



Edward Via College of  
Osteopathic Medicine

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**VIRGINIA • CAROLINAS**

**Social Media Guidelines**

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## **Introduction**

Social media is changing the way we communicate, as institutions and as individuals. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, and blogs provide quick and easy access to anyone with an Internet connection. Because of this access it becomes even more important that everyone is careful about what they place on these very public web spaces.

VCOM's Social Media Guidelines is our guide to safe computing as faculty, staff and students venture out into these sites. We remind our VCOM family that what you place on the web can come back to haunt you many years later.

## **What is Social Media**

Social media refers to online tools and services that allow any Internet user to create and publish content. 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.

Because of the emerging nature of social media platforms, these guidelines do not attempt to name every current and emerging platform. However, popular social media services include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, iTunes, and blogs.

## **Potential Consequences of Unprofessional Behavior**

While social media provide individuals with unique opportunities to communicate, its permanence on the web can have unintended consequences for the professional. The permanence and written nature of online postings cause them to be subject to higher levels of scrutiny than many other forms of communication. Therefore, postings within social networking sites are subject to the same standards of professionalism as any other personal or professional interaction, and will be treated as if made in a public forum.

The use of social networking sites or blogs can also have legal ramifications. Comments made regarding the care of patients or that portray you or a colleague in an unprofessional manner, may be used in court as evidence of a variety of claims, including libel; slander; defamation of character; negligence; etc., or in other disciplinary proceedings such as with State Medical Licensing Boards. Libel, slander, and other forms of defamation refer, generally, to the communication (written, oral, tangible, etc.) of a false statement about a person that injures his/her reputation. Other potential consequences include the revocation of a residency selection or sanctions by a professional licensing board.

Statements and photos posted within these sites are potentially visible by program directors or future employers. It is not uncommon for program directors/employers to search for the social networking profiles of potential residents/employees and to use the discovered information in making selection decisions. Individuals have been denied residencies and other employment opportunities as a result of what is found on social networking sites.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) apply to social networking sites; violators may be subject to the same prosecution as with other FERPA and HIPAA violations.

In addition, cyber stalking and other inappropriate postings can be considered forms of sexual harassment. Relationships online with other medical students are governed by VCOM's sexual harassment policies. Students should refer to VCOM's *Student Policies and Procedures Handbook* for VCOM's Honor Code at:

<http://www.vcom.vt.edu/handbook/behavioralpp.html#honorcode>. Faculty should refer to the *Faculty Handbook's* Sexual Harassment Policy at:

<http://www.vcom.vt.edu/humanresources/humanresources.html>. Staff should refer to the *Administrative Faculty and Classified Staff Handbook's* Workplace Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy at:

<http://www.vcom.vt.edu/humanresources/humanresources.html>.

## **Best Practice Guidelines for Social Media**

### ***General Guidelines***

***Be transparent:*** Be honest about your identity. The lines between public and private, personal and professional are often blurred on social media sites. By identifying yourself as a VCOM faculty, staff or student, you may influence perceptions about VCOM by those who have access to your social network profile or blog. All content associated with you should be consistent with your position at VCOM and with VCOM's mission, values, and professional and ethical standards. In addition, unprofessional postings by others on your page may reflect poorly on you so monitor others' postings on your profile and strive to ensure that the content would not be viewed as unprofessional.

If you participate in or maintain a social media site on behalf of VCOM, clearly state your role and goals. Keep in mind that if you are posting with a VCOM username, other users do not know you personally. They view what you post as coming from VCOM. Be careful and be respectful. What you say directly reflects on VCOM. Find out before you respond to a post whether you are empowered to respond directly to users or if you need to obtain approval.

For information about general best practices on disclosure visit:

<http://www.socialmedia.org/disclosure/>.

***Maintain confidentiality:*** Do not post confidential or proprietary information about VCOM, its students, alumni, faculty or staff. Use sound ethical judgment and follow VCOM's Electronic Communication Policy (#U007) and federal policies, such as HIPAA and FERPA. Review HIPAA guidelines on VCOM's website at: <http://www.vcom.vt.edu/handbook/clinicalpp.html#patientconfid> and on the US Department of Health and Human Services at: <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/>. Review FERPA guidelines on VCOM's website at: <http://www.vcom.vt.edu/registrar/>.

Specific guidelines for VCOM students, faculty and staff:

- Do not advertise on behalf of external vendors on VCOM websites and social media presences.
- Do not have interactions with patients on your social networking sites; to do so may damage the doctor-patient relationship and may have legal consequences
- Online discussions of or about specific patients should be strictly avoided, even if all identifying information is excluded; someone may still recognize the patient.
- Avoid giving medical advice—this may result in a violation of HIPAA and may cause danger to others.
- Under no circumstances should photos of patients, cadavers or other photos depicting body parts of patients or cadavers be displayed online.
- Under no circumstances should photos from OMM or physical diagnosis labs be displayed online unless VCOM Administration has given approval for the posting.
- VCOM's logo or other VCOM image cannot be used on personal media sites.
- VCOM's name cannot be used to promote a product, cause, political party, or candidate.
- Do not promote or condone unprofessional or high risk behaviors such as, excessive use of alcohol, high risk sexual behaviors, and other such behaviors that would be embarrassing to the person or to VCOM.
- Do not make disparaging comments about VCOM employees (faculty and staff), other students or VCOM in general.
- Do not make any comment that could be viewed as discriminatory or harassment of any kind.

