

# **Social Media Policy**

## **Summary**

Columbus State University has a policy for departments, centers, and academic units on best practices, as issued by University Relations. Additionally, a policy on student social media use when adopting an account on a Columbus state email address.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the best practices and approved forms of communication on social media platforms.

## **Policy**

### **Social Media Defined**

Social media refers to a variety of online programs, services and platforms that allow the participants (or users) to create and publish content that appears on the page. Many of these sites use personal profiles where users post information about themselves. The “social” in social media comes in as these individuals find others with similar interests and interact with them through online communities, sharing information and knowledge, offering support and networking. Social media also allows for the easy sharing and re-purposing of existing content, expanding the reach of your work and enabling others to share it with their friends and networks. Popular social media services include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube and Flickr.

### **Social Media at CSU**

Columbus State University – and many of its units – are active participants in certain social media platforms and is trying hard to stay current with emerging services. Social media has become a vitally important method of communication for the university to share what is happening on campus directly with people who are interested in us and what we do. Social media also lets us hear directly and immediately from students, faculty, staff, parents, fans and friends about what is important to them, or lets us know what’s important to them based on what they are talking about with each other. These “conversations” makes social media so different from traditional forms of institutional communication.

The primary tools the University Relations office is currently using are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Picassa. Units across campus also are successfully using blogs and Flickr to communicate with key audiences.

CSU’s primary official social media presences are:

- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ColumbusState>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ColumbusState>
- YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/columbusstateu>
- Flickr: <https://picasaweb.google.com/ColumbusStateUniversityPhotos>

In addition to the sites mentioned above, many CSU departments and programs have launched official social media presences. CSU's University Relations office encourages these kinds of activities, but suggests some guidelines and best practices that should be followed.

### **Guidelines for Best Practices for Social Media**

There are no university prohibitions to departments or other organizations on campus from starting up their own social media sites. However, there are some guidelines and best practices that should be followed.

First, unless the site is yours personally (and updated and monitored on your own time) you must remember that you are acting and speaking as a representative of Columbus State University and your department. As such, you need to adhere to all CSU, University System of Georgia, and state of Georgia policies on confidentiality, use of technology, fairness, among others.

Your site should clearly state that you are XX department **at Columbus State University** (not CSU – there are many, many institutions out there that call themselves CSU). In the description or “about you” part of the site, you should clearly state your official name – including the words “Columbus State University”, official university URL and how to get in touch with your department or program.

If you are interested in establishing a social media program, here are some questions you need to ask yourself:

### **Goal of Social Media at CSU**

What is your goal here? If you want to promote an occasional event or share news about your department, a website or an e-newsletter, there might be a better choice for you. You can use email, the Sabre, Impact or existing university social media platforms, such as CSU's Facebook and Twitter accounts, which require daily maintenance, desire to engage with others and are always looking for suggestions on content.

### **Social Media Audience**

Figuring out the type of people you want to have a conversation with will help determine which platforms are best for you. Are you trying to connect with current students? Are you trying to engage alumni? Are you trying to attract new students?

## **What is your message?**

This is a trick question. Social media is all about connecting, not pushing a message. To be a good participant, you must first be a good listener. Your online community will tell you what they want to hear from you.

## **Do you have what it takes?**

To you have the time and the content to keep the account active? If your site is not active and updated, it will be ignored. To be successful at social media takes not only time and strategy, but it often takes an outgoing personality. If you've been described as a people person or friendly, you may have what it takes. Or you may be a connector — someone who enjoys making connections and providing helpful information. In any case, you'll need to have some personal or professional experience with social media before hosting an account on behalf of the university.

## **Best Practices**

**Listen first.** Observe before you engage. Listen to the conversations, view the content. See what people are talking about and what they're interested in.

**Think it through.** Have your goals and purpose of participation. Know how you will add value. Make sure you're choosing the most relevant platform.

**Add value to the discussion.** Social media at its best is an exchange of helpful or interesting information. In order to be accepted in the community, bring content of value.

**Adhere** to university compliance requirements, policies and guidelines.

**Be respectful.** Don't post or allow material that is profane, libelous, obscene, threatening, abusive, harassing, hateful, defamatory or embarrassing to anyone.

**Abide by the law.** Don't post or allow content that violates any state or federal laws. Get permission to use or reproduce copyrighted content.

**Be yourself.** Social media is all about transparency and connecting personally. Don't hide your identity or affiliations. Show your personality.

**Be relevant and accurate.** This is one reason why you should listen before joining, and continue to listen. Be sure your content and communications are relevant to those with whom you are engaging. Make sure your posts are accurate.

**Don't be argumentative.** These platforms allow for opinions and civil discussions, not rude and hateful comments to spur arguments.

**What you say** can and will be used against you. Everything you say or do online is likely

to be stored forever, even if you delete it.

**It's not a one-way conversation.** Social media is not a place for you to talk without listening, commenting and responding to the conversations around you. Engage with others.

**Have a thick skin.** Because it's an open forum, there will surely be negative comments and complaints about you/your organization. That's part of the social media world. That's OK. As long as it's not grossly disrespectful (see above) or profane, you should probably resist the temptation to erase it, and instead respond to it as best you can. Social media sites are ignored if they are not authentic.

**Use your best judgment.** If you are unsure about your post, discuss content with your manager before commenting.

### **Student Social Media Guidelines**

Using a CSU social media site (or using your university email to join a social media site) is a great way to interact with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends. CSU encourages you to participate in discussions, post comments, and share your ideas, photos, and videos.

When using social media, please use common sense. For your own safety, never include your phone number, email address, or other personal information in a post. Remember, the internet is not private. If there is something you would not want a judge (or worse, your mother) to see, don't post it.

Social media is a valuable tool in collaboration and in forging healthy debates. Be respectful in your comments and actions. Please do not post:

- Profanity, abusive language, or personal/character attacks
- Material that is unlawful, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, abusive, slanderous, hateful, or embarrassing to any other entity as determined by CSU
- Advertisements and business solicitations
- Chain letters or "spam"

Think before you post. If you post something offensive or inappropriate, or something that is not relevant to the general CSU family, as determined by CSU, the university may remove the post and/or terminate your account.

The views, opinions, and inane comments expressed on CSU's social media sites do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of CSU. CSU is not responsible for the accuracy, currency, or reliability of information posted.

## **Related USG Policy**

10.2.2 Institutional Publications

## **Last Update**

2016-17 Student Handbook

## **Responsible Authority**

University Relations