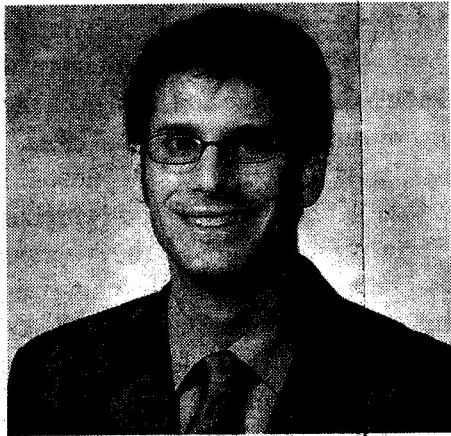


An EPIC Summer



by Mark Pike

Fall From Grace photomontages.

From Facebook, to Gmail, to eBay, and the iPhone, the Internet is becoming increasingly omnipresent in our daily lives, but we have only just begun to understand the implications of a continuously “connected” life. All too often we read news stories about sensitive personal information being accidentally leaked by irresponsible companies, significantly compromising consumer rights and privacy. And, as a matter of public policy, America is currently aiming to find a comfortable balance between protecting civil liberties and using technology to defend homeland security.

As a summer clerk at the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), I had the chance to learn about the exciting intersection of

Internet law and policy, a very nascent field that is rapidly gaining a lot of attention on Capitol Hill and in academic circles.

EPIC is conveniently located in downtown D.C., so I had the unique opportunity to attend congressional hearings and policy meetings in our nation’s capital and learn directly from experts on a variety of topics.

In June, I researched and helped draft testimony titled “Protecting the Privacy of the Social Security Number from Identity Theft” for my supervisor to present to a congressional subcommittee. In addition to making my first congressional cameo (on TV just behind Sen. Schumer), I learned a lot about the risks involved with the misuse of Social Security Numbers for identification purposes.

Here at William & Mary, the

first password I received from the IT department was a combination of my last initial and the end of my SSN. And, in addition to that, the gym has biometric data from my thumbprint. Also, I just got an email last week with a spreadsheet of everybody’s healthcare policy and their W&M Student ID number. This isn’t a science fiction conspiracy theory. Identity theft topped the Federal Trade Commission’s complaint list for the seventh year in a row as it continues to cause billions (with a B) of dollars of damage a year. This is real.

The most high-profile project I worked on this summer was researching the proposed merger between Google, the world’s largest search engine, and DoubleClick, the world’s largest purveyor of online advertising.

Continued on pg 9.

An EPIC Summer

Continued from Pg 8.

ing. The summer clerks helped submit supplemental materials to the FTC as they investigate the anticompetitive practices and privacy concerns in the \$3.1 billion dollar merger. Between DoubleClick's ability to reach an estimated 85% of all Internet users and Google being the search engine of choice for more than half of all Americans, the amount of data this joint entity could collect about consumers is astounding. After AOL's data breach last year revealed the search habits of over 650,000 supposedly "anonymous" and "non-identifiable" users, it would be prudent to pay attention to these privacy concerns. I don't think anybody wants to the world to know what they're searching for online during a Van Alstyne first amendment class.

In addition to the projects on Social Security and Google, I got to explore several other contemporary privacy issues. I prepared and drafted

comments to federal rulemakers to reject the use of "vicinity read" radio frequency identification technology in passport cards, because of substantial privacy and security risks. I helped edit chapters on international privacy law for the annual publication Privacy & Human Rights. And, I filed a Freedom of Information Act request and drafted a letter sent to the Secretary of Defense inquiring about the U.S. military's collection of Iraqi citizens' biometric data in an effort to help prevent genocidal violence.

It was an honor to represent William & Mary School of Law at this summer program and demonstrate that even one of the world's oldest law schools is in touch with the 21st century. I plan on continuing to work in the field of technology and policy, and I believe my clerkship at EPIC put me on the right path to finding an enjoyable career as a public servant.