

University of Regina Faculty of Social Work

Ethical Use of Social Media Policy

Approved at SW Faculty Council November 18, 2015

Online communications have become an integral part of student life and the fast pace of technological developments has introduced new dynamics in communication that have impacted social work education and practice. As with many forms of technology that have impacted communications, social media comes with its own risks. Social work students and professionals are increasingly using and relying upon social media, and therefore, guidelines are necessary in order to protect us, and those with whom we work from potentially harmful consequences. This document outlines the University of Regina Faculty of Social Work policy for responsible and ethical use of social media, consistent with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics, the Canadian Association for Social Work Education's (CASWE) Standards for Accreditation, Human Rights legislation, and the University of Regina's Social Media guidelines.

Section 2.4.6 of the CASWE Standards for Accreditation states "The academic unit has a policy regarding ethical use of all forms of social media to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the academic unit and its field practicum community and demonstrates how the policy and procedures are consistent with the relevant human rights legislation, with the mission of the CASWE-ACFTS, and with the mission of the academic unit concerned."

The CASW Code of Ethics outlines the core social work values as:

- Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons
- Pursuit of social justice
- Service to humanity
- Integrity of professional practice
- Confidentiality of professional practice
- Competence of professional practice

The University of Regina Social Media guidelines encourage the following principles and best practices that are highly congruent with social work values and ethics:

- Be responsible
- Be transparent
- Protect private information
- Respect copyright and fair dealing
- Be mindful
- Be respectful
- Be trustworthy
- Admit your mistakes
- Add value
- Be timely

Faculty of Social Work Social Media Policy:

In keeping with the above principles, the Faculty of Social Work values both academic freedom and the freedom of inquiry and affirms these as pillars of university education whether expressed in print, orally, or electronically. The Faculty of Social Work recognizes the importance of the Internet and is committed to supporting students' and professionals' rights to interact ethically and responsibly through social media.

Members of the Faculty of Social Work community are responsible and accountable for their actions and statements. The guidelines for use of social media in this document have been designed to help students make appropriate professional decisions about classroom etiquette as well as the content of blogs, personal websites, and postings on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other widely used Internet social media sites.

Guidelines for Communication about the Faculty of Social Work and the Practicum

The content of publicly accessible electronic communications should adhere to the values outlined in the CASW Code of Ethics and the University of Regina Social Media principles. The Faculty values and encourages freedom of expression and critical debate, as well as respectful and knowledgeable internet interactions. The Faculty does not encourage or support the online use of inflammatory, libelous, or disrespectful language. The use of derogatory statements or misrepresentation in online postings is not viewed favourably by the Faculty of Social Work or Field Placement agencies and may result in disciplinary action as per the University of Regina's Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy and the Faculty of Social Work's policy on Student Professional Performance Responsibilities. Saskatchewan Human Rights legislation includes protection from harassment in public life and includes negative comments that are discriminatory in nature.

The Faculty of Social Work encourages communications that are based on reasoned engagement and professional and scholarly knowledge. Postings on social media sites should be treated as public documents recognizing that they could be seen by anyone, accessed by potential employers, and may form a permanent personal electronic record. Photographs form part of the Internet record and should be carefully considered before posting.

General Transparency and Confidentiality Guidelines for Students

“Policies should inform students [and their parents] that disciplinary action may be taken against them when their off-campus speech causes a substantial disruption to the education environment or interferes with another student's rights” (cited in Bradshaw & Saha, 2010, p. 150).

Transparency

- If you are developing a website, social networking group, or writing a blog that will mention the Faculty of Social Work or your Practicum agency, identify that you are a student and that the views expressed are yours alone and do not represent the views of the Faculty of Social Work or your Practicum agency.

- Unless given permission in writing by either the Faculty of Social Work or your practicum supervisor, you are not authorized to speak on behalf of either the Faculty of Social Work or your Practicum agency.
- If you are developing a website, social networking group, or writing a blog that will mention the Faculty of Social Work or your Practicum agency, as a courtesy, you must advise the Faculty of Social Work and/or your Practicum Supervisor in advance and you should clearly state your goals and what your postings intend to say or reflect.

