



Social Media Guidelines

Overview: Social Media and Existing University Policy

The Social Media Guidelines at Mercer University are designed to be a seamless integration with existing University policies that help govern campus life at Mercer. With 12 schools and colleges on major campuses in Macon, Atlanta and Savannah and at three regional academic centers across the state, Mercer University has multiple policy handbooks that directly relate to the unique environments in which they exist. The Social Media Guidelines provide guidance for using different social media platforms within the context of these policies established by the University to govern student and staff (non-faculty) behavior. With regard to University faculty, and in keeping with the principle of academic freedom, the Social Media Guidelines are consistent with the Faculty Handbook.

The various policy handbooks can be found online at <http://provost.mercer.edu/handbooks>.

Guidelines for Behavior

The emergence of social media has redefined the traditional communication exchange within a college or university community. In years past, one-way communication was primarily controlled, thoughtfully crafted and carefully managed by a staff or faculty member, and the exchange was usually private. Today, in the social media environment, the communication exchange is more interactive and can involve dozens of people, is dynamic and often impulsive, and is public. Notwithstanding, social media platforms provide enormous opportunities for institutions to effectively engage and connect their communities in ways unimagined years ago.

With that in mind, these guidelines are not designed to curtail or suppress the use of social media but rather encourage the appropriate use of such platforms. These guidelines will help focus your interactions with other users of social media across all platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, blogs, Flickr, LinkedIn and other social media platforms.

Official Use Guidelines

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

A social media platform officially affiliated with Mercer University is defined as:

- The University's official social media platforms that the University uses to interact with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.
- A social media platform established and maintained by an entity (i.e., unit, department, office, organization, etc.) of the University for interaction with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.
- A social media platform for a University course or event used for interaction with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.
- A social media platform established and maintained by a student organization or similar entity of the University used for interaction with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.

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.*

Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to follow these guidelines both when managing and interacting with the various types of social media platforms. "Managing," in this case, means that you are creating content for the platform and administering it completely. "Interacting," in this case, means that you are not the administrator of the platform, but choose to in some way interact with it.

Mercer University expects each member of the community to use Mercer's information technology resources – including connections to resources external to Mercer that are made possible by the University's information technology resources – responsibly, ethically, and in compliance with the Information Technology Access and Use Policy, relevant laws, and all contractual obligations to third parties. The use of Mercer University's information technology resources is a privilege. If a member of the Mercer community fails to comply with this policy or relevant laws and contractual obligations, that member's privilege to access and use Mercer's information technology resources may be revoked.

The Information Technology Access and Use Policy can be found at http://it.mercer.edu/faculty/policy/it_access_and_use_policy.htm.

The University respects the rights of its faculty and staff to identify themselves as employees of the University on their personal social media platforms 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 Mercer University, but this social media platform 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 risks with using that service; this is outlined in the terms that are agreed to when one interacts with a social media service.

University Branding Guidelines

The University's branding guidelines, which are found in the style guide, are designed to protect the integrity and reputation of the University brand. Managers and interacters of official University social media platforms should consult the University style guide for the protocols and procedures for using the University's official marks.

Social Media Use on University Electronic Resources

The University policy regarding the personal use of school electronic resources can be found in the employee and student handbooks. Therefore, using a University computer to access your personal social media sites would fall under this existing policy. Conversely, managers and interacters of official University social media sites are expected to access sites during, but not limited to, regular work hours.

General Guidelines

Honesty and accuracy

Be sure what you are posting is honest and accurate. Always verify your information before posting it. If you are in doubt about something, leave it out. To outside readers, your comments on social media can often be interpreted as "official" comments and positions of the University. So make sure you have all the facts before you post. It is also good practice to include a citation so others can verify your comments if necessary.

Privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property

Make sure whatever information you share, including representations and photographs, is public information. If you are discussing the work that a professor is doing, make sure you ask him or her exactly what he or she feels comfortable sharing with the rest of the world. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Mercer, its students, its alumni or your fellow employees. Follow University policies and federal requirements, such as FERPA. If you have given someone your word that a conversation will be kept private, then do not discuss it in social media platforms.

Respect others

Remember that your opinion is but one of many, and if you wish to sway others then it's probably best that the language and tone that you use is respectful and considerate of varying vantage points. In the social media environment, where the definition of community has considerably expanded, being respectful of others is a bedrock principle.

Think before you post

Always remember: Think before you post. If you're angry about something, delay your post until you have cooled off and had time to think. The one thing that is absolutely certain about social media is that it is public, and, in fact, viral at times. Your comments can be forwarded and copied multiple times, and search engines can retrieve posts years after they are posted. And even deleting a post or an entire social media page does not eliminate it because archival systems still save information. So always think before you post.

