



GUIDELINES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Harvard University recognizes the importance and benefits of communicating through social media. Social media is a powerful vehicle through which Harvard may disseminate relevant news to the Harvard community, listen to voices and perceptions about Harvard, and connect with our audiences online.

Navigating the world of social media can be confusing with constant changes in platforms, technologies, and communities. However, existing legal responsibilities and University policies remain in place when Harvard employees use social media, and these guidelines do not supplant or restrict any policy in force.

INDIVIDUALS COVERED BY THESE GUIDELINES

Individuals authorized to speak on behalf of the University.

Note that although these guidelines cover the appropriate use of social media by individuals authorized to speak for Harvard, the use of social media by other employees remains subject to Harvard policies governing employee conduct.

REASONS FOR THESE GUIDELINES

To provide members of the Harvard community with contemporary guidance for using social media to communicate about the University.

To clarify work-related and personal uses of social media.

To clarify the relationship between existing University policies and contemporary uses of social media.

GUIDELINES

These Guidelines will provide information for Harvard community members who are authorized to speak on behalf of the University through social media. Social media forums can include blogs, wikis, social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.), personal web sites, and other media yet to be developed in a dynamic communications field.

Community members may find that many of these Guidelines can be helpful when thinking about personal social media accounts. However, these Guidelines are not intended to govern or restrict personal presence on the web, nor are these guidelines intended to restrict employee rights to engage in concerted, protected activity with fellow employees over the terms and conditions of employment ([see HARVie for further information about your employee rights under the National Labor Relations Act](#)). Nevertheless, Harvard encourages staff to direct complaints or concerns about your job or working environment to supervisors, local or University administrators and human resources officers or your union representative using established processes.

Similarly, these Guidelines are not intended to abridge or otherwise restrict principles of academic freedom, as described in the [University-Wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities \(1970\)](#) and the [Statement of the President and Deans on University Rights and Responsibilities \(2002\)](#).

It is also important to note that this will be a living document, which will reflect Harvard's current needs and adjust to future changes in social media.

With these parameters in mind, here are some principles to guide individuals authorized to use social media to speak on Harvard's behalf:

Confidentiality – *Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Harvard, its faculty, its students, its affiliates, its alumni or its employees.*

University and local policies, applicable federal and state laws and regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) (among others), and your supervisors should be consulted for guidance on restrictions related to the release of confidential information.

Privacy – *Do not post anything that you would not present in any public forum. In particular, do not discuss a situation involving named or pictured individuals on a social media site without their knowledge or permission.*

Permanence: Remember that whatever you share (either on the University's behalf or your own personal account) may be public for an indefinite period of time, even if you attempt to modify or delete it.

Audience: Be careful what personal information you share online. Many social networking websites are not secured and information is available to anyone with access to a computer and the internet.

Association: Keep in mind that on many social networking websites, your name and photo/icon appear next to the content that you post and will be associated with you or with the University when you are representing Harvard or its affiliates on the web in an official capacity.

“Do No Harm” – *Harvard encourages the use of social media to enhance its education and research through collaboration, communication, and promotion of research and programs. You must ensure that your authorized use of social media does not harm or otherwise injure the University, its faculty, its students, its alumni, or its employees.*

Here are some examples of situations where using social media can create unintended harm to Harvard or a member of the Harvard community, or may violate laws, regulations or Harvard policies:

HIPAA/FERPA violation: You are a staff assistant in University Health Services, and you use your cell phone camera to take a picture of some colleagues in your workspace and post the picture to the Department's Facebook page. However, the picture contains the image of a student receiving medical services in the background, and some confidential medical documents are legible on your desk area. In this situation, you should have taken steps in advance to prevent the exposure of confidential medical or student information.

Student Groups: You “retweet” a Twitter message posted by a student activist group using your Department's official Twitter account. However, the tweet contains a link to an outside website that disparages University leadership. In this situation, you should have taken advance steps to ensure that material you posted to authorized social media accounts at the University did not contain material that reflects negatively on the University or members of the University community.

