

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Executive Summary and Best Practices & Guidelines for Use of Social Networking Sites

PART I – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Blogs and online social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter are popular forums for communicating and connecting with one another. As professionals with a unique social contract and obligation, health care students and employees must be cognizant of the public nature of these forums and the permanent nature of postings therein, including the impact posts can have on the reputation of MSU. While these sites offer the potential to engage with the community, they are also a potential forum for lapses of professionalism and professional behavior. This document, including the below summary, serves to outline expectations of those using their personal or professional social media accounts.

Professionalism

Future employment: Remember that statements and photos posted online are potentially viewable by future employers, and even if deleted can be recovered under certain circumstances.

Harassment: Cyber stalking, requests from those who you supervise to engage in activities outside of work, and inappropriate postings to social networking sites while supervising students can all be considered forms of sexual harassment.

Identification: By identifying yourself as an MSU student or employee, you are creating perceptions about the university by those who have access to your accounts or blog. Be sure all content associated with you aligns with MSU's values and professional standards. Use professional contact information for accounts that represent a component of your work at MSU. Use personal contact information for accounts that are strictly non-work-related or accounts that are blended.

Medical advice: Neither give medical advice on behalf of yourself or the university, nor engage with patients on social media.

Privacy: Do not share any content that would violate HIPAA standards and patient privacy. This includes photos of patients or cadavers, as well as commenting on patient care.

Any violation of the above standards could result in legal and/or disciplinary action.

Content

Logos: If you wish to use an MSU, MSU Health Care or college logo, please reach out to your unit's marketing and communications director.

Ownership: Do not post any content with copyrighted or trademarked materials, unless the artist has given you permission.

Engagement

Hashtag use: To expand the reach of your post, consider [using a hashtag](#), but only if on Instagram or Twitter (hashtags on Facebook are generally ineffective).

Imagery: Posts with photos and/or videos tend to perform better than those without.

Responses: Do not feel obligated to respond to every comment you receive on a social media post, especially overly negative ones. If you do not know the commenter, there is a chance the person could be deliberately trying to "bait you" into an argument.

PART II – BEST PRACTICES & GUIDELINES FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING SITES

Introduction

Michigan State University's health colleges (College of Human Medicine, College of Nursing and College of Osteopathic Medicine) recognize that social media continues to be an integral tool for communication.

While social networking has provided unique opportunities to interact, it has also created a forum for potential issues for health professionals. As professionals bound by social contracts and professional obligations, medical and nursing students, staff and faculty must be cognizant of the public nature of social networking forums and the permanent nature of postings therein.

Even though these channels offer terrific potential to bolster communication with friends and colleagues, they are also a forum for lapses of professionalism and professional behavior that may be freely visible by many people, despite the impression of privacy these sites portray. Do note the Office of Health Sciences holds its students, faculty and staff to higher standards as negative interactions can sometimes have more adverse outcomes for those in health professions.

The following "best practice guidelines" are designed to outline acceptable, responsible and encouraged uses by MSU health college students, faculty and staff in social media spaces, including networking sites, forums and blogs. These guidelines are recommended, whether participating in social networks personally or professionally, or whether one is using personal technology or technological resources owned or operated by Michigan State University or an MSU health college.

Online Social Networking: A Brief Definition

A social networking site is a space on the internet where users can create a profile and connect that profile to others (whether it be individuals or entities) to establish a personal or professional network. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit.

A blog (or weblog) is a website, usually in the form of a digital journal, maintained by an individual or group, with regular commentary on any number of subjects which may incorporate text, audio, video clips, and any other types of media.

A forum, such as Reddit or Discord, is a message board or place for online discussion around particular topics, current events, etc.

Potential Consequences of Online Unprofessional Behavior

The permanence, written nature, and ease of sharing of online postings cause them to be subject to higher levels of scrutiny than many other forms of communication. Therefore, the postings in social networking sites are subject to the same standards of professionalism as any other personal or professional interaction and will be treated as if made in a public forum.

The use of social networking sites, forums or blogs can also have legal ramifications. Comments made regarding the care of patients, or that portray you or a colleague in an unprofessional manner, may be used in court as evidence of a variety of claims (including libel, slander, defamation of character, negligence, and others) or in other disciplinary proceedings (e.g. State Medical Licensing Boards). Libel, slander, and other forms of defamation refer, generally, to the communication (written, oral, tangible, etc.) of a false statement about a person that injures his/her reputation. Other potential consequences include the revocation of a residency selection, or sanctions by a professional licensing board.

Also, the statements and photos posted within these sites are potentially viewable by program directors or future employers. It is not uncommon for program directors to search for the social networking profiles of potential residents and to use the discovered information in making selection decisions.

Individuals have been denied residencies and other employment opportunities as a result of what is found on social networking sites.

With respect to confidentiality, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) applies to social networking sites, and violators may be subject to the same prosecution as with other HIPAA violations.

