

# Social Media Guidelines

Web Design & Support  
Marketing & University Relations  
Southeast Missouri State University

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## Overview – Integration with Existing Policy

The following guidelines are not to be seen as brand new institutional policy, because they aren't. In fact, these guidelines are simply an elaboration of how existing University policy applies in the social media space. This document was developed with the intention to help Southeast staff and faculty better understand the best practices for acting in the social media environment and are simply guidelines to that end.

These guidelines relate to the general expectations of employee behavior outlined in the Staff Handbook (Section 3 of the University's Business Policies and Procedure Manual: <http://www4.semo.edu/humanresources/staff1.htm>)

For faculty, the information in these guidelines also relates to the Faculty Handbook, Chapter 3 Section 1, labeled "Professional Ethics." You can view this document online here: <http://www2.semo.edu/provost/handbook/pdf/FHIII.pdf>.

You may also refer to the University's Information Technology and Network Systems Acceptable Use Policy and Procedures, located here: <http://www6.semo.edu/infotech/policies.asp>. Of specific relevance is section 4: "[General Statement of User Responsibilities](#)" and section 6: "[Acceptable Use Guidelines](#)."

## Guidelines for Behavior

While there are a lot of options when it comes to what type of social media platform you can engage in, the *same principles* of behavior apply to *all of them*. These guidelines will help focus your interactions with other users of social media across all platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and beyond.

One of the most important things to remember is that once information is posted and distributed, it is impossible to take it back. Which means that anything you say is likely to remain said forever.

Bearing that in mind, below are the major principles of behavior that you are encouraged to follow as a representative of Southeast Missouri State (and its constituent departments) on the Web.

## Social Media: Official Use Guidelines

While using social media, you have two identities. You are acting as both yourself and as a representative of whatever organization you belong to. The guidelines in this document are here to help inform your conduct while **managing** or **interacting with** a social media profile officially affiliated with Southeast Missouri State University.

A social media profile officially affiliated with Southeast Missouri State University is defined as:

- The University's official Facebook page or Twitter feed or any other type of page for the University at large used to interact with the public, including students, faculty and staff of Southeast.

- A Facebook page, Twitter feed, Blog, or other type of page established and maintained by a Department of the University used for interaction with the public, including students, faculty and staff of Southeast.
- A Facebook page, Twitter feed, Blog, or any other type of page for a University Course or Event used for interaction with students or the public, including students, faculty and staff of Southeast.

***Note:** Personal social media pages that include references to the University or links to groups affiliated with the University are NOT considered “officially affiliated” for the purposes of these guidelines.*

It is recommended to follow these guidelines both when managing and interacting with the various types of profiles above. “Managing” in this case means that you are creating content for the profile and administering it completely. “Interacting with” in this case means that you are not the administrator of the profile, but choose to leave a comment or in some way interact with it.

In the cases listed above you should consider the impact of your statements and how they represent the University. If an employee of Southeast is using a University-affiliated social media presence to criticize or discredit the University, the employee will be asked to edit the offending material. In extreme cases the employee may be subject to enforcement of the IT Acceptable Use Policy by the University as described in [section 8](#) of that policy.

The University respects the rights of its faculty and staff to identify themselves as employees of the University on their own personal social profile pages in whatever way they deem suitable while still expressing their personal opinion on any subject matter.

In order to avoid the appearance of speaking on behalf of the University when using a personal social media outlet, University faculty and staff might want to consider adding a note to their profile such as:

*“I am an employee of Southeast Missouri State University, but this is profile is for personal use and my statements here don’t reflect the opinions of the University itself.”*

Remember when using a social media service that the user assumes all associated risk with using that service; this is outlined in the terms that are agreed to when one interacts with a social media service.

