

# Emory University Social Media Guidelines

Office of Communications and Marketing

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## Guiding Principles for Emory University Social Media

### Open expression

As a community of scholars, Emory University is committed to an environment where open expression of ideas is valued, promoted, and encouraged. This commitment extends to social media, where the open exchange of ideas leads to progress— as well as tension.

Provided that Emory students, faculty and staff adhere to respective Emory codes of conduct and policies<sup>1</sup>, their speech (on social media and otherwise) is protected.

The university encourages open expression on its social channels. All on-topic comments are welcome provided they contain no profanity, name-calling, or threats.

### Respect

Effective, open expression of ideas requires mutual respect. Differences of opinion are inevitable (and welcome), but Emory social community members are strongly encouraged to keep their side of the conversation respectful by refraining from name-calling, profanity, or threats.

### Accountability

Information shared on Emory-affiliated social channels should be accurate and honest to the best of a poster/commenter's knowledge. Incorrect information should be corrected immediately or removed.

### Responsibility

When posting to an Emory-affiliated social media account or a personal account that identifies you as an Emory employee or student, remember that anything you post can reflect on the university. When you are using social media for personal purposes and might be perceived as an employee/expert at Emory, make it clear to your audience that your opinions are not those of the university.

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<sup>1</sup> Links: General ([Sex and Gender-Based Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#), [Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment Policy](#), [Identifiable Health Information Policy](#), [HIPAA at Emory](#), [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)); Students ([Office of Student Conduct](#), [Undergraduate Code of Conduct](#), [Respect for Open Expression Policy](#), [FERPA](#)); Staff ([Standards of Conduct](#), [Confidentiality](#)); and Faculty ([Faculty Handbook: Policies on Media, Communication, and Marketing](#)).

## Moderation

As an institution of higher education, Emory University supports expressing ideas, debate, and community engagement. Emory encourages fans, followers, and friends on social media to share their thoughts with one another as they relate to the issues presented and to initiate or participate in civil conversations.

Emory does not endorse or take responsibility for content posted by third parties, referred to as user generated content (UGC). This includes text input and uploaded files (video, images, audio, executables, documents). Emory has established these guidelines for the moderation of UGC on Emory-sponsored social media channels:

- If a UGC comment is positive or negative and in context to the conversation, then we will permit the content, regardless of whether it's favorable or unfavorable to Emory. But if the content is offensive, denigrating and/or out of context, we will remove the content.
- We encourage lively, thoughtful, and civil conversations and we require that participants engage in on-topic dialogue in a respectful manner that appreciates differing opinions.
- We may choose to block comments on selected pieces of Emory content.

We do not discriminate against any views in our moderation of comments, but we reserve the right to remove any comment for any reason and will delete comments that:

- include violent, obscene, profane, hateful comments;
- employ offensive or inappropriate language;
- threaten or defame any person or organization;
- include copyrighted material that requires permission to produce and distribute;
- would be considered spam;
- suggest or encourage illegal activity;
- solicit, advertise, or endorse a third-party business or service;
- solicit donations to an unrelated cause or campaign;
- are off-topic posts by a single user; and/or
- are repetitive posts copied and pasted by multiple users.

# Guidelines for Emory-affiliated social media accounts

## Overview

Social media is a powerful communications tool and an excellent way to reach a wider audience. Social media offers an opportunity to communicate in a more natural, conversational manner with key audiences. However, social media has evolved to become a primary communication method and should be planned and executed with the same professionalism as more traditional mediums such as websites, official media releases, and print pieces.

Emory's Office of Communications and Marketing is responsible for guiding the university's social media strategy and efforts as a whole and ensuring Emory's social media content is professional, respectful, and accurate.

If you are planning to create a new social media account to represent an Emory school, department, program, or organization, please contact Wendy Darling, [wdarlin@emory.edu](mailto:wdarlin@emory.edu), 404-784-2543.