Confidentiality

You may not share information that is confidential about the Faculty of Social Work, your Practicum employees and setting, and/or clients and peers. Do not post information that will identify faculty members, practicum staff, or clients. Do not post confidential information about classmates and peers. If you are in doubt or have any questions about whether information has or could breach confidentiality, immediately contact the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Social Work, the Faculty of Social Work Graduate Studies Coordinator, BSW Field Practicum Coordinator, or your field instructor to discuss the matter.

Guidelines for Interactions with Faculty, Staff, and Clients (Past and Present) on the Internet

- Do not approach field instructors, faculty, or staff to connect on social media sites for the duration of your social work education, in order to avoid dual relationship conflicts.
- Do not “friend” clients (current or past) and do not allow your clients (current or past) to “friend” you.
- Do not use messaging on websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn to contact your clients or respond to clients who may have contacted you. These sites are not secure.
- Become intimately familiar with the privacy controls on social networking sites and ensure that the general public cannot see the personal details of your life that you would only share with immediate family and friends.
- Consider using a pseudonym that is only for family and friends.
- Only use your professional work/practicum email address to communicate with clients.
- All email communication with clients should be of a professional nature and not involve personal discussions and/or inappropriate self disclosures of any kind.
- Familiarize yourself with the social media or communications policies of the practicum agency.
- If the agency does not have a social media or communications policy, please consider developing a policy that you can use with your clients. Please discuss this document (the policy) with your clients and field supervisor.
- If you choose to communicate with clients by email, be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your and their internet service providers. Keep all communications professional.

Respect and Privacy Rights

Speak respectfully about the Faculty of Social Work and your Practicum supervisors. Do not engage in conduct that will reflect negatively on you, the Practicum agency, or the Faculty of Social Work. If you have concerns or complaints about the actions/activities of Faculty of Social Work members or other people involved in your program, please use the established protocols in the University of Regina Undergraduate Calendar and other University policies and guidelines to channel your concerns or complaints.

The Faculty of Social Work encourages you to write knowledgeably and accurately, using appropriate professionalism. Despite disclaimers, Internet interactions can result in members forming opinions about the Faculty of Social Work and the Practicum agency employees, about you (as a social work student or social worker), and clients.

Photographs

Taking and sharing photographs outside of public spaces without consent is a breach of confidentiality. Know your agency's policy regarding photograph use and limitations of that use.

Classroom Etiquette and Electronic technology

The use of computer and electronic technology has greatly enhanced social work education and is encouraged if it supports and augments academic learning. However, non-academic use of technology in the classroom is inappropriate and is not acceptable. Texting, surfing the Internet, checking Facebook and other social media activity during class time is prohibited unless it is expressly authorized by the professor/instructor for a specific academic exercise. Cell phones may be used for family emergencies and on-call employment purposes, but the phone must be set to "vibrate" so as to not disturb the class. The use of cell phones, even for family emergencies and on call employment purposes, must be discussed with the professor/instructor prior to the start of class. Students are invited to attend to their social media needs during non-class time.

The production of recordings of classroom interactions is expressly prohibited unless it is specifically authorized and approved by the Instructor and class participants. The use of such recordings is subject to these guidelines. Unauthorized Internet postings of unauthorized recordings constitute a breach of confidentiality and a violation of privacy rights.

Legal liability

Recognize that you are legally liable (responsible/accountable) for anything that you write or present online. Anything published on the Internet is NOT confidential and may form a permanent record. Students can be disciplined by the Faculty of Social Work and the University of Regina for online commentary, content, or images that are deemed to be defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment. You can be sued by any individual or organization that views your online commentary/postings as such.

Additional informative links:

The Mission of the CASWE can be found here: <http://caswe-acfts.ca/about-us/mission/>

The University of Regina Faculty, Social Work Policy regarding Student Professional Performance Responsibilities can be found here:

<http://www.uregina.ca/socialwork/assets/docs/pdf/Stud-Perf-Res-June-14-07.pdf>

The University of Regina Regulations Governing Discipline for Academic and non-Academic Misconduct can be found here:

<http://www.uregina.ca/presoff/vpadmin/policymanual/Academic%20Regulations/DisciplinaryRegulations.pdf>

The University of Regina Social Media Guidelines can be found here:

<http://www.uregina.ca/external/communications/social-media/sm-guidelines.html>

Saskatchewan Human Rights Legislation can be found here:

<http://www.saskimmigrationcanada.ca/saskatchewan-human-rights-law>

Acknowledgement

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Other references

Levmore, S. & Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *The offensive internet*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.