

DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES



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Introduction

Social media can be a powerful tool to connect and share relevant information about your department or division. Used correctly, social media helps establish powerful connections with key influencers in this digital age. As people find more and more ways to connect on the internet and as they seek new ways to create meaningful interactions, social media becomes (for many) their primary method of communication. People are not only connecting with friends and family on social media, they are also engaging with their favorite brands and talking about their favorite products or services. People, now more than ever, are aware content and what it means to them. They are making recommendations, asking for suggestions, and expressing their opinion. For different people, social media has different functions. It can be a vehicle to voice an opinion, a place to share an experience, a way to reach the customer service department, and even an official channel of communication. It is important to keep in mind that the social media experience is an individual one and departments must carefully consider what is going to be their main objective when using social media.

Departments should not implement a “set and forget” approach to social media. If a department decides to open a social media channel, the department should be fully responsible to maintain it by posting relevant updates, responding to questions, etc. There are plenty of social media platforms opening every month, carefully consider which venues will be the *most effective* ones for your department and do not open a social media account without talking to the UMC Digital Team or University Social Media Manager.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Social Media Manager at socialmedia@utrgv.edu.






General Policy

Social media tools are one of the most powerful forms of communication in today's marketplace. Their reach and influence have significant impact on both organizational and professional reputations and branding initiatives. Social media, by nature, falls in the gray area between personal and professional posting and conduct. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has therefore created the following policy to help both internal and external stakeholders clarify how to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when participating in social media.

Social Media in Definition

Social media sites are defined as media designed to be disseminated through social interaction. Social media is shared using highly accessible, viral, and scalable publishing techniques.

Some of the most popular social media platforms, as of April 2021, include:

Image	Name and Link	Brief description
	Facebook facebook.com	A social networking site that allows sharing of video, photos, and status updates. Still, the most widely used social media platform to date.
	Instagram Instagram.com	Allows sharing of pictures using special filters and other special image effects.
	Twitter twitter.com	A microblogging site that allows sharing of updates up to 280 characters long. Very fast and reactive.
	YouTube youtube.com	A video social network that allows users to upload high resolution videos and share them publicly and privately.
	LinkedIn linkedin.com	A professional networking site that focuses on career connection and industry leadership.

Overview

Both in professional and institutional roles, employees need to follow the same behavioral standards online as they would in real life. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines for interacting with students, parents, alumni, donors, media, and other university constituents apply online as in the real world. Employees will be held to account for offensive or otherwise inappropriate posts and comments to institutional social media sites.

FERPA and HIPAA

All departments are required to follow all applicable state, federal, and university laws, rules, and policies. Departments who decide to engage in social media should be mindful of The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). **Departments should not post or share any personal identifiable student record information (such as GPA, social security number, admission status, test scores, financial aid, SID, etc).** If the student publicly discloses his/her information, please advise the student to remove it and direct the conversation to a secure/university-sanctioned method of communication such as your employee email, departmental email, or university phone number. Given that social media platforms are controlled by external organizations/businesses, they are not considered university-sanctioned methods of direct communication of student records. Do not disclose or engage publicly about "...the individual's past, present or

future physical or mental health or condition, the provision of health care to the individual, or, the past, present, or future payment for the provision of health care to the individual, and that identifies the individual or for which there is a reasonable basis to believe can be used to identify the individual.”

For more information about FERPA visit [Ed.gov/ferpa](https://ed.gov/ferpa), to learn more about HIPAA visit hhs.gov/ocr/privacy

Student Records

Please refrain from asking or replying using social media about any of the following:

- Academic records
- Transcripts
- Test scores
- Disciplinary records
- Financial aid records
- Loan collection information
- Social security number
- Driver's license
- Student ID
- Suspension status
- Expulsion status
- Migrant status
- State or federal personal documents
- Any medical record information
- Any other personal identifiable information as defined by UTRGV policies.

