**Emory Health Sciences Social Media Policy  
August 13, 2018**

This social media policy is written with Woodruff Health Sciences Center and its units in mind, although the majority of it, with or without slight alternations, is applicable to all official Emory University social media. This policy should be used in conjunction with the umbrella university-wide policy document.

**Principles**

Social media is a powerful tool in Emory’s overall communications strategy, from the top level on down to schools, departments and centers. However, just as with university communications as a whole (press releases, videos, press statements, etc.), university-owned social media is not a free for all Social media activity should adhere to policies which protect the university legally and in terms of reputation, while also accurately representing the institution’s overall mission.

**Obey Rules, Policies, and Laws**

A guiding principle of social media communications is that it must be treated the same as other types of communications in terms of adhering to institutional code of conduct, privacy, respect for copyright, etc. Just because it is a newer form of communication doesn’t mean that rules go out the window.

**Specifics:**

* **Adhere to official** [**Emory University Policies**](http://policies.emory.edu/)**, including policies related to information security and privacy**, especially with regard to Emory Healthcare patients, whose information must be treated [as per HIPPA](http://policies.emory.edu/9.4), and students, [as per FERPA](http://registrar.emory.edu/records-transcripts/ferpa.html).
* **Maintain the confidentiality of the university’s proprietary and/or protected information.** Do not disclose, post or share proprietary Emory information, data, or communications. This includes intellectual property, internal operating plans, vendor communications, financial data, internal presentations and correspondence.
* **Adhere to intellectual property rights and laws.** Use of third-party copyrighted or trademarked material or use of a person's likeness without permission in digital content may be illegal and may expose Emory to financial liability and reputational risk. Obtain the necessary clearance for its use of intellectual property rights (e.g. music and photos) and a person's likeness in connection with their communications activities. If an asset requires payment and/or credit for use, adhere to those requirements.

**Protect Reputation**

Social media can greatly enhance an institution’s reputation for the better, but it can also damage it, if it’s not properly managed. Social media managers must be cognizant that the communications they put out are representing the university and thus should maintain institutional voice, be accurate, be respectful, follow proper communications procedure, and avoid situations where the institution might sustain damage.

**Specifics:**

* **Remember that you are representing Emory University; a social media administrator is not representing themselves.** All of the posts, comments and actions on university-affiliated social networks have the ability to affect the reputation of the university as a whole.
* **Protect the institutional voice.** Posts on social media should protect Emory’s “voice” by remaining professional in tone and in good taste. Keep this in mind when naming pages or accounts, selecting profile pictures, and selecting content to post.
* **Be thoughtful and discerning when engaging on social media.** Think twice before you post. If there’s a possibility a message could be misunderstood, consider whether you should make the post, find a way to rewrite it, or consult with other staff on the matter.
* **Strive for accuracy.** Get the facts straight before posting to social media. Stay in line with university and school messaging. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. Make sure all links work and all tags (for example Twitter @ mentions) are accurate and appropriate.
* **Unless a social media manager is a designated media relations representative, they should not interact with media.** Managers may answer general questions but must not comment on university policy or speak to matters which would normally be addressed by media relations or official spokespersons. Reporters, bloggers, and media companies should be referred to the appropriate staff.
* **Be respectful.** Understand that social media post naturally encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. When crafting a response to such comments, social media managers should carefully consider how their words might reflect on the university and its institutional voice. Be mindful of official Emory University Policies and moderate comments judiciously (see *Accounts Management*).
* **Write for your audiences, but know your posts may appear out of context and therefore communicate with that in mind.** There are no privacy settings on Twitter, so a tweet can viewed by anyone and may be misinterpreted, where it’s a standalone tweet, a retweet with comments, or a reply. Other social media posts are also generally made without any type of privacy. Posts are viewable by prospective students, current students, alumni, etc. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm or provoke any of these groups.
* **Don’t make posts or share posts by others that conflict with Emory’s official public stance in terms of message.** Whether it’s a newspaper article quoting a student or a tweet by a faculty member, if it’s contrary to a public statement, a university policy, or speaks ill of the school, do not share it. The official social media accounts represent the university and the posting or re-sharing of messages that are contrary to approved messaging breaks this policy.
* **Social media managers should be careful about what they appear to “endorse” on social media through simply acts such a “liking” a post.** A school account can follow or “like” an individual or institution or group; this is considered an “action” and could be taken as an “endorsement.” Similarly, “liking,” retweeting or re-posting material can also be seen as an endorsement. The same goes for other reactions on Facebook, i.e. if a school reacts using the “angry” emoji on a post, it can be construed that the school as a whole is saying it hates the content of that post. There is nothing inherently wrong with interacting with others on social media – it’s the point of the medium – but because this is being done on behalf of an institution, care must be taken.
* **Stay on topic – close to Emory.** University-owned social media should have some connection to Emory and not simply higher education or interesting research with no clear connection to the school. Many faculty post about interesting research or news items related to their fields which have no connection to Emory; retweeting these posts doesn’t make sense because to the larger audience (following the medical school, nursing school, etc.), they are not relevant in connection with Emory. **Occasions where this rule is not so hard and fast: when tweets originate with institutions who work in partnership or close affiliation with Emory**, such as the CDC, Georgia Tech, UGA, GSU, the Carter Center, etc. Those institutions’ posts are more relevant, although ideally when they are shared they should be framed with comment that explains the connection with Emory.
* **Stay “in house” by linking back to Emory.** Whenever possible, link back to Emory web sites or social media handles, for example official university press releases, school magazines, YouTube videos, Twitter handles. The exception to this is when posting media coverage (*see below*) and sharing posts by university partners, such as the CDC or Georgia Tech.
* **Be judicious in sharing outside media coverage.** It’s great when Emory receives positive media coverage, but that coverage should be shared in context with the same type of care given to stories or social media posts by the university. For example, if a local news station tweets about something at the university but doesn’t mention the university in the tweet, that post should be retweeted with a comment making the connection clear. A good practice is to take news links and post them to social media directly, with credit to the outlet, i.e. making a Facebook post showing off a newspaper article with a description of the story by the social media manager, not the news outlet.

