MERCER
UNIVERSITY

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, Savannah and Columbus and at regional academic centers in Henry and Douglas counties, 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 faculty, staff and student behavior.

The various policy handbooks can be found online at https://provost.mercer.edu/resources/handbooks-and-publications/.

Guidelines for Behavior

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, LinkedIn, TikTok and others.

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 profile officially affiliated with Mercer University.

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

- The University's official social media profiles that the University uses to interact with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.

- A social media profile 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 profile for a University course or event used for interaction with the public, students, faculty and staff of Mercer.

- A social media profile 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 profiles. "Managing," in this case, means that you are creating content for the profile and administering it completely. "Interacting," in this case, means that you are not the administrator of the profile, 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 profiles 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 profile, 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 profile is for personal use and my statements here don't reflect the opinions of the University itself."

Remember when using a social media platform 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 platform.

University Branding Standards

The University's Branding Standards, https://www.mercer.edu/university-branding/, are designed to protect the integrity and reputation of the University brand. As is the case with existing policy on the use of the University seal, logo or other official marks, managers of and those who interact with official University social media profiles should consult the policies, trademarks and licensing guidelines, https://www.mercer.edu/university-branding/policies-trademarks-and-licensing/, for protocols and procedures for using the University's official trademarked materials.

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 profiles would fall under this existing policy. Conversely, managers of and those who interact with official University social media profiles 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.

Guidelines for Academic Instruction

Drawing upon polices 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, exercise appropriate restraint, show respect for the opinions of others, and 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 platform 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 platform."

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

Social Media Platforms
www.facebook.com/merceruniversity/
www.twitter.com/merceryou/
http://instagram.com/merceryou/
http://www.youtube.com/user/MercerUniversity
https://www.linkedin.com/school/mercer-university/

If your department would like to have something promoted on one of the University's pages, please contact the Office of Marketing Communications.