Transparency

Be honest and forthright about your identity and your official relationship with the University. And don't wait for someone to ask who you are or for some crisis to arise. Identify yourself at the beginning of your post and indicate whether you are authorized to represent Mercer in social media. If the topic you are discussing represents something that you or your department has a special or vested interest in, mention that interest explicitly.

Guidelines for Academic Instruction

Drawing upon policies present in the Mercer University Faculty Handbook, the following statements specifically address instructional guidelines regarding social media practices:

As scholars and educational officers, faculty/instructors should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their communications. Hence, they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

A university or college may not impose any limitation upon the teacher's freedom in the exposition of his or her own subject in the classroom or in addresses and publications outside the college.

A university or college should recognize that the teacher in speaking and writing outside of the institution upon subjects beyond the scope of his own field of study is entitled to precisely the same freedom and is subject to the same responsibility as attached to all other citizens.

Mercer's name may not be used on documents intended for political purposes, including soliciting funds for political support.

The University's guarantees of academic freedom presuppose that members of the faculty will act in a professionally responsible manner.

When they speak or act as private persons, faculty/instructors should avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university.

In addition, if social media is a component of course design, then faculty/instructors should include a caution on their syllabi that states the following:

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

Faculty/instructors may not use external social media systems to communicate sensitive, confidential, proprietary, or restricted information (FERPA/HIPPA), nor official notification of University business.

Defining Social Media Platforms and How They Are Used

Social media include a wide-range of technologies in which content is generated by the user. Included below are descriptions of many, though not all, social media platforms.

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking website that allows its members, also known as “friends,” to connect with other members of the site. Each member has the ability to post “status updates” (what he/she is doing at any given time); links to websites, news articles, and videos of interest; and personal photos and videos.

Users can connect to other users via a “friend request.” Once a user becomes “friends” with another user, the parties have access to each other’s “profile pages,” which can contain as much or as little personal information as the user would like.

In addition to connecting with “friends,” members can also connect with businesses and organizations they are interested in. These entities create “Pages,” which host information about the business or organization. The Page administrator can also post status updates, photos, videos, and links, and invite its “followers” to events.

Facebook also has “groups,” which are almost always initiated by an individual user – not by an organization or business. Groups are designed to connect users who have similar interests. Groups have profiles and cannot post status updates but can post photos and videos.

For more information about Facebook and how to create a Page or Group, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

Mercer and Facebook

For a complete listing of the University’s Facebook Pages, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

Mercer has an official Facebook presence, which can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/merceruniversity>. The page was created May 2009 and is used to promote the University to students, alumni, parents and friends. If your department would like to post something on the University’s page or create and/or publicize an event, please contact the Office of Marketing Communications.

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging sight that allows its members to connect with other users, or “followers.” Members post “Tweets” that are distributed to their followers via their Twitter homepages.

Tweets are short updates/messages and can contain links of interest or messages the user thinks his/her followers will find interesting.

To learn more about Twitter, how to create an account and how to use the service, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

Mercer and Twitter

Mercer has an official Twitter feed that was created in May 2009. The feed can be found at <http://www.twitter.com/merceryou>. If you would like a message posted on Mercer’s Twitter feed, please contact the Office of Marketing Communications.

YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing website. Upon creating an account, users can upload and share videos. To learn more about creating a YouTube account and how to upload videos, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

Mercer and YouTube

Mercer has an official YouTube channel, which can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/user/MercerUniversity>. There, visitors can find videos produced by various University departments. If your department would like to produce a video to post on YouTube, please contact the Office of Marketing Communications.

Instagram

Instagram is an online photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services.

Mercer and Instagram

Mercer has an official Instagram site, which can be found at <http://instagram.com/merceryou>. There, visitors can find general photos and short videos promoting the University in various ways.

Blogs

Blogs are online journals. To create a blog, users must create an account with a blog platform, such as Tumblr.com, WordPress.com, blogger.com, or blogspot.com. Contact the Help Desk to learn how to get a University hosted blog.

Mercer and Blogs

Mercer has several official blogs. For a complete listing, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a networking site designed for professionals. Through LinkedIn, users can post their resume, connect with other users in the same field, and make business referrals. Members can also join “groups,” where people with the same interests can share articles, post job listings and network with others in their field.

For more information about creating a LinkedIn group, visit <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.

Mercer and LinkedIn

Mercer has one official LinkedIn group for Mercer University alumni. Mercer’s group can be accessed by visiting Mercer’s social media site: <http://socialmedia.mercer.edu>.