

## **Social Media Guidelines for Social Work Students The University of Alabama School of Social Work**

### **Purpose of the Policy**

This policy was developed by (FILL-IN). The use of social media by social work students may impact present and future relationships with peers, co-workers, faculty, clients, field instructors/agencies, and employers. The Social Work Program has developed these guidelines to help students reduce risk as they enter the Social Work Program, and to learn how to use social media in professional ways. This policy incorporates guidance from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, the NASW Technology Standards for Practice, and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) EPAS competencies provide guidance on the use of social media.

### **Best Practices with Social Media in Social Work Education/Practice (Laurel)**

The Internet, digital technologies and mobile devices have created the ability for students and social workers to communicate and share information quickly and to reach millions of people easily. Participating in social networking and other similar Internet opportunities can support a student's personal expression, enable individual social workers to have a professional presence online, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the profession, and provide the opportunity to widely advocate for social policies and other communication. Social networks, blogs, and other forms of communication online also create new challenges to the social worker-client relationship. Students should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:

1. Students should be cognizant of standards of client privacy and confidentiality which must be maintained in all environments, including online and digital, and must refrain from posting any and all identifiable client information online.
2. When using the internet for social networking, students should use privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content to the extent possible, but should realize that privacy settings are not absolute and that once on the internet, content is likely there permanently. Additionally, students should routinely monitor their own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about them by others, is accurate and appropriate.
3. When using the internet for professional networking, students should work to build professional online communities that support the values of the social work profession by developing authentic, ethical digital profiles and contributing content that is appropriate, respectful, and credible.
4. If they interact with clients on the internet, students must maintain appropriate boundaries of the social worker-client relationship in accordance with NASW Code of Ethics, just as they would in any other context.
  - a) To maintain appropriate professional boundaries students should consider separating personal and professional content online.
  - b) When students see content posted by colleagues that appear unprofessional they have a responsibility to bring that content to the attention of the individual,

so that he or she can remove it and/or take other appropriate actions. If the behavior significantly violates professional norms and the individual does not take appropriate action to resolve the situation, the student should report the matter to appropriate authorities.

- c) Students must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among clients and colleagues, may have consequences for their social work careers, and can undermine public trust in the social work profession.

Examples of good and ethical practice tasks include:

1. Develop and maintain a [LinkedIn](#) account, a social networking site designed for professional networking.
2. Create your own professional social media policy. See [Dr. Keely Kolmes' policy](#) for a good example.
3. Download a copy of the [University of Buffalo, School of Social Work's Social Worker's Guide to Social Media](#) and post near your desk as a helpful reminder when using social media.
4. Review this [curated list of resources](#) (articles, blog posts and podcasts) from the University of Buffalo's School of Social Work about social media and other digital technologies in social work practice.
5. Review the [Netiquette Home Page](#) to learn about do's and don'ts of online communication.

Adapted from:

American Medical Association. (2011). Opinion 9.124 - Professionalism in the Use of Social Media. Retrieved from: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/medical-ethics/code-medical-ethics/opinion9124.page?>

References:

Shea, V. (n.d.). *Netiquette*. Retrieved from: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>.

University of Buffalo's School of Social Work. (n.d.) *Additional Resources on Social Media and Social Work*. Retrieved from: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/social-media-guide/resources.html>

University of Buffalo's School of Social Work & 12 Grain Studio. (n.d.) *Social Workers Guide to Social Media*. Retrieved from: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/social-media-guide.html>