**Account Management**

In additional to following established university policies and protecting the institution’s reputation, social media managers must also exercise their organizational skills to maximize the success of their efforts and lower any risk of social media being used inappropriately.

**Specifics:**

* **Manage social media according to a plan.** Social media managers should consider their messages, audiences and goals, as well as a strategy for keeping information on social media sites up-to-date.
* **Minimize security risks to social media accounts and profiles that have the ability to affect Emory’s reputation.** Social media accounts are an attractive target for someone who wants to damage the university. To minimize: 1) use strong passwords and manage them securely, 2) regularly monitor active social media accounts, and 3) eliminate accounts which are not active.
* **Staff your social media effort appropriately.** While interns can be tremendous collaborators on social media, they should not be the “owners” of official university social media accounts or profiles. Such profiles should be owned and maintained by permanent university staff. Interns who actively post on behalf of Emory accounts should be monitored by staff.
* **Moderate comments judiciously.** Comments are an important part of social media. A social media manager should not delete comments simply because they personally disagree with the commenter’s point of view or because the commenter has expressed a negative opinion, i.e. they are upset about something happening at the school. **On the other hand, there are cases where deleting comments is appropriate.** Managers should monitor social accounts or profiles for which they are responsible and delete comments that
  + include violent, obscene, profane, hateful or racist comments
  + use offensive or inappropriate language
  + threaten or defame any person or organization
  + include copyrighted material that requires permission to produce and distribute
  + would be considered spam
  + suggest or encourage illegal activity
  + solicit, advertise or endorse a third-party business or service
  + solicit donations to an unrelated cause or campaign
  + are off-topic posts by a single user
  + are repetitive posts copied and pasted by multiple users
  + expose the private data of others  
      
    If a manager encounters threatening comments on a post or receives communications that could be reputationally damaging or are threatening, this should be reported to university communications and/or the Emory Department of Public Safety.
* **Coordinate with central Emory University Communications.** If there is a question or concern related to social media – a “flare up” in comments, a matter of policy, a need for coordinated communications – social media managers should consult with central Emory University Communications. General staff or specific social media specialists will provide their expertise and advice.

**Emergency Communication**

In the event of an emergency or severe weather on campus, we have teamed up with [The Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response (CEPAR)](http://emergency.emory.edu/) to establish a reporting structure and ground rules.

Main campus communicators have given CEPAR access to their Twitter accounts in order for CEPAR to tweet on their behalf in the event of an emergency. We have chosen to do so in order to disseminate the message to a larger audience, as quickly as possible. The emergency message CEPAR has traditionally texted to individuals will also be posted to these Twitter accounts.

Campus communicators should default to re-sharing posts from the main Emory University social channels and website in the event of an emergency, and refrain from posting their own messaging. We do not want to confuse our community and lose control of the situation. Safety is of the utmost importance, and we need to maintain clear messaging during a crisis.

More information about our emergency notification system can be found on CEPAR’s website here: [http://emergency.emory.edu/just\_in\_time/emergency\_notification/](http://emergency.emory.edu/just_in_time/emergency_notification/index.html)

**References**

The content of this policy was drawn from existing practice as well as points stated in the policies of several universities, which are posted publicly. Specifically:

**Stanford University:** Social Media Guidelines

<https://ucomm.stanford.edu/policies/social-media.html>

**University of Dallas:** Social Media Policy

<https://udallas.edu/offices/communications/social/social-policy.php>

**Lawrence University:** Social Media Policies and Guideline

<https://www.lawrence.edu/info/offices/communications/lu-social-media-policy>

**Drexel University:** Social Media Policy

<http://drexel.edu/ucomm/about/policies/social-media/>