balance can cause, at the very least, distraction and anxiety, and at the most, termination of employment or securing a job. The situation is not uncommon in Thailand.

Given that Thailand has been in political turmoil for almost a decade (BBC News, 2012), Facebook is a place where we can find opinionated commentary from supporters of deposed former Prime Minister and the opposition. In fact, people rant and rave about these issues. For instance, a professor from Chulalongkorn University was quick to express his political orientation as he posted on his Facebook in response to the admission of a pro-democracy freshman as follows: “I won’t comment on politics and his activism, but his face [i.e. his look] will cause the identity of [the university] people to be doubted in the eyes of the public” (Rojanaphruk, 2016). When taken at face value, the message was merely judging the freshman’s appearance. More likely, it is the widespread classism that gets the best of the professor to connect the freshman’s appearance to the identity of the university. The next day the post quickly went viral, and after much public pressure, the professor used the same platform to apologize and removed his previous posting about the freshman. Luckily, the professor kept his job despite social media backlash.

A transgender academic who applied for a job at Thammasat University was not that lucky as he learned that although he was qualified academically, the committee unanimously denied his application because they found the photo he posted nearly a year ago to Instagram inappropriate (Mokkhasen, 2015). While the issue was directly related to sexual equality in society, it was the photo of the anatomically shaped lipstick that ultimately put him in a vulnerable position.

These are but a few examples of issues about the blurry line between personal and professional life. It raises questions about how higher education institutions are coping with these challenges, and similarly how academics are preparing themselves as they enter this changing landscape of increasingly blurry line between personalization and privacy.

Although studies related to faculty’s use of Facebook can be found in literature, they tended to rely on a self-reported survey (Chretien et al., 2011; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Metzger et al., 2010; Roblyer et al., 2010). To the authors’ knowledge, this is the first attempt to study the actual use of Facebook of in-service faculty in higher educational settings in Thailand. This study aims to determine how Thai faculty members are using Facebook and to offer perspectives for OHEC, and higher education institutes in general, to consider the unforeseen impacts of the new technology.

2.5. Facebook data
Facebook users can customize personal information ranging from basic information—such as gender and relationship status—to contact, family members, work, and education, Facebook
pages that they like (e.g. TV shows, movies, books, sports and others) and Facebook groups that they joined. Facebook also offers privacy settings by allowing such customizations of information. Over the past few years, the company has been making policy changes by decreasing the default privacy settings to become more open (O’Neill, 2010) and offers levels of privacy customizations for individual pieces of information that users share, such as photos, posts, or check-in locations. The users can manage levels of access to information that they share from sharing publicly, with friends, to with a specific audience (e.g. only those who went to the same college or work at the same company). However, it is nearly impossible for users to set their profiles completely private as the default settings become more open (i.e. visible to all Facebook users or the entire internet) and they must go through various configurations and opt out of the Facebook’s public search. In other words, we are likely to see a glimpse of identities if we can look through these pieces of information that the users made public.

The recent development of Facebook’s Graph Search allows users to discover new connections based on what others share on Facebook (Graph search, 2014). Any Facebook user can discover other users by searching for specific pieces of information such as job title (e.g. lecturer) or employer (e.g. university or company). The researchers used this technology to gather profile data publicly available on Facebook. With these profile data, anyone can observe user profiles on their Timeline, a reverse-chronological display of a Facebook user’s activities and events (Duffy, 2012). These activities and events include status updates, photos, job history, as well as other information that a user has recorded in his or her profile.

The researchers also revisited the About pages to collect basic demographical information, the Facebook pages they like, and Facebook groups they subscribe. The About page is a place where users can share their personal information (e.g. work and education, contact info, family and relationships, and life events) and things they are interested in (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research question
How are Thai faculty members using Facebook? Specifically, it aims to describe faculty’s use of Facebook in Thai Higher Education institutes.

3.2. Data sources
Following IRB approval, the researchers used Graph Search to collected data of Facebook users who identified themselves as a lecture from one of the two Thai universities, a large public university (University A) and a large private international university (University B) during July 2014. Although Graph Search returned several user profiles, the researchers limited the search to about 50 participants for each university. Eventually, 114 Facebook profiles were located, 102 Thai and 12 other nationalities. To make profiles from the two universities more comparable, the authors decided to focus on only Thai faculty members. Of these 102 profiles, there were 46 males and 56 females. Information in the following domains was recorded: personal information, gender, nationality, and relationship status. The qualitative content of the profiles such as photos, wall posts, and Facebook pages were also examined. While data from Facebook users were openly accessible, none of the users were contacted. After data analysis, identifiable information was anonymized for the report.

3.3. Data analysis
Search results from Graph Search were collected and sorted with Microsoft Excel spreadsheet containing the complete set of profile information including username, gender, nationality, and relationship status. The researchers revisited these profiles to collect data from Timelines and About pages. Information from Timeline were photos and wall posts that users shared publicly. To examine whether the activities of these profile records are in accordance with the social media policy, the researchers examined inappropriate content (i.e. Facebook pages) that are shared
publicly. For example, selfies, alcohol content, and nightlife photos were spotted on the profile’s Timeline. Next, the researchers went through each user’s About page to observe what users liked such as pages or groups.

Information from Timeline and About pages was added to the existing profile records in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Then another spreadsheet was created to document inappropriate Facebook pages found in the profiles’ About pages. A contingency table was constructed to show frequency distribution of faculty members from the two universities.