## Checklist: Is social media right for you?

Before you establish an official Emory social media channel, your organization or department should consider these questions:

- What is your main purpose for having or creating a social media presence?
- What types of information or messages do you want your social media content to convey? Is another group conveying this information or similar information already? Is this social channel the best way to share this content?
- Who is the intended audience of your channel(s)? Have you chosen the best channel to reach that audience?
- What kind of content (text, photo, video) is or will be available? How often will you have something to share? Do you need equipment or software to create social content? Do you have someone on staff with the time and training needed to produce this content?
- If you are looking to create or have more than one social media account, what is your rationale? How do you plan to use each network differently?
- Is there or will there be a designated person or group of people in charge of updating the social media channel?
- How will you engage your audience and encourage conversation? Have you established moderation guidelines?

- How will you promote your social media channel?
- How will you measure success?

The decision to set up and manage a social media channel(s) should not be taken lightly.

While many social accounts can be created easily, at no cost, in minutes, the maintenance and upkeep of these platforms is anything but quick, easy, and free. The amount of time and resources needed to populate and monitor a two-way, 24/7 conversation on these social channels can quickly become overwhelming, and ultimately a group might find that the effort going into these channels is not generating results that justify the time and energy spent.

Don't feel pressured to have a presence on multiple social media channels if you don't believe you have an audience or content that's a good fit. It's much better to manage one or two channels well than to run three or four poorly.

Please keep in mind that channels such as Instagram and TikTok are highly visual (both images and video), and your content will need to be visually interesting to resonate on these channels. These channels also employ natural sound and/or music; please bear in mind quality as well as adherence to copyright laws (see following section).

Always be aware that your channels will represent Emory as a whole. Please keep your communications professional, accurate, and respectful.

## Rules, Policies, and Laws

A guiding principle of social media communication is that it must be treated the same as other types of communications in terms of adhering to institutional code of conduct, privacy, respect for copyright, etc. Even though it is a newer form of communication, most rules still apply.

- **Adhere to official Emory University policies, including policies related to information security and privacy**, especially regarding Emory Healthcare patients and Emory University students, whose information must be treated as per HIPPA or as per FERPA. (See links to pertinent policies in footnote earlier in this document.)
- **Maintain the confidentiality of the university's proprietary and/or protected information.** Do not disclose, post, or share proprietary Emory information, data, or communications. This includes, but is not limited to, intellectual property, internal operating plans, vendor communications, financial data, internal presentations, and correspondence.
- **Adhere to intellectual property rights and laws.** Use of third-party copyrighted or trademarked material or use of a person's likeness without

permission in digital content may be illegal and may expose Emory to financial liability and reputational risk. Obtain the necessary clearance for its use of intellectual property rights (e.g., music and photos) and a person's likeness in connection with their communications activities. If an asset requires payment and/or credit for use, adhere to those requirements.

- **Follow Emory brand guidelines.** Only Emory University accounts should use the university logo as an avatar/profile image, although other accounts may incorporate it. When using the university logo in graphics and video, please follow official Emory visual guidelines.

## Political Content

Social media accounts representing any Emory school, department, division, lab, or program must be careful not to share overly partisan political content that could give the impression that the university or any part thereof is officially supporting a particular political candidate or organization.

The following are prohibited on Emory-affiliated social accounts (per official Emory policies):

- campaigning for a particular party or candidate; and/or
- fundraising for a particular party or candidate

While not explicitly prohibited by policy, the following are strongly discouraged to avoid the appearance of political bias:

- sharing articles or opinion editorials that espouse an overtly partisan point of view;
- “liking” (from an Emory-affiliated social account) articles or opinion editorials that espouse an overtly partisan point of view; and/or
- social posts directly attributing overtly partisan comments to an Emory faculty/staff member or student.

## Best Practices

### Staying on message

If you've done the work of identifying desired audiences and key goals/messages for your social media account, your content should reflect your goals and audiences. Do not share something “just to share it” – think about how your audience can relate to it and craft your message accordingly. Depending on your department and focus, this could be a very wide or very narrow playing field. “Fun” posts are great, but they too should fit within the context of your core goals and audiences.

### **Find the right timing for your content**

Timing is both your friend and foe. It can transform a somewhat standard story into a viral phenomenon given the right context. It can also cause a social media disaster if you do not pay attention to the broader conversation. Know what is happening in the world and determine where you can add Emory into the conversation in a way that is authentic and interesting for your audience.

### **Engage your audience**

One of the most important aspects of social media is establishing a relationship with your audience. Respond to mentions, like or share posts about your organization/faculty/students/staff, like comments on your posts – this shows your audience that there is a real and relatable person behind the account. Do not simply spit out content but rather engage with your audience.

