STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

SUSAN GILL, DIRECTOR OF NEW MEDIA

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“The university authorizes the creation and use of university social media accounts, provided their use is professional, protects the reputation and brand of the university, aligns with university priorities, and complies with other Virginia Tech policies and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, and is guided by the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.”

Policy Section 2.2.4 — Business and Personal Use of Social Media
Why do we have a policy? Policy No. 1030: policies.vt.edu/social-media-policy2.pdf

- To support social media with the preservation and protection of Virginia Tech’s brand identity, integrity, and reputation; also allows University Relations to address issues with non-compliant accounts more readily.
- To ensure social managers across campus are in compliance with VT policies, applicable state and federal laws and regulations, and the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.
Ask yourself: “Is my personal account really more of a business/university-affiliated account?”

By having a social media account that indicates you work for or attend Virginia Tech you may be perceived as being a spokesperson for Virginia Tech.

It is essential that you do not speak for Virginia Tech, the institution, but that you represent your role at the university accurately. To mitigate any potential issues, be mindful of the following:

- Keep personal accounts separate from your role at Virginia Tech when possible.
  - If there is overlap, ensure your personal views are not viewed as official Commonwealth of Virginia communications. You can include a disclaimer in your About section, but users may still have a hard time making the distinction.
- Double-check that what you’re posting is accurate. When in doubt, don’t post.
- Questions/comments that are related to a news story or press release should be referred to @vtnews on Twitter and/or the Media Relations Director of University Relations: vtnews.vt.edu/contact

tracy_vosburgh
@tracy_vosburgh  Follows you
Senior AVP University Relations at Virginia Tech. Thoughts and opinions here are my own. Retweet does not mean endorsement
Depending on your professional role at the university, you may be privy to sensitive or confidential information.

This could include: Activities with a signed “non-disclosure act”; names of injured or deceased persons before they were officially confirmed/announced; embargoed announcements; Virginia Tech Foundation activities, including pending donations.

It is essential that you do not share this information on personal or professional social media accounts, even if you think you are being helpful.

Rule of thumb: If it hasn’t been said in a VT News article, it’s not your news to share.
ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND EXPECTATIONS

Stick to your area of professional expertise

DXfrenchToast 4 points · 7 months ago
It would be nice to have one of their social media people on it

Give Award Share Report Save

letsgohokies05 8 points · 7 months ago
Hi! 😊 We indeed do not have an official VT account on here because, like others said, we don't want to harm the open discussions people have. Plus, this channel isn't run by the social media team, so we don't want to take over something we don't own. However, we do watch discussions on occasion (love how helpful y'all are about admissions stuff for incoming students!). If anyone wants someone from the social media team to weigh in on something (obviously if it's something we CAN weigh in on — we're not the official university spokespeople and just relay the messages to appropriate audiences), you can email socialmedia-g@vt.edu to alert us.

Thanks! - Susan Gill, VT director of new media

Share Save Edit •

DXfrenchToast 3 points · 7 months ago
Wow, thanks! I wasn't expecting a reply. With your explanation, I really appreciate the hands off approach then.

Give Award Share Report Save
BEFORE WE GET TO THE GOOD STUFF

DISCLAIMER:
WE ARE NOT LAWYERS
Why does your personal social media activity matter?

- It is many times the first impression of you for employers, employees, potential partners, etc.
- You can’t take it back — the internet is forever.
- Nothing is private.
- Anonymity can be skirted.
- Improper use can cause you to miss out on opportunities without you knowing.
- Proper use can help your future endeavors.
How do social media platforms show your activity?

- Your direct posts are served up to people who follow you.
- Your likes, comments, and follows may be shared as suggestions to your friends.
- Your purchasing history may result in ads being shared with your friends that are tied to your name.
- Suggested groups will show up with attached profile pictures of your friends.
Quick Civics Review
The First Amendment
The Bill of Rights of the United States of America, 1791

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.
Why does this matter?

Freedom of Speech is the right of people to express their opinions publicly without governmental interference, with notable exceptions.
So, I can pretty much say what I want, right?

Um...sorta...

Just because you CAN say what you want (with notable exceptions) and not be arrested by the government, it doesn’t save you from real-life consequences.
What does this mean?

The First Amendment does not protect you from:
- Criticism
- Shame/mocking
- Loss of privacy/anonymity
- Professional and academic consequences

The laws protecting the free speech of private employees vary from state to state, aside from specifically protected speech like labor organizing.
CASE STUDIES
Your private conversations aren’t private

You may want to take a better look at employees. We are a very proud VT family and I do not want this person working with my nephews who are attending now or any VT students.

Lori's Post

4/4 Violin - $150

Mark As Sold  Request Payment

Your black I don’t deal with black people I’ll get one from music shop.
Owner is white

Always do the right thing no matter what even when everyone else is doing the wrong thing.