In addition, cyber stalking, bullying and other inappropriate postings can be considered forms of harassment. Relationships online with other medical students are governed by MSU sexual harassment policies. Please refer to the university's [Rules Governing](#)

[Personal Conduct of Employees](#), [Medical Students Rights and Responsibilities](#) (MSRR) and [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) for more information regarding these issues.

Guidelines for Online Social Networking

1. The lines between public and private – as well as personal and professional – are often blurred in online social networks. By identifying yourself as an MSU health college student, faculty or staff, you may influence perceptions about your college by those who have access to your social network profile or weblog. As a representative of an MSU health college, all content associated with you should be consistent with your position at the school and with the college's values and professional standards.

2. Avoid giving medical advice as this could result in a violation of HIPAA and may cause danger to others. Make sure that you differentiate medical opinions from medical facts and articulate what statements reflect your personal beliefs.

3. Avoid online discussions of specific patients, even if all identifying information is excluded. It is possible that someone could recognize the patient to which you are referring based upon the context.

4. Some photos are strictly forbidden online. These include photos from the anatomy lab, research models, surgical procedures, patient exams and suturing clinics. Remember, even if you have permission, such photos may be downloadable and forwarded by others. Once you post, the actions of others could lead to legal or professional consequences for you personally.

5. Avoid interactions with patients on social networking sites. This provides an opportunity for a dual relationship, which may damage the doctor-patient relationship and may have legal consequences.

6. Engage with others online in ways that reflect MSU's core values – quality inclusiveness, and connectivity. Be respectful when considering other points of view and evaluating the intentions for desires of the audience. Refrain from posting language and content that could be construed as hateful, harassment, threatening, or supporting illegal activity. Make it clear that the views expressed are your own.

7. Unprofessional postings by others on your page may reflect very poorly on you. Please monitor others' postings on your profile and strive to ensure that the content would not be viewed as unprofessional. It may be useful to block postings from individuals who post unprofessional content.

8. Others may post photos of you and may "tag" you in the photos. It is your responsibility to make sure that these photos are not professionally compromising. As a general rule, "untag" yourself from any photos that are inappropriate, irrelevant or spam, and refrain from tagging others unless you have explicit permission from them to do so. Privacy or account settings may allow you to prevent photos from being "tagged" with your information or may prevent others from seeing your tags.

9. Due to continuous changes in these sites you should closely monitor the privacy settings of your social network accounts to optimize their privacy and security. Restrict your settings so that only individuals you have authorized to access your profile can see your information. Also, you should not share or post any identification numbers or demographic information online.

10. Help monitor your peers by alerting colleagues to unprofessional or potentially offensive comments made online to avoid future indiscretions and refer them to this document.

11. Do not infringe upon another's copyrighted or trademarked materials. If you post content, photos or other media, you are acknowledging that you own or have the right to use these items.

12. Do not use MSU logos or registered trademarks without expressed permission. Contact your college's communications department for assistance.

13. Do not use MSU logos or registered trademarks for personal endorsements, to promote a business, cause, political party or candidate. When using an MSU logo or mark on an MSU Health College social media account, follow [university brand standards](#).

14. Refrain from accessing social networking sites while in class, at work, or in clinical-work areas.

15. Use professional contact information for accounts that represent a component of your work at MSU. Use personal contact information for accounts that are strictly non-work-related or accounts that are a blend of professional and personal information. If you're not sure whether to use your personal or professional contact information, err on the side of using your personal information. If your account reflects your work at MSU, include a disclaimer that the content you share reflects personal views.

16. Comments are an important aspect of social networking. When networking on an MSU Health College social media account, avoid deleting or hiding a comment simply because you disagree with it. However, do delete or hide comments that are harmful, threatening, libelous, obscene or expose the data of others.

17. Any social media posts in which you may receive compensation (monetary or otherwise), should be clearly marked as such. Consider the university's conflict of interest policy before entering social media content agreements with companies.

18. Administrators of MSU health college social media accounts should link to source material when possible to reduce the spread of misinformation and drive traffic.

Guidance for Political, Social Issues and Advocacy

The university cannot make statements for or against any political parties, candidates or ballot initiatives. We are prohibited from using resources for political efforts, including the use of university social media accounts. As part of MSU, we can encourage people to vote, in general and bipartisan ways, but avoid linking to outside sources that promote political parties, candidates or ballot initiatives. This guideline applies to any affiliated student organizations or college units.

On personal social media accounts, you can represent and support political activities on social media during non-work or school hours with a clear indication that you're sharing your own views and not speaking on behalf of the university. Be careful of unintentional inferences of university support and don't use campus icons (i.e. Beaumont Tower) or university wordmarks in your messaging.

It is common for health professionals to use social media as a means to advocate and support particular health or social issues. Students, faculty and staff can express their views in these matters under the guidance of the best practices in this document. The university supports freedom of speech in a respectful and professional manner which supports our core values of quality, inclusiveness and connectivity.

References

[MSU Social Media Guidelines](#)

[MSU Community Guidelines](#)