### **Know your audience**

Success in social media can be measured in many ways – likes, followers, engagement rate, etc. But none of this means anything unless you are truly connecting with your intended audience. Pay close attention to which content is resonating with your audience (more likes, shares) and try to provide content that is useful and engaging to your audiences.

### **Quality vs. quantity**

There's a fine line between frequently posting and oversaturation. At Emory, we want to avoid oversaturation of Emory-related news as much as possible. When covering live/breaking events, it's fine to post more frequently, if the content is meaningful.

Conversely, it is also important to ensure you have enough content to keep your social channel "alive." If you do not have enough content for daily (or at least weekly) updates, you should rethink having your own accounts. It may be more beneficial to share your messages via pre-established accounts (department, college, university).

### **Collaborate**

Work with your fellow Emory campus communicators to maximize your social campaigns and strategy. Take it upon yourself to reach out to other departments and include them when planning campus events or communications campaigns as they may be able to amplify your message if it's appropriate for their audiences. In turn, your help may be needed to amplify appropriate messages on behalf of the university or your department or college.

## Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency or severe weather on campus, we have teamed up with the [Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response \(CEPAR\)](#) to establish a reporting structure and ground rules.

Main campus communicators have given CEPAR access to their Twitter accounts to allow CEPAR communicators to tweet on their behalf in the event of an emergency. We have chosen to do so because it disseminates the message to a larger audience as quickly as possible. The same [emergency message CEPAR has routinely texted to individuals or delivered by LiveSafe](#) will also be posted to these Twitter accounts.

Campus communicators should default to re-sharing posts from the main Emory University social channels and website in the event of an emergency, and refrain from posting their own messaging. We do not want to confuse our community and lose control of the situation. Safety is of the utmost importance, and we need to maintain clear messaging during a crisis.

## Personal use of social media

### Emory faculty and staff

When posting to personal social media accounts, bear in mind that you are an employee of Emory University, and anything you post can reflect on the university. When you are using social media for personal purposes and might be perceived as an employee/expert at Emory University, make it clear to your audience that your opinions are not those of the university.

Be mindful, and follow these pointers when using your personal social media accounts:

#### **Think before you post**

Almost everything on social media is searchable. Be mindful when posting opinions and pictures of yourself – if you do not want *everyone* to see it, do not post it. If you are upset about something, take a minute to think before posting something you could regret later.

#### **Maintain Emory confidentiality**

As an Emory employee, you must follow Emory guidelines relating to confidential information. You must also follow HIPAA guidelines when sharing information regarding current and former Emory Healthcare patients, and FERPA guidelines regarding student records. (See links to pertinent policies in footnote earlier in this document.)

#### **Do not use Emory logo or make endorsements**

Do not use the Emory logo, shield, or any other trademarked material on your personal social media channels. Do not use Emory's name to endorse products or political

candidates.

### **Protect your identity**

Do not provide your personal information (phone number, address, etc.) to the public, as this is information scam artists and identity thieves might steal.

### **Use a disclaimer**

If you identify yourself as an Emory employee on your social media accounts, include a disclaimer, such as “Opinions are my own” or “Opinions do not reflect those of Emory University.”

Questions? Contact the Office of Communications and Marketing: Wendy Darling, [wdarlin@emory.edu](mailto:wdarlin@emory.edu), 404-784-2543; or Laura Diamond, [laura.diamond@emory.edu](mailto:laura.diamond@emory.edu).

## **Emory students**

When posting to personal social media accounts, remember that if you identify yourself as an Emory student, anything you post can reflect on the university. Be mindful, and follow these pointers when using your personal social media accounts:

### **Think before you post**

Almost everything on social media is searchable. Be mindful when posting opinions and pictures of yourself – if you do not want *everyone* to see it, do not post it. If you are upset about something, take a minute to think before posting something you could regret later.

### **Compliance**

Your social media communications while a student at Emory are covered by Emory's code of conduct for Emory College and Oxford College students or the applicable code of conduct for your school or department. (See links to pertinent policies in footnote earlier in this document.).

### **Protect your identity**

Do not provide your personal information (phone number, address, etc.) to the public, as this is information scam artists and identity thieves might steal.