PRIVACY SCENARIOS
Specific privacy issues for discussion

AMAZON ECHO SMART SPEAKER

The University of Erewhon (UoE) has a partnership with Amazon, and has just formed a working group to explore opportunities to roll out Amazon Echo. Amazon Echo is a smart speaker that constantly listens for a user to say a "wake word," which triggers Alexa to begin recording voice data and respond to commands. When a user says, “Alexa, what’s the time?” Alexa will answer. Today, users everywhere are working on new services for Alexa to tackle. The working group is making the following recommendations:

- **Add Echo units to the classroom:** UoE can use Echo to share curriculum, course materials, assignments, exams and student grades. Students and faculty can ask Alexa questions to augment and improve the classroom materials.

- **Add Echo units to stadium seats for sporting events:** Visitors can use Echo to order food with statements like, “Hey Alexa, bring me two hot dogs and a beer.”

- **Add Echo units to dorm rooms:** UoE will provide Amazon with student class schedules, grades, assignments and geolocation data from the student ID card and the UoE mobile app. This way, a student can say, “Hey Alexa, can I fail my Econ 100 quiz today and still pass the class?” or “How long is the line in the cafeteria?”

In researching the Echo, the working group learned that some privacy groups have raised concerns. The Echo is constantly listening for its wake word: “Alexa.” However, there are times when the Echo starts recording, randomly, at least once per week. It can happen when it picks up a sound from the TV, or a stray bit of conversation that sounds enough like the wake word.

Now, the working group is asking for the input of students, faculty and staff. How would you advise the working group?
STUDENT SAFETY

Suicide is a leading cause of death among college and university students in the United States (https://www.sprc.org/settings/colleges-universities). A student survey administered on your campus with the promise of confidentiality asks questions about:

- Connectedness to other students, staff, and faculty on campus;
- Hours per day spent sleeping; and
- Levels of alcohol and drug use.

Some combinations of responses might indicate that a student could be at risk of suicide. Should you share the responses from individuals with such combinations with mental health professionals on campus? Does that violate the promise of confidentiality?

Suppose this information comes from sources other than surveys. For example, a student’s ID card swipes might tell you that a particular student is in his dorm room during most of the time that he is not in class, and that he is spending that time alone. When he does leave the dorm, it’s often late at night and he goes off campus for a short time. His grades have dropped, but are still in the B- to C range. This behavior is very different from his behavior in the previous semester.

Is it your responsibility to share these data with a counselor? Does that violate his right to privacy?

IMPROVING FACULTY PRODUCTIVITY

Dr. Messen, Vice President for Research at Aspire University, is rolling out a plan to improve the research productivity and profile of the university. He proposes that AU use the extensive data it holds on faculty, including publication records, impact measures, grants, awards, membership in distinguished academies, and so forth, to predict the career trajectories of younger faculty.

The university could do this using analytic tools developed by Research Impact, Inc., a private company that has developed advanced algorithms to predict research success. Dr. Messen proposes that AU redeploy its resources to foster the research of the most promising young faculty, providing them with internal grants, course releases and extensive leave time to support their research.

How would you advise Dr. Messen?