Anonymous Comment Boards: You are a senior administrator in one of Harvard's graduate schools. You read a story on The Harvard Crimson website about a new University policy and post an assumed "anonymous" comment questioning the policy's goals. However, you did not realize that you were logged into the Crimson website with your personal screen name when you posted your comment, and subsequent viewers were able to see your name and make assumptions from your position as a senior administrator that your school would not support the new policy. In this situation, you should have taken steps to ensure that you were transparent in stating your authority to speak on behalf of the institution and whether the comments were limited to your personal views on the matter.

Personal Responsibility and Liability – *Communications made via social media are not exempt from the expectations and obligations set forth in Harvard's policies or from the laws and regulations that govern personal liability across general and traditional forms of communication. You are responsible for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others, and should only post on behalf of Harvard or its affiliates in an official capacity where you have been explicitly authorized to do so. Nothing in this policy shall be read to restrict your ability to engage in concerted, protected activity with your fellow employees regarding the terms and conditions of your employment.*

Incidental Use: Harvard understands that employees utilize social media and the web for personal matters in the modern workplace. While Harvard reserves the right to monitor use of its computer systems, employees may engage in incidental personal use of social media in the workplace so long as such use does not consume significant time or resources, interfere with operations and productivity, and does not violate other University policies (see **RELATED POLICIES**, below) or the policies of an employee's local unit. A disciplinary or other review may be initiated if an employee's online activity violates law or Harvard policy, or if the employee's non-official or unauthorized online activity otherwise subjects the University to liability for such acts.

Here are some practical tips for representing Harvard online and in an official capacity:

Affiliation: Disclose your affiliation if you talk about work related matters that are within your area of job responsibility.

Be sensitive: Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the University, and be aware of non-disclosure agreement(s) when acting in a personal capacity.

Clearly identify your personal communications: In some cases, individuals maintain several social media outlets, with some for personal use and others for official Harvard business. Individuals must use care to separate the two uses and avoid using Harvard outlets to distribute personal communications. Unless specifically authorized to speak on behalf of Harvard or a University department, school or unit, you must state that the views expressed are your own. On Twitter, for example, you might consider using a disclaimer in the account profile's "Bio" section: "Tweets are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer."

Accuracy: Take a moment to think about what you are posting (both personally and professionally) before you hit the publish/post button. Think about the content: is it relevant and topical? Are you reviewing and maintaining the content you provide through social media on a regular basis? Proofread for spelling and grammar.

Be aware of what you say and of your connections in social media networks. For example, a comment you make on a colleague's Facebook wall is visible to anyone that person is connected to, but you might not be connected to those individuals and therefore unable to control access or anticipate further distribution of your comments. Be thoughtful and discreet.

Transparency – *To both protect the Harvard name and build trust with users, social media such as blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, etc. that are established on behalf of Harvard entities should be explicit regarding the nature of the relationship to Harvard. As a social media representative of the University, you should clearly state your position within the University and the limits of your authority to speak on behalf of the University. Similarly, in keeping with Harvard's non-profit status, social media should not be used to promote or transact any commercial business or financial transactions, including revenue from advertising, nor should any staff with administrative responsibilities realize any personal monetary profit from Harvard-related social media.*

Your social media profile should include descriptions of the mission/work of the Harvard entity, as well as the kinds of information one can expect to receive by "liking" or "following."

"Liking" or "following" sites or feeds should reflect the opinions of Harvard. Refrain from "liking" or "following" sites or feeds for personal interest or communication.

When sharing information from other users via links or "retweeting," making sure that the information is relevant to the audience.

When sharing via links, "retweets" or blog posts, avoid promoting vendors or other commercial operations not related to Harvard entities or activities. View the Office of the Provost [Endorsement Guidelines](#) for further information on Harvard policies and procedures, and review these [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) on the Federal Trade Commission's \(FTC\) Revised Endorsement Guides \(16 CFR Part 255\)](#) for further information about using social media outlets to promote goods and services.