## **Style Guide**

When referring to Southeast and matters, people and places related to the university, remember to consult the University’s [style guide](#). Remember that it is inappropriate to refer to the University as “SEMO” except in limited cases. For more information, consult the style guide section on acronyms here:

[http://www.semo.edu/news/style/index\\_acronyms.htm](http://www.semo.edu/news/style/index_acronyms.htm)

## **Guidelines for Social Media Use during Work Hours**

Personal use of University electronic resources to access social networking sites is to be limited to incidental use. Incidental use must not interfere with an individual's performance of his/her assigned job responsibilities or someone else's job performance or compromise the functionality of the department or campus network. These guidelines are in accordance with the University's Information Technology Acceptable Use Guidelines which can be viewed here: <http://www6.semo.edu/infotech/policies.asp#Acceptable Use>

## **Transparency**

It is recommended that you be open and honest in all communications about who you are and who you represent when discussing matters related to the University. You should make sure that the first thing you mention is that you work for the University and your position here. If the topic you are discussing represents something that you or your department has a special or vested interest in, mention that interest explicitly.

The people you interact with will appreciate your honesty and will often be receptive of your point of view. On the other hand, social media users are very savvy and tend to detect dishonesty very quickly. This can damage not just the reputation of the University, but your reputation as well.

## **Privacy and Intellectual Property**

Be careful that whatever information you share, including visual representations and photographs, is public information. If you are discussing the work that a professor is doing, make sure that you ask them exactly what they feel comfortable sharing with the rest of the world and work with them to help preserve their intellectual property. Remember that if it's on a blog or a Web site, anyone can see it.

If you need to discuss another staff or faculty member personally make sure you have that person's permission. If you intend to discuss the activities of individual students, make sure they understand that their activities might be communicated through social media channels and offer them the option, in writing, to decline participation. Consider keeping a signed record of such requests in case students believe that their privacy has been violated.

Avoid any University-related legal or disciplinary issues unless discussing them in the context of classroom assignment or discussion. If you are going to discuss other Universities or external entities make sure that your statements are respectful, professional, and impeccably accurate.

## **Stick to your Expertise**

Make sure you that you are focusing on subjects that you are passionate and knowledgeable about. If you want to talk about something on the edge of your expertise, let people know that you might be out of your depth. Social media users fact check, so it's important to be up front with what you do and do not know.

It's also important to distinguish explicitly when you are and when you are not acting as a representative of your department, and by extension, the University. Consider writing in the first person and adding a disclaimer when you are speaking from your own opinion and not as a representative of Southeast. Remember, other users will hold you accountable for any content that you create.

## Respect Other People

The beauty of social media is that it is a dialogue. It is about creating and engaging in a conversation with other people, and the tools of social media make that easy to do. It is important to remember that with everything you say you are interacting with others. It is also important to remember that people will observe how you treat them as an extension of how the institution you represent regards them. So, as a representative of the University you should always be courteous, respectful and open-minded.

Having said that, do not be afraid to show your personality or post open-ended comments and ask other people questions. Embrace the nature of conversation while using a tone that is positive and engaging.

## Managing Conflict

From time to time there can be incidents of conflict that arise through social media discussions. Occasionally a user might even post something mean-spirited in an attempt to derail the conversation and provoke you or the University into a course of action that will later appear embarrassing. The most important thing to remember when dealing with conflicts in the social media environment is to be civil and courteous at all times.

If someone is trying to engage in an honest discussion with a legitimate point of view and seems interested in hearing the University's side of the story, feel free to carry a dialogue with them with the principles of these guidelines in mind. Remember to be transparent about who you are and who you work for, how the issue impacts you and your department, and be painstakingly accurate in your comments.

It is *very important* for you to [let Marketing & University Relations know](#) if you believe that the issue under discussion will have an impact on the University's reputation at large. If you believe that the conversation has merit but are unsure how to proceed, you can also [contact the News Bureau](#) and they can help you with the discussion.

If someone appears to be baiting you with malicious or slanderous comments, it is best not to respond to them at all. All social media platforms give an account manager the option to delete or block offensive posts, and if a user is intentionally being provocative it is within your rights to delete that person's comment or block that account from accessing yours. *Consider this option carefully.* There is a fine line between a sarcastic but harmless comment that should simply be ignored and an offensive comment that should be deleted. Please [contact us](#) and inform us of the situation *before* you take action against another user.