4. Results
Of the 102 Facebook users, 54.90 percent were female (n = 56), and 45.10 percent were male (n = 45.10). In University A, 48 percent were female (n = 24), and 52 percent were male (n = 26). In University B, 61.54 percent were female (n = 32) and 38.46 percent were male (n = 20). Overall, information about each user was rarely public. Apart from gender, and nationality, only 22 of them identified their relationship statuses (e.g. single, married, or widowed). The authors describe profiles from both universities in Table 1.

4.1. Analysis of publicly available content
Analysis of publicly available photos and wall posts found similar results to previous studies (Coutts et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2008) that many faculty members used Facebook for personal reasons with prominent new-born and family photos. However, a small number of users have made potentially inappropriate content accessible. For example, 4 percent of the users had posted photos with alcohol content, and 14 percent posted politically excessive messages. Surprisingly, a third of the users (29 percent) shared photos that could be identified as selfie, a photograph that one has taken of oneself usually with a smartphone and shared over social networking services (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). One user from University B evidently overshared selfies on Facebook with 30% of the profile photos and 10% of mobile uploads photos categorized as selfies.

Qualitative analysis of publicly available profiles in About page found that many faculty members from both universities have made Facebook pages and groups visible to everyone. While the majority of the pages or groups found were seemingly benign such as clothing, books, and movies, a small proportion (4% of all users) of these interests seemed politically excessive (e.g. “We don’t want red shirts” page which openly opposes Red Shirts political pressure group supporting the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra), obscene (e.g. “Mature ladies,” “Searching hubby for my buddies,” “Babyface big breasts”), or ethically flawed (e.g. “Wear student uniform and come to me if you need money”). The Facebook profiles categorized by types of information is shown in Table 2.

Albeit a small amount, the study found evidence of lecturers’ online behaviour that goes against the societal expectation of university lecturers. Results indicate that each group of faculty profiles from the two universities drew distinct characteristics. Faculty members from the University A (a large public university) showed much more interest in politics (12.75%), while faculty members from the University B (a large private university) were busy taking selfies (21.57%). It is also observed that female faculty in the University B took more selfies than their male counterparts. Further, only faculty members from the University B were found associated with inappropriate Facebook pages. In fact, there were only four members from all 102 Facebook profiles who fell in

| Table 1. Description of participation |
|-------------------------------------|
| **University A (n = 50)** | **University B (n = 52)** | **Total (n = 102)** |
| Female | 23.53% | 31.37% | 54.90% |
| Male | 25.49% | 19.61% | 45.10% |
| Total | 49.02% | 50.98% | 100.00% |
this category. While some of these Facebook pages were borderline, others were outright inappropriate. Examples of Facebook pages that could be considered obsessive were “Engineer cute girls,” “Engineer guy society” and “Thai university girl.” These were merely collections of photos of girls showing cleavage, girls in short dresses, or topless guys. Other pages that were clearly unsuitable for the profession of academia were “National lolicon [i.e. young girls] society,” “Mature ladies,” “Wear student uniform and come to see me if you need money,” and “Searching hubby for my buddies.”

5. Limitations
This study has several limitations. First, it was performed at one time at only two top-tier universities with a small number of samples. It is possible that other Thai higher education institutions have different norms and patterns of social networking services usage. Second, these two top-tier universities were situated in the capital metropolitan region, implying that the sample profiles are mostly from high or middle socioeconomic status (SES). There are likely greater variations by SES in the suburban areas that would yield different findings. Further, due to the limited sample size, the authors decided to focus on only Thai faculty members. The study results may differ if international faculty profiles with diverse background were included.

6. Conclusions
While this study is limited in scope, it gives a glimpse of the reality of e-professionalism challenges in Thailand’s higher education. The findings reveal that university lecturers are active on Facebook as it was assumed. Although most of the activities (e.g. posts and liked pages) were seemingly benign, the need for social media policy is genuine given the evidence of professional ethics violations in our findings. Whether knowingly or otherwise, a handful of faculty members have crossed the blurred line of privacy and taken an unnecessary risk of their career and the reputation of their institution as they shared information that is not usually disclosed in a teacher-student relationship (e.g. political orientation, and sexual preference). The fact that these instructors publicly declared their fondness for scandalous Facebook pages or shared disreputable photos is indeed alarming.

7. Recommendations
The existing social media policies found at Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chulalongkorn University (2016) and Mahidol University (2018) both recognize social media as a public space. All stakeholders including faculty, staff, and students, should abide by the professional code of conduct and respect the privacy and confidentiality of others. Furthermore, these policies suggest that one should avoid engaging in sensitive issues such as politics or defaming of other individuals or organizations. The findings from this study indicate that a few faculty members are not aware of the notion of social media as a public space where they should carry themselves appropriately and in accordance with the professional ethics.
The findings from this study encourage open discussion of e-professionalism among administrator and other stakeholders including human resources department and the student representatives. Guidelines for conducting a pre-employment check on applicants should be considered as well as an ongoing discussion about guidance on the use of social media for personnel and students. The authors agree with Jones et al. (2011) that higher education institutions should establish a code of conduct related to the use of social network sites and provide training on how to use social network services.

If the goal of higher education institutions is to prepare future workforce who are competent and ethical in the traditional sense and the new era, our faculty members who guide them toward the goal should act by what we preach.

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