

**Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina
Ethical Use of Digital Communication and Social Media Policy**

Digital communication has become an integral part of student life, and the rapid pace of technological change continues to shape how we interact within social work education and practice. While these tools offer many benefits, they also introduce new risks and challenges. As social work students and professionals increasingly rely on digital communication and social media, it is important to establish clear guidelines to help protect both ourselves and those with whom we work from potential harm. This document outlines the University of Regina Faculty of Social Work policy for the responsible, ethical, and professional use of digital communication and social media.

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear expectations for students in the Faculty of Social Work regarding the responsible, professional, ethical, and safe use of digital communication and social media.

This policy reflects the Faculty's commitment to ethical practice, professional integrity, respect for persons, privacy, anti-oppressive practice, reconciliation, digital safety, and responsible engagement in online environments and is aligned with the following:

- [CASW Code of Ethics](#)
- [SASW Standards of Practice](#)
- [University of Regina Policy Respectful University](#)
- Applicable human rights and privacy legislation in Saskatchewan and Canada

This policy applies to all students in the Social Work Program across academic, field placement, and personal contexts where digital communication and social media use may affect professional responsibilities.

Guidelines for Digital Communications with Faculty and Field Instructors.

Respectful, professional communication is required in all interactions with social work professors and field instructors, whether in person, by email, or online. When communicating by email, students are expected to use respectful, professional language, including a clear subject line, proper greeting, and courteous tone. Students must also maintain a courteous tone when using any instructor-approved social media platform.

The Faculty of Social Work recognizes the importance of maintaining respectful and professional relationships within the academic environment and is attentive to the issue of contra-power harassment.

Contra-power harassment refers to behaviours directed toward individuals in positions of authority—such as professors, instructors, or field supervisors—by those they teach or supervise.

It involves conduct that is disrespectful, aggressive, or otherwise inappropriate and that may undermine the dignity, role, or authority of individuals in formal positions of responsibility.

In an academic context, contra-power harassment may include, but is not limited to:

- Persistent disrespectful or disruptive behaviour toward an instructor
- Verbal abuse, intimidation, or hostile communication
- Repeated attempts to undermine or challenge authority in ways that are not constructive or appropriate to academic dialogue
- Refusal to comply with reasonable academic expectations when accompanied by disrespectful conduct (Christensen Craft & White, 2020)

Course evaluations that contain personal attacks, derogatory language, harassment, or comments unrelated to teaching and learning are inappropriate and will be reviewed and may be removed from the permanent record.

It is important to note that the recognition of contra power harassment does not limit students' ability to ask questions, express differing viewpoints, or engage in critical discussion. Academic environments value respectful dialogue, thoughtful debate, and constructive feedback. The concern is specifically with behaviour that crosses into disrespect, hostility, or intimidation.

Guidelines for use of Computer and Electronic Technology within the Classroom.

The use of computer and electronic technology has greatly enhanced social work education and is encouraged when it supports and augments academic learning; however, it must be used only for approved instructional purposes during class time.

Non-academic use of technology during class—including texting, browsing the internet, or using social media—is not permitted unless explicitly authorized by the instructor for a specific learning activity.

Cell phones must be set to vibrate and are not to disrupt the learning environment. Use of cell phones for emergencies or on-call employment must be disclosed to and approved by the instructor prior to the start of class.

Students are expected to manage all personal communication and social media outside of scheduled class time.

Recording classes requires **explicit consent** from instructors and all participants.

1. Unauthorized recording, posting, or distribution of class content is prohibited.
2. Digital devices should be used for academic purposes unless otherwise permitted.
3. In virtual classes, students must respect privacy, maintain professionalism, and avoid recording or capturing images without consent.

Guidelines for Social Media Use

Students in the Faculty of Social Work are responsible and accountable for their actions and communications. The following guidelines are intended to support students in making informed, ethical, and professional decisions regarding the use of social media.

The Faculty encourages communication that reflects reasoned engagement, as well as professional and scholarly knowledge. Content shared on social media should be considered public and treated accordingly, recognizing that it may be viewed by a wide audience, including potential employers, and may become part of a permanent digital record.

1) Confidentiality and Privacy

- Students must not disclose any identifying or sensitive information about clients, field agencies, or communities.
- Confidentiality must be maintained across all communication platforms, including social media and digital technologies.
- CASW emphasizes that confidentiality must be protected in “all settings and social media environments.”
- Even indirect or “de-identified” information may violate ethical standards if individuals or communities could be recognized.

2) Professional Boundaries and Use of Technology

- Students must not initiate or accept personal social media contact with clients or service users.
- CASW guidelines discourage communication with clients through personal or non-work-related technologies due to risks of boundary violations.
- Professional boundaries must be maintained at all times, including online interactions.
- Students should use only agency-approved platforms for any client-related communication.

3) Professional Identity and Representation

- Students must accurately represent their status as social work students, not registered social workers, unless appropriately credentialed.
- Under Saskatchewan regulation, the title “social worker” is protected and restricted to registered members of SASW.
- Students must avoid misrepresentation of qualifications or scope of practice.
- When identifying as a social work student online, behaviour must reflect professional standards and ethical values.

4) Respectful and Anti-Oppressive Communication

- Social media use must reflect anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and culturally responsive practice.
- Students must avoid posting discriminatory, harmful, or stigmatizing content.
- CASW emphasizes promoting equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity in all interactions.

5) Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest

- Students must avoid dual relationships that may arise through social media (e.g., interacting with clients in personal spaces online).
- Online activity must not compromise professional judgment or create conflicts of interest.

6) Academic and Field Education Expectations

- Students must not post content that could harm the reputation of faculty, field agencies, colleagues, or the profession.
- Sharing confidential field experiences, even in informal or private groups, is prohibited.

Accountability

All digital conduct, including digital communication and social media activity, that violates this policy may be reviewed by the Faculty of Social Work. Such review may result in action under the [*Faculty of Social Work Student Professional Suitability Policy and Procedures*](#) and/or the [*University of Regina Policy Respectful University*](#).

Legal Liability

Students should recognize that they are legally responsible and accountable for anything they write or present online. Content shared on the internet is not confidential and may become part of a permanent record. Students may be subject to disciplinary action by the Faculty of Social Work and the University of Regina for online commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that contribute to a hostile learning environment. Individuals or organizations may also pursue legal action if they consider online content to be harmful or damaging.

Student Signature

Upon admission, all social work students are required to sign an acknowledgment confirming their understanding of, and commitment to comply with, this policy and the ethical expectations of the social work profession.

Student Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Christensen, M., Craft, J., & White, S. (2020). "Nurse academics' experience of contra-power harassment from undergraduate nursing students in Australia." *Nurse Education Today*, 84, 104220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2019.104220>