

## GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PRACTICUM

Social media is catch phrase for (1) internet-based communication technologies, (2) digital technologies, and (3) sharing platforms. These services and sites contribute to:

- **Easy sharing of content** which can lead to exponential dissemination....
- **A sense of community** through targeted audiences, focused subject matter....
- **Engagement** through polls, comments, metrics, alerts for new content....
- **Being readily accessible** via smart phones, tablets, laptops, public computers....
- **Being low-cost or free** but a large time commitment on the part of your social media account manager

Social media's use in community development has largely been as a promotional tool as well as a vehicle for knowledge mobilization (both academic and community created knowledge). It has also been used as a mechanism of communication for activists.

With more and more social workers embracing social networking sites, the question arises – where do you draw the line in terms of boundaries with your clients? Setting and maintaining clear boundaries is very important in developing professional relationships.

As a student you should also know what (if any) policies exist at your practicum agency, as they may go beyond those laid out in this guideline and what the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers expects of you in terms of professional liability. As a placement student, you are expected to follow your placement site's policies re: the use of social media.

### **Communication about the School of Social Work and Your Practicum, using social media:**

- Whenever you identify yourself online as a student from a particular practicum site/agency or School, you effectively represent that agency or School. To make the distinction between speaking on your own behalf or the agency or School's behalf, you might want to say something like "I'm speaking on my own behalf" or "all opinions communicated here are my own".
- If you are developing a site or writing a blog that will mention the School of Social Work, your practicum and/or their employees, as a courtesy to the School and/or agency, please let the School of Social Work and/or your practicum supervisor know that you are writing about them- **and you should clearly state your goals and what your blog intends to say or reflect.** Representatives of the School of Social Work and/or your practicum supervisor may choose to "visit" from time to time to understand your point of view.
- It is advised that you not say/write things on a social media platform that you wouldn't want attributed to you. Even things you may think are private on social media may not be. Before making a comment or statement you might want to ask yourself, "would I say this in public?"
- Online communication strips away all the non-verbal cues we rely on to understand what someone is saying: tone, body language, facial expressions, intonation, etc. It is wise to always give your audience the benefit of doubt when ascertaining meaning.

- As a Social Work Student, you are also bound by the Social Work Code of Ethics to maintain confidentiality with respect to your practicum setting and the clients you work with. Everyone is entitled to their privacy online.
- The School of Social Work encourages you to write knowledgeably, respectfully, and accurately, using appropriate professionalism. Despite disclaimers, your web interaction can result in members of the public forming opinions about the School of Social Work, your practicum and/or their employees or clients.
- It is not advised that you “friend” your clients (current or past) or allow your clients (current or past) to “friend” you on your personal account. Use agency account, as outlined by the agency policy, if you are trying to outreach to clients.
- It is also not advised that you use your personal Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts to contact your clients or respond to clients who may have contacted you. Use agency account, as outlined by agency policy.
- It is advised that you become intimately familiar with the privacy controls on these networks and ensure that the clients cannot see personal details of your life you would prefer to share only with your immediate friends and family.
- Only use your professional (work/practicum) email address to communicate with clients.
- If you choose to communicate with your clients by email, please be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your agency and their internet service providers. While it is unlikely that someone will be looking at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the internet service provider.

### **Photographs or visual aids**

Posts that use visuals are more effective than ones that don't. The use of a photo or a graphic might give your content the greatest chance at being discovered. However, keep in mind that taking and sharing photographs without consent is a breach of confidentiality. Agencies increasingly use photography for professional consultation, research and education purposes. Know your agency's policy regarding photography including any limitations on its use.

### **Legal Liability**

Recognize that you are legally liable for anything you write or present online. It must be noted that anything published on the web is NOT confidential. Students can be disciplined by the School of Social Work for commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment. You can also be sued by any individual or organization that views your commentary, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment. Note that the use of unfounded or derogatory statements or misrepresentation is not viewed favourably by the School of Social Work or your practicum agency and can result in disciplinary action up to and including school/practicum termination. If the School of Social Work is concerned or made aware of a breach of these guidelines, the Professional Behaviour Policy may be invoked.

(If you would like a complete guide of York University's Social Media guidelines, please contact Mark Farmer at 55131 or the Communications and Public Affairs Division at York University).

*[This guideline was approved by School of Social Work Faculty on June 10, 2014]*