***Do no harm:*** Let your Internet social networking do no harm to VCOM or to yourself whether you are navigating those networks on the job or on your own time. Anything you post in your role as a VCOM faculty, staff or student reflects on the institution. Be professional and respectful at all times while on your social media site. Do not engage in arguments or extensive debates with naysayers.

**Consider your audience:** Social media often span traditional boundaries between professional and personal relationships. Use privacy settings to restrict personal information on otherwise public sites; choose photos and avatars carefully. Be thoughtful about the type of photos you upload.

**Respect copyright and fair use:** When posting, be mindful of the copyright and intellectual property rights of others and of VCOM. VCOM copyright policies are found on the website at: <http://www.vcom.vt.edu/handbook/studentfacilitiespp.html#copyright> (students) and <http://www.vcom.vt.edu/humanresources/humanresources.html> (faculty/staff). More information about the US Copyright Law, Title 17 can be found at: <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/>.

**Use of VCOM logo:** The use of the VCOM logo or any other VCOM images on personal media sites is **not** permitted. Do not use VCOM's name to promote a product, cause, political party, or candidate. VCOM branding information (logos and other identifying objects) can only be used after obtaining approval from the Director of VCOM Marketing, Website and Publications.

**Be Aware of liability:** You are responsible for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been liable for commentary deemed to be copyright infringement, defamatory, proprietary, libelous, or obscene (as defined by the courts). Increasingly, employers and graduate medical education programs are conducting Web searches on job and residency candidates before extending offers. Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you.

**Define your role:** If you are representing VCOM when posting on a social media platform, acknowledge this. If you are posting on your person site, identify your views as your own. If you identify yourself online as VCOM faculty, staff or student, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the institution.

VCOM's Social Media Policy (S009-students and U006-faculty/staff) is very explicit as to how you represent yourself while on social media sites. VCOM faculty, staff and students are expected to be follow this policy.

### **Posting for VCOM**

If you wish to create a social media site as a VCOM division/department, or wish to post a comment on a social media site on behalf of VCOM you need to:

**Seek approval:** VCOM divisions/departments that wish to create a social media page must first obtain permission through the appropriate officer with final approval by the Dean. Prior to seeking that approval, divisions/departments should have a plan

developed for the use of the social media page. That plan should discuss what they determine the:

- Message;
- Audiences;
- Goals; and
- Strategy for keeping information on the social media sites up-to-date.

***Link to VCOM:*** Whenever possible, link back to the VCOM website. Posts should be very brief, redirecting a visitor to content that resides within the VCOM website. When linking to a news article about VCOM, check first to see whether you can link to a release on VCOM's website rather than to a publication or other media outlet.

***Protect the institutional voice:*** Posts on social media sites should protect VCOM's institutional voice by remaining professional in tone and in good taste. No individual VCOM division/department should construe its social media site as representing VCOM as a whole. Consider this when naming pages or accounts, selecting a profile picture or icon, and selecting content to post—names, profile images, and posts should all be clearly linked to the division/department rather than to the institution as a whole.

***Respect VCOM time and property:*** VCOM computers and work time are to be used for VCOM-related business. It is appropriate to post at work if your comments are directly related to accomplishing work goals, such as seeking sources for information or working with others to resolve a problem. You should maintain your personal sites on your own time using non-VCOM time and equipment.

VCOM would like to thank the following institutions that provided their guidelines online to be used as valuable sources as we developed VCOM's Social Media Guidelines.

1. Ball State University. Ball state University Social Media Policy:  
<http://cms.bsu.edu/About/AdministrativeOffices/UMC/WhatWeDo/Web/WebPolicies/SocialMedia.aspx>.
2. DePaul University. Brand Resources:  
[http://brandresources.depaul.edu/vendo\\_guidelines/g\\_recommendation.aspx](http://brandresources.depaul.edu/vendo_guidelines/g_recommendation.aspx).
3. Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Guidelines for the Use of Online Social Networking Sites: <http://www.com.msu.edu/ss/Social%20Networking.html>.
4. University of Michigan. University of Michigan Social Media Guidelines:  
[http://mmd.umich.edu/forum/resources\\_socialguide.php](http://mmd.umich.edu/forum/resources_socialguide.php).
5. University of Michigan. Voices of the Staff, Guidelines for the Use of Social Media, January 2010, Revised 2010: <http://voices.umich.edu/docs/Social-Media-Guidelines.pdf>.
6. Vanderbilt University. Vanderbilt University Social Media Handbook:  
<http://web.vanderbilt.edu/resources/social-media-handbook/>.
7. Vanderbilt University Medical Center, VUMC Social Media Policy:  
<http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/root/vumc.php?site=socialmediatoolkit&doc=26923>.