If the student initiates the conversation and discloses any of the above, please instruct them to communicate such information via university-sanctioned channels such as a departmental or employee email. When in doubt, please contact us at

SocialMedia@utrgv.edu

Social Media Departmental Guidelines

- Social Media pages bearing UTRGV's name may NOT be created without the approval of the university Social Media Manager. All departmental social media accounts are considered property of the university.
- When creating a social media page bearing UTRGV's name, the university Social Media Manager must be provided all necessary passwords and editing credentials.
- UTRGV social media pages created prior to the issuance of these guidelines also must add the editorial Social Media Manager as a co-administrator.
- These guidelines apply to the creation of UTRGV social networking site accounts on such platforms as, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WordPress, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, Snapchat, G+, future and as of yet unnamed social media platforms, all microblogs, and blogs.
- The university Social Media Manager in coordination with the University Marketing and Communications department will have oversight responsibility to ensure that UTRGV social media pages are within the bounds of UTRGV messaging and visual standards.
- The university Social Media Manager in coordination with the University Marketing and Communications department may determine whether a social page is "unkempt" or "unmaintained" and may remove that page after consultation (when possible) with the department's Social Media Manager or creator of the page.
- The university Social Media Manager can edit or remove any departmental content posted in social media sites that is misspelled, contains sensitive student information, or violates university policy.
- Departmental social media accounts should not post copyrighted images in social networks without proper licensing/authorization. If your department needs stock images or custom graphics, please contact us or submit a custom service request at www.utrgv.edu/umc
- All departments that create their own custom graphics for social media must comply with the UTRGV [Graphic Identity Guidelines](#).
- UTRGV employees, interns, or student workers who have access to the departmental social media accounts should not post personal information or personal updates on UTRGV social media platforms.
- The person in charge of the departmental social media site is responsible for notifying the university Social Media Manager about any social media updates/posts that might constitute a security/safety hazard to students, faculty, staff, or the community.
- To help prevent your departmental social media accounts from being hacked, please create a password that is difficult to decipher and that you only share the password with trusted employees.
- If your department is granting social media account access to student workers or part-time employees to the social media accounts, please have them fill out the [Account Access Authorization Form](#).

Engagement Guidelines

Sharing information about UTRGV events, news, and student/faculty work through social media is a very low-cost way to interact with the community and develop the UTRGV brand. Employees are encouraged to repost/share public information with their friends and followers. This includes news articles, press releases, etc. Posting links to relevant online sources is also encouraged. If employees wish to post original content or information that is not public, a set of guidelines should be followed with every post, photo, and comment. These guidelines are listed below and should be implicit while posting on behalf of UTRGV.

Be Transparent

“Transparent” in social media refers to being honest about your identity and being considerate to your potential audiences by being mindful of your posted content. It is acceptable to identify yourself as a UTRGV faculty or staff member to somebody that might ask you in a personal post (although this situation is uncommon). In doing so, however, you **MUST** identify that you are expressing your own views as an individual and not those of UTRGV.

Personal Social Media Profiles

Although these guidelines apply primarily to departmental accounts. If you choose to engage in social media with your personal profiles and disclose your relationship with the university, it is important that you keep in mind that people might perceive your personal comments or statements as coming from your department. If you are expressing an opinion and you have your profile set to public, make sure you make it clear that your opinion does not constitute an official response from your department. You might choose to add “*opinions are my own*” to your social media profiles.

If external news media contacts you via your personal social media profiles, please direct them to the University Marketing and Communications department:

umc@utrgv.edu

Consider the Liability

Because you are personally responsible while posting material on any website or online platform, you must remember to consider the legal liability of your job. There have been cases where individual social media publishers have been held legally liable for content that was deemed to be defamatory, libelous, proprietary, obscene, or copyright infringement. These charges are easily searchable from any common search engine and could potentially affect your future employment opportunities.

Respect Everyone

You are more likely to engage the community better if you regard everybody that interacts with you the best that you can. This can be difficult (especially when

people might post upsetting things), but it is crucial not to do harm to UTRGV or yourself by posting disconcerting material.

Don't Post Confidential Information

Posting confidential information about UTRGV is not only unethical, but also illegal in many circumstances. A circumstance where sharing confidential information becomes illegal includes the sharing of medical records or academic records. Following the university's code of conduct and using proper ethical judgment is key when deciding to post information that may not be too private.

