

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY & STAFF

REV. 15 JUL 2015

SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED

Tools allowing individuals to create and publish content to a wide audience changed the media landscape at the close of the 20th century. The ability to network together large groups of individuals with similar interests is the hallmark of the start of the 21st century. These two developments combine to create an environment in which the barriers to mass communication have never been lower in the history of human history. Taking the ability to communicate to large audiences and combining it with interaction is the heart of social media. The one-to-many world of public relations becomes two-way interaction; it is no longer a speech to the people, but a conversation.

The general public seeks more voices, and to achieve that diversity, Northwestern State encourages the use of social media tools by its faculty, staff and students. For employees who maintain social media on behalf of the university, the following policies outline the duties and responsibilities of those engaging the public on behalf of Northwestern State.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A MEMBER OF THE NORTHWESTERN STATE COMMUNITY

Northwestern State encourages its faculty, staff and students to engage in a robust use of social media to forward conversations and knowledge. At the same time, it is important to remember there are certain limits to privileged, confidential, or protected information that must be observed.

Usage of Northwestern State University's official trademarks, logos, seal and colors must comply with the Northwestern State University Visual Branding Guidelines. This includes the university name and abbreviation in the context of social media.

Release of information deemed official by the university is also subject to oversight by the Division of External Affairs. It is not permissible to release official news of the university without the prior approval of External Affairs.

All state of Louisiana rules regarding purchasing, contract confidentiality, proprietary information, and open records regulations apply, as well as federal guidelines regarding student records (FERPA) and personnel information (HIPPA).

In regard to employees, no political statements or endorsements are allowed in accordance with state of Louisiana Civil Service Code.

Northwestern State University's campus computing conduct codes also apply.

Keep in mind that you are utilizing state resources to update and maintain social media websites on behalf of the university's overall marketing efforts. Because you are utilizing state of Louisiana property, state of Louisiana computer networks and/or state work time, your activities will be subject to any state Freedom of Information Act requests.

Employees of Northwestern State University who violate these policies, or other university privacy and confidentiality policies do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination.

Finally, as a de facto representative of Northwestern State, inappropriate language, ethnic slurs, personal insults, or conduct deemed unprofessional will not be tolerated. Please recognize that as state employees, there are limitations on what is prudent to say.

As a rule of thumb, do not act in a manner that would be unacceptable in the halls of your university unit. Is this something that you would like the president to read in the local newspaper?

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PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

When participating in social media, there is no one else to blame besides the person at the keyboard. Keep in mind, you cannot claim to be misquoted or misinterpreted by a reporter – you are the reporter. And, you will not have the benefit of editors to clean up misspelling or poor grammar, or others that can assist or to share your responsibility.

UNDERSTAND INTERNET PROTOCOL

On-line activity is monitored and logged on a routine basis by all internet providers. The IP address of the origination point for any communication – email, blog entry, Twitter post, social media update – is attached to that information. There is no such thing as anonymous posting, especially for individuals using state equipment and state networks.

UNDERSTAND THE LIMITS OF INTERNET PRIVACY

Conversations with colleagues over coffee in the student union regarding student projects may be overheard, but they will not be logged and become a searchable database. Assume that any online exchanges can be copied and pasted out of “secure” areas. Internet privacy controls on services such as Facebook are subject to change at any time by the service provider, and may result in accidental revelation of information assumed to be private. The limits of privacy are human, not computer. Individuals with access to sensitive material and conversations may decide to reveal them to the world at large.

STUDENT PRIVACY AND RECORDS

It is not appropriate to discuss the grades, performance or personal information of students on social media. Social media is not secure, and even if names have been removed from works, posting whole passages for public critique is not considered appropriate behavior. Faculty should not use social media to contact students regarding assignments, grades or class room participation. All official communication regarding classwork should be transacted using the student and faculty member’s official nsula.edu email address. This is to ensure the security of the communication and is in accordance with accepted FERPA procedures.

FACULTY-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

As a rule, faculty should consider the impact of their extension of “friend” or other “following” requests of their current students. Students in the past have expressed concern about refusing faculty invitations for fear of offending individuals with discretion over grading. Students who initiate social media contact with faculty are opting in, and this is less intimidating to the students. As a rule, many faculty will not accept friend requests of students actively involved in coursework in their area. We recommend that if you have a policy regarding student social media interaction, individual faculty may wish to include this in their syllabi. If a faculty member wishes to invite the entire class into a discussion group, and if this is a part of the requirements for the course, it may not be seen as intimidating to individual students. However, please be aware of potential needs for accommodation for students under Section 508 regulations and the Americans With Disabilities Act if social media is part of class work.

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ONCE POSTED, ALWAYS AVAILABLE

The delete key does not work on the internet. Digital files – text, photos, video or audio – are easily copied and extremely portable. Please think before you post. Many services archive all data posted, and viewers often copy or screen capture posts. Assume everything is archived somewhere – because it is. The key factor to remember is how difficult it will be to recover what you believe you deleted. Whatever you post can and often is shared globally. Keep in mind this quote: If it gives you pause; pause.

CREATE EXCITEMENT

The most important part of your participation in social media is bringing the point of view of Northwestern State into the conversation. It is important for our personnel to represent the brand, and the help explain and enlighten our supporters. Remember, the heart of social media is the conversation – it's no longer a speech in which we tell the public what is important.

USE EXPERTISE

Comment on what you know and who you are. Being social means sharing with others. If you have an area of particular interest, promote that within the context of your department or unit's feed. National news, especially academic research and other information related to your area, will enhance your feed.

BE CONVERSATIONAL

Remember that it is "social" media – having a particular voice and a conversational tone is encouraged. Being less formal is good, but take care with slang.

IN AN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS SITUATION

TAKE EXTREME CARE WITH INFORMATION DURING EMERGENCIES. If an event is unfolding on the campus, refer all traffic to the Purple Alert system, the university's main website and official social media feeds. When you repost information from official university sources during these times, be sure to copy carefully the information and all links back to the official university source. NEVER SPECULATE or report unconfirmed information in a crisis. If you see erroneous information in a crisis, contact members of Northwestern State's External Affairs Division immediately and forward links to the errors.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you want to learn more about using social media to interact with colleagues or students, please reach out to the Northwestern State University Social Media Group.

Kara Scouten (scoutenk@nsula.edu)

For questions or concerns, contact the Coordinator of Social Media:

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