## ***Instructional Use***

Some faculty may choose to use social media profiles as a tool to engage students in discussion about their coursework in the classroom, blended and online courses. The power social media offers to connect with people and to communicate with them in new ways makes this an exciting option for some instructors.

The principle of academic freedom (as described in Chapter 2 of the *Faculty Handbook*) protects the right of individual faculty members to choose to use social media in their classes (regardless of delivery method) and for related educational objectives. Therefore, the decision to use social media is entirely up to the individual faculty member. However, to fully meet the responsibilities of academic freedom, faculty members should be as aware as possible of some of the issues that might accompany the use of social media for instructional purposes.

These guidelines exist to inform Faculty of these issues and help them to make decisions regarding the manner in which they use social media in their courses, if they choose to do so at all. When utilizing social media faculty may wish to consider the following:

**Transparency**—If you have a social media profile related to a course, let the students know who is managing that profile and what your expectations are for them when they interact with it.

**Privacy and Intellectual Property**—Make sure to understand the Terms of Use of any third-party service that you decide to use in your classroom. Some of these companies have very broad statements in those agreements that give them rights in perpetuity to re-publish anything anyone has said using their network; you should endeavor to protect any sensitive or un-published materials, including visual representations and photographs, by keeping them OFF of these social networks.

For most social networking sites, simply signing in to the service is tantamount to signing your name on a legal document accepting the terms of use for that service. Make sure you are comfortable with how a third-party service will treat your coursework and posted material before you make that agreement. Such agreements are often called “Terms of Use” agreements, “End User License Agreements” (EULAs), or a “Statement of Rights and Responsibilities.”

It is also important to consider your own personal privacy and the privacy of your students. Some educators create separate profiles to use to interact with their students so that they can retain a private profile they share with only friends and family. Remember to respect the privacy of your students as well and be open to discuss any privacy concerns they have. Faculty members’ use of social media should not compel their students to relinquish any more of their privacy than would be expected by fully participating in a face-to-face class.

**Student Preparation**—Faculty should be aware that not all students embrace technology in the same way and therefore student training in the technology may be appropriate. If social media use is to be a component of the course, and especially if students’ use of the media is to be graded, this requirement should be included in the course syllabus or outline. It should

be made clear to students the extent to which the use of social media will factor into their grades.

**Class Environment**—Depending on the type of course being offered, discussion might get heated from time to time. Remember to foster an environment of respect and that it is your example that could make the difference between success and failure in a conversation that uses social media as its conduit. Encourage your students to remember that even though they are having a conversation online, you still expect the same level of respect and decorum they would display in a face-to-face environment. If there is a serious incident resulting from a conflict that occurs in a virtual discussion using social media, it should receive the same disciplinary response as if it happened inside an actual classroom. The Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct provide guidance regarding student discipline.

**Existing Alternatives**—Faculty members should consider whether existing University instructional tools or technologies might permit them to accomplish their instructional objectives without using a third-party service. For example, the Online Instructor Suite (OIS) permits virtual discussions to take place with perhaps greater privacy and less impact on intellectual property rights than afforded by some social media sites. Further information can be obtained by contacting the Center for Scholarship in Teaching and Learning (CSTL).

Social media services are not a substitute for University-provided services when teaching an online and blended course, but offer an optional way for faculty to augment their delivery methods with tools that their students might feel comfortable using.

### Best Practices for Specific Platforms

The previous pages in these guidelines were written to be “platform neutral.” That is, their principles can be applied to any type or platform of social media. Southeast has also developed information to help departments and employees make the most of specific social media platforms. You can use the links below to view that information.

- Facebook: <http://www.semo.edu/wds/social/facebook.htm>
- Twitter: <http://www.semo.edu/wds/social/twitter.htm>
- Blogs: <http://www.semo.edu/wds/social/blogs.htm>

## **Contact Information**

### **Web Design & Support**

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