

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

Human Resources

HR ADVICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are powerful communication tools that can have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations. Because they are fairly new to employees and can blur the lines between personal voice and institutional voice, HR has crafted the following advice for Skidmore employees to help clarify how best to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when participating in social media.

Social media are defined as media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Examples include but are not limited to blogs, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace.

Both in professional and institutional roles, employees need to follow the same behavioral standards online as they would in real life. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines for interacting with students, parents, alumni, donors, media, and other college constituents apply online as in the real world.

HR ADVICE FOR ALL SOCIAL MEDIA SITES, INCLUDING PERSONAL SITES

The keys to success in social media are being honest about who you are, being thoughtful before you post, and respecting the purpose of the community where you are posting.

Protect confidential and proprietary information: Do not post confidential information about Skidmore College, students, employees, or alumni. Employees must adhere to all applicable federal requirements (e.g., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, FERPA) and college privacy and confidentiality policies and practices. Employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of potential disciplinary action or termination.

Respect copyright and fair use: When posting, be mindful of and act in accordance with the copyright and intellectual property rights of others and of the college. For guidance, consult the college copyright policy at:

<http://cms.skidmore.edu/it/policies/copyright.cfm>.

Don't use Skidmore logos or watermarks for endorsements: Do not use the Skidmore logo or any other college images on personal social media sites. Do not use Skidmore's name to promote a product, cause, or political party or candidate.

Clearly identify your opinions as your own: If you choose to identify yourself as a Skidmore College employee on a personal web site, a social networking site, blog or other social media, you are expected to also make clear that you are not authorized to

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Speak on behalf of Skidmore, that the views you express are yours alone and do not necessarily reflect Skidmore's views. This may be accomplished by posting the following disclaimer – “I am not authorized to speak on behalf of Skidmore College and the views expressed on this website/ blog/ site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Skidmore College.” This is particularly important if you are a department head or administrator. You should also consistently write in the “first person” narrative (e.g. “Today I am going to...”). Should you discuss Skidmore College's programs or services on social media, you must disclose that you are a Skidmore employee.

Be respectful: Be respectful of and do not disparage Skidmore, students, other employees, vendors, suppliers and other institutions. Do not vent personal complaints about supervisors, co-workers or Skidmore, or engage in name calling or other behavior that will reflect negatively on your or Skidmore's reputations.

Respect college time and property: The college technology infrastructure (including, but not limited to computers, printers, and network) and time on the job are reserved for college-related business as approved by supervisors and in accordance with the Information Technology Code of Ethics policy document (<http://cms.skidmore.edu/it/policies/ethics.cfm>). Use of social media should not interfere with work commitments.

Comply with College policies: College policies apply to employee activity on social media as they would in other venues. Employees should not use social media to harass, threaten, discriminate against or disparage employees or others associated with Skidmore. Employees may not provide references for other individuals on social media. In accordance with Skidmore's policy on employment verification and references, only Human Resources may verify employment or provide references for a current or former employee.

Terms of Service: Read, understand and obey the terms of service of any social media platform employed.

BEST PRACTICES

This section provides HR advice for those posting on behalf of an official college unit/ department though the guidelines may be helpful for anyone posting on social media sites in any capacity.

Think twice before posting: Absolute privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Consider what could happen if a post becomes widely known and how that may reflect both on the poster and the college. Search engines sometimes find posts years after they are created (even if they have since been deleted), and comments can be forwarded or copied. If you wouldn't say it at a conference or to a member of the

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media, consider whether you should post it online. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, ask your supervisor for input or contact Communications at ext 5733.

Strive for accuracy: Get the facts straight before posting them on a social media site. It is better to verify information first than to have to post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. This is especially important if posting on behalf of the college in any capacity.

Be respectful: Understand the content contributed to a social media site could encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. Responses should be considered carefully in light of how they would reflect on the poster and/ or the college and its institutional voice.

Remember your audience: Be aware that a presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, prospective employees, current employees and colleagues, and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.

Be transparent: Be honest about your identity. A resource about transparency in online communities is the Blog Council's "Disclosure Best Practices Toolkit at <http://blogcouncil.org/disclosure/>.

Be aware of liability: You are legally liable for what you post on your own site and the site of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts).

Protect your Identity: While you want to be honest about yourself, don't provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use against you. Don't list your home address or telephone number or your work telephone or e-mail address. It is a good idea to create a separate e-mail address that is used only with the social media site.

Follow a code of ethics: There are numerous codes of ethics for bloggers and other active participants in social media, all of which will help you participate responsibly in online communities. For examples, see http://forrester.typepad.com/charleneli/2004/11/blogging_policy.html; <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/04/draft-bloggers-code-of-conduct.html>

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If you post on behalf of an official college department/ unit, the following advice should also be considered in addition to the advice and best practices listed above:

Notify the college: Departments or units that have a social media site or would like to start one should contact the Executive Director of Communications (ext 5733). Please contact the Executive Director to ensure that all college social media sites coordinate with other college sites and their content.

Acknowledge who you are: If you are representing Skidmore when posting on social media platforms, acknowledge this. Discuss with your supervisor when you are empowered to respond directly to users and when you may need approval.

Be thoughtful: If you have any questions about whether it is appropriate to write about certain kinds of material in your role as a Skidmore employee, ask your supervisor before you post.

Have a plan: Departments should consider their messages, audiences, and goals as well as strategy for keeping information on social media sites up-to-date. The Communications department can assist and advise you with your social media planning.

Protect the institutional voice: Posts on social media sites should protect the college's institutional voice by remaining professional in tone and in good taste. If you see unfavorable opinions, negative comments or criticism about Skidmore, do not try to have the post removed or send/ post a written reply. Instead, forward this information to the Executive Director, Communications (ext 5733) who will take appropriate action.

Materials in this advice were developed using social media policy and information posted on the web sites of Ball State University and DePaul University.