Message

Works at Virginia Tech
“Keep politics out of it.”

Vice Chancellor resigns after complaints from conservative groups about his comments on social media.

Yet another indication of the lack of ethical values inherent in Trump supporters. She trusts a president who does not tell the truth. Wow.

Mike Mullen, PhD ’87
@NCSU_MikeMullen

Yesterday I tweeted a message that has, rightfully, resulted in many pushing back. I believe my track record on respect for others speaks for itself, but unfortunately, I did not live up to that record yesterday.

6:00 AM - 10 Nov 2018

7 Likes

Clyde Haberman @ClydeHaberman

Speaks for itself. Wyoming woman interviewed about Trump by @nytimes at a rally of his: "I can't really say that anything he says is true, but I trust him."

11/6/18, 7:14 AM

The NC State official rules for university Twitter feeds advises people to "Keep your personal views separate: Uphold the university’s mission and values in your activities. Don’t include political comments or comments on social issues, and do not conduct any political activities on behalf of any party or candidate."
University fires adjunct professor for tweets

UT’s faculty handbook follows guidelines from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which state that “[professors] should be free from institutional censorship or discipline” when speaking in their capacities as independent individuals. A school should only discipline a professor, AAUP says, “if there are grave doubts concerning the teacher’s fitness to teach.

The university asserted in a separate statement to ABC News that Storey’s comments were not representative of its views, since he did not make them in his capacity as a faculty member. Yet on Aug. 29, 2017, UT announced it had fired the adjunct professor, writing, “We condemn the comments and the sentiment behind them, and understand the pain this irresponsible act has caused. Storey has been relieved of his duties at UT.”
“Her comments, although disgraceful, are protected free speech under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Additionally, although Professor Jarrar used tenure to defend her behavior, this private action is an issue of free speech and not related to her job or tenure. Therefore, the university does not have justification to support taking any disciplinary action.”
“That’s protected.”

Bigoted Views vs. Bigoted Teaching

Indiana University condemns professor’s racist and misogynistic tweets in strongest terms but won’t fire him over views alone.

By Colleen Flaherty // November 22, 2019

"Indiana University at Bloomington will not terminate Eric Rasmusen, professor of business economics and public policy, for the ‘stunningly ignorant’ views he expressed on social media. So said Provost Lauren Robel this week amid calls that Rasmusen be fired.

Rasmusen ‘has, for many years, used his private social media accounts to disseminate his racist, sexist and homophobic views,’ Robel wrote in a statement. ‘When I label his views in this way, let me note that the labels are not a close call, nor do his posts require careful parsing to reach these conclusions.’"

— Insight Higher Ed
Free speech ≠ free from consequences

As a result, this Fresno State professor:
- Loss of respect from the university
- Took a Twitter hiatus and made her account private

Fresno State president wrote in a statement: “Jarrar’s conduct was ‘insensitive, inappropriate, and an embarrassment to the university.’”
All roads lead to social

Messages may start on one platform and become amplified on social media beyond its original, intended audience.

Dr. Not Your Token @tjjourian · Jan 21
Wow, the level of utter ignorance & ethnocentrism in this email...

Email to students at U of Houston about body odor raises concerns about how to broach this delicate topic, if at all. [Link]
#highered #racism #ethnocentrism #leadership

Email to students at U of Houston about body odor raises concerns...
Professor’s email at U of Houston about body odor, referencing some cultures, raises concerns about how to broach this delicate... [Link]
HOW TO BE A GOOD ONLINE CITIZEN AND PROTECT YOUR FUTURE
BE DIGITALLY LITERATE

Digital literacy is “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills,” as defined by the American Library Association.
POSITION YOURSELF FOR SUCCESS

- Put on a marketer’s hat when writing something for public consumption.
- Keep your audiences tailored and narrow (i.e. utilize Facebook lists, protected accounts, etc.).
- Consider a private account or an account with a “no student zone” by protecting your tweets and Instagram posts to ensure you know who’s following you.
- Know which account you’re using – don’t forget to switch from a business account to your personal account before posting something personal.
- Know that “likes” and other activities will show up on others’ feeds.
- Go through your social history and remove anything questionable.
- AND ALWAYS – think before you post.
BE RESPONSIBLE

- Don’t post anything that you wouldn’t want employers, coworkers, or supervisors to read.
- Be safe on the internet, be careful when sharing personal information with others.
- Know how social media algorithms share your personal interests.
- Regularly audit your online personas to see if they reflect who you are.
- Do not engage in cyberbullying, trolling, or other activities that may cause harm to others online.
- Do not speak as the university.
- Always refer to the Virginia Tech handbook and university policies.
- Contact socialmedia-g@vt.edu if you have any VT social media questions.
QUESTIONS?
SOCIALMEDIA-G@VT.EDU