

Social Media Policy for the Columbia Missourian

Audience: I wish I knew. Generally for our print product, they are an older, educated, white crowd from Columbia. However I know that with out analytics we have discovered that many of our online readers come from the St. Louis and Kansas City areas as well as Columbia. I would imagine that our online readership covers people young and old from many different backgrounds. As far as the audience of this policy, obviously much of our staff is young and experienced with social media. That said, there are staffers who are less familiar with it and would need more of a primer of what is and is not acceptable.

Mission: (From the J4450 syllabus)

We believe we can best serve citizens and our profession by relentless execution of four strategies. They are:

- **Immediacy:** We will report and deliver news as it happens. We will not fear to report a story as it develops, while always striving to verify information. We will be willing to tell our reader-viewer-listeners what we don't know as well as what we do.
- **Enterprise:** We will find stories that provide meaning and context; that hold public officials and the public accountable; and that entertain and enlighten. We will use all the techniques and technology available to tell stories that engage readers-listeners-viewers.
- **Community Knowledge:** We will analyze, aggregate or create information that helps citizens tell their own stories. We will create methods to let citizens build community knowledge.
- **Conversation:** We will foster better talk in mid-Missouri by joining existing streams in person and online. We will spark new dialogue from our reporting and through sharing the experience of one community with another, especially those that are underrepresented in the media.

This is a definition, an experiment, in progress. It will evolve. Students and staff of the Missourian will, through collaboration and experimentation, give new meaning and new life to each of the four strategies.

Current Policy:

The advent of social media introduces a world of complications as we increasingly share aspects of our personal lives online.

Political viewpoints should not be apparent through students or staffers' public profiles on social networking websites. Be careful what you post. Ask yourself: What would a source think?

At the beginning of each semester, students will conduct peer reviews of their Facebook profiles and/or other online social media. Remember: If you don't think an editor should see it, why would you want a source to see it?

Students or staff may be "friended" by a source or a subject they cover. It may even be in the interest of students and staff to "friend" sources in order to follow their businesses or campaigns. In such cases, students and staff are accountable for viewpoints expressed on their private profiles as well.

Students and staff should refrain from expressing political and religious viewpoints or preferences while using online social media, especially on divisive issues.

As a rule, always assume that all posts are public. When in doubt, err on the side of neutrality.

This is a new area for everyone. There will be gray areas. But as with your wardrobe,

your voicemail and your demeanor, the same ethic always applies: Be professional.

Suggested Policy:

Just like the written word or photographs, social media websites are tools we can use to further our mission to inform our public and practice journalism. However, care should be taken given the public nature of social networking profiles. *I feel like our current policy starts right off with how complicated social media is. I think that is a scare-tactics approach, and I don't think it fits for our staff. Many of us are already comfortable using social media, the question is just how to adapt it for a work environment. For those staffers who are less comfortable, starting with an admonishment doesn't help either. Our policy should be positive, not harsh.*

Above all: Be professional. If a post would embarrass you, your colleagues or your boss, don't post it. If you have even the slightest doubt that it could call your professionalism into question, don't post it. *Taken from The Gazette's (in Cedar Rapids Iowa) two-line social media policy.*

Do tweet: "Wishing my best friend Katie a Happy 21st Bday! #loveya"

Don't tweet: "Can't wait to get smashed with Katie 2nite! #happy21st"

Do tweet: "Working like a maniac @CoMissourian #partylikeajournalist"

Don't tweet: "Work sucks, Swafford hates me #whenwillthishellend?"

Do FB: "Lots happening in Libya this year. Arab Spring, Gadhafi dies, what next??"

Don't FB: "Fucking crazy protestors in Libya making my gas more expensive."

Just like how taking part in a political campaign is a conflict, espousing your political beliefs on social media profiles is also inappropriate for staffers. If any behaviors or actions are considered conflicts of interest under our policy, such things should not be broadcast on profiles. This includes, but is not limited to: Holding or seeking political office, lobbying or participating in demonstrations to effect policy changes. Please check our conflict of interest policy for further explanation. *We should make sure our policies do not contradict each other. As they stand, our COI policy says staffers cannot be politically active in public, so this should apply to social media.*

That being said, you are a person, and people have thoughts, opinions and beliefs. In an effort to make yourself a human being, feel free to share your favorite movies, food, books and the like. You are also allowed, as a resident, to belong to social, service, athletic and religious organizations and attend public events. Mentioning such actions within social media websites are acceptable. *On the other hand, the COI policy says it perfectly acceptable to vote and worship and belong to other organizations. There is no reason then, as I see it, why such things cannot be disclosed on social media.*

Students or staff may be "friended" by a source or a subject they cover. It may even be in the interest of students and staff to "friend" sources in order to follow their businesses or campaigns. In such cases, students and staff are accountable for viewpoints expressed on their private profiles as well. *This is fair and well-said. I think students are often confused about this, so we definitely need to explicitly state the rules about source relationships.*

If in doubt, at the very least refrain from using profanity, racist/sexist language and references to drugs and alcohol. Operate under the assumption that everything you post is public. *This just needs to be said. Sometimes students and faculty alike forget that privacy settings, especially ever-changing ones on Facebook, don't guarantee actual privacy. Also, the explanation about language is included because of the example tweets I posted earlier, just in case it wasn't clear. I am actually going back and forth about including the bit about language, but with what I see my peers posting on FB/Twitter, I think decorum is easily forgotten.*

This is a new area for everyone. There will be gray areas, and questions about what is appropriate should be directed to your editor. But as with your wardrobe, your voicemail and your demeanor, the same ethic always applies: Be professional. *I do think we need to say that some things will have to be handled on a case-by-case basis. In no way is this policy comprehensive, nor can it be. I also think it is smart to let reporters and staffers know that sometimes social media questions should be a conversation between staffers (reporter, editor; editor, editor). No one has all the answers, but two heads are better than one.*