Use of the Harvard Name – *In addition to meeting the requirements set forth in the Office of the Provost's policies on the use of Harvard names and insignias, there are unique challenges associated with using the Harvard name in social media, such as the potential need to abbreviate a program or entity name for a Twitter account.*

Use of the Harvard shield is not permissible as a profile photo or on a blog unless express permission is granted by the Provost's office and the School/Unit to which the initiative/office/department reports.

Accessibility - *Harvard University is committed to ensuring effective access to communications materials for all members of the University community, including individuals with disabilities.*

Individuals who are blind or have low vision or other disabilities may confront significant barriers when accessing certain information through social media. Accordingly, individuals that maintain social media on behalf of the University should take steps to reduce barriers to access for individuals with disabilities.

For example, screen reader compatibility, captioning and descriptive tags on images can help reduce barriers to accessing information for individuals with disabilities. Most major social media platforms (including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter) provide access solutions for individuals with disabilities, including application programming interfaces (API) that enable the ability to create applications that enhance accessibility of content.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that APIs do not eliminate or resolve all accessibility challenges. For additional and more current resources on improving access to Harvard-related social media and Harvard websites for individuals with disabilities, please contact [Digital Communications & Communication Services](#) at [Harvard Public Affairs & Communications \(HPAC\)](#).

For Recruiters – *While Social Media continues to evolve and develop as an effective tool for advertising positions at the University and for recruiting candidates, it does not replace or otherwise eliminate the need to use the University’s existing recruitment systems and processes for posting positions, collecting applications, conducting background checks, making offers of employment and other related activities. In addition, Social Media should be used in keeping with the University’s [affirmative action obligations](#).*

All applicants must apply through the ASPIRE system in order to be considered an applicant for a job. Social Media cannot replace the University’s existing applicant tracking system.

Offers of employment should only be extended through existing and accepted processes, and should not be communicated through social media.

RELATED POLICIES

Staff Personnel Manual

[Important Notice About Employee Rights Under the National Labor Relations Act](#) (external link to National Labor Relations Board website content)

[Conflicts of Interest or Commitment](#) (Staff)

[Information Security and Privacy Policy](#)

[Reaffirmation of the University’s Policy Concerning Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity by the President and Fellows of Harvard College](#)

[Procedures to Resolve Work-Related Problems](#)

Office of the Vice Provost for Research – Policy & Compliance

[Information Privacy](#)

Harvard Human Resources (HHR) – Practitioners’ Toolkit

[Pre-Employment Screening](#)

Office of the Provost – Policies and Guidelines

[Enterprise Information Security Policy](#)

[Endorsement Guidelines](#)

[The use of Harvard Names and Insignias](#)

[Use of Harvard's Name in Internet Addresses, Domain Names, Web Sites and Other Electronic Contexts](#)

[Domain name request form \(for harvard.edu\)](#)

[Email Alias Request Form \(for @harvard.edu\)](#)

[University Faculty Financial Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

[Harvard Privacy Policy](#) (Information Security & Privacy)

Academic Freedom

[University-Wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities \(1970\)](#)

[Statement of the President and Deans on University Rights and Responsibilities \(2002\)](#)

Harvard Public Affairs & Communications (HPAC)

[Social Media Guidelines](#)

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

[Copyright Resources](#)

Other related local policies

Harvard Business School

[HBS Social Media and Blogging Policy](#) (access restricted)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Have questions? Contact the following offices with questions about these guidelines and best practices.

Local Human Resources representatives

Office of Labor & Employee Relations

University Place, Suite 480 South (124 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge)
(617) 495-2786

<http://laborrelations.harvard.edu>

Contact Information for Campus Unions

<http://laborrelations.harvard.edu/employees/unions.shtml>

Office of the Provost

[Individual School Contacts for Name Issues](#)

Harvard Public Affairs & Communications

<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/contact/>

Harvard University Information Technology (HUIT)

If you have security concerns, questions about publishing Harvard information, or questions about the definition of 'confidential information' please contact the HUIT Security Unit at ithelp@harvard.edu or (617) 495-7777.