Be a Contributor

When you join a social network, you essentially step into a virtual conversation with thousands of people. With this in mind, do not dominate any discussion you may have over social media with self-promotion and redirections. Excessive self-promotion is viewed negatively (as it would be in a person-person conversation) and could alienate friends/followers. Instead of dominating a conversation, simply contribute to one.

Be Timely & Accurate

Social media is real-time and should be used as such. Interacting with the public should happen on a daily basis and be as accurate as possible. Linking URLs and citation in general is an excellent practice in displaying the credibility of the content posted by UTRGV. In posts containing links in which citation is not possible, make sure to positively verify all information. It is far better to be correct the first time without having to fix a mistake.

Understand Your Personal Responsibility

You will be personally responsible for any content that is published on any social media tool currently being used by UTRGV. Remember—anything that you publish will be public. Protect your own privacy by not posting anything that could potentially do harm to UTRGV.

Do Not Cover Up Mistakes

Social media is a real-time process. If you make a mistake, chances are people HAVE seen it (even if you try to delete it). Do not try to cover up your mistakes—instead admit them and be quick with your correction.

When in Doubt, Seek Approval

If any posted material could (in ANY sense) be interpreted as the official position or view of UTRGV, the material should be approved by the university or director of the individual department.

Do Not Post Anything about Named Individuals

It is important to remember not to post anything about an individual (faculty, student, alumni, etc.) without FIRST obtaining their permission. In general, if you believe that the content you wish to publish may be defaming in any aspect AT ALL, do not post it.

Use of the UTRGV Logo

Please make sure that you adhere to the official UTRGV Identity Guidelines. Please submit custom graphics with the UTRGV to umcreview@utrgv.edu for review.

Think Before You Post

Regardless of the privacy settings, social media is the furthest thing from “private.” Standard search engines can turn up posts and pictures long after they are published, content can be forwarded or copied, and some archival systems will save your posts even if you delete them. In addition to that, it is relatively easy to take a screenshot. These facts reiterate the importance of considering the liability of social media and respecting others while interacting with them. If you are having a bad day or feel any particular strong emotion towards a topic, reflect on these guidelines and think before you post.

Set Expectations

Who is managing your account? When will they be checking and responding to messages? Is there a specific time frame that users and followers can expect interaction? These expectations need to be explicitly decided and roles for the ongoing monitoring described and assigned.

Contact for External Media and News

If an external news reporter or agency contacts your department via social media, please direct them to the office of university marketing and communications. Please do not release any statements or information to news sites without first contacting the university marketing and communications department at umc@utrgv.edu

Social Media Best Practices

The key to an effective institutional social media presence is ensuring that all players who have roles: social media editor(s), writers, creators, managers, and administrators are following and engaged in an agreed-upon set of best practices. These practices should become second nature to all the social media players as the standard that is acceptable and expected at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Twitter

The nature of Twitter is fast paced and ultra-responsive. Tweets should ideally be responded to within the hour. This applies to both tweets, responses, and messages. This shows courtesy to those that send direct messages or replies. When you don't respond to received messages, it shows a lack of community interest. This perceived lack of interest in your followers and community will lead to a lack of interaction from your fans. Photos that you would use on Instagram (as seen with this campaign), you should also use on Twitter as well as Facebook.

REMEMBER: When responding to a person, best practices are to reply with an intelligent response, retweet (RT) their content, redirect them to another website, or follow them back (if relevant). If the tweet is about a concern or issue, please direct them to send you a direct message and in the direct message instruct them to email your department. Please avoid discussing direct student information via social media (even in private conversations).

Self-Promotion

Most institutional mediums will use Twitter to promote UTRGV events. Followers are used to this and will accept it as such. Be mindful, however, that too many self-promoting tweets will lead to the account becoming “spammy.” If any promotions require linking a tweet to a URL, make sure to use a shortened URL. Tweets should not be over three lines unless necessary.

REMEMBER: People follow you because you are resourceful, engaging, and have something interesting to say or some insight or expertise to offer—not just to utilize you as a bulletin board for events. You should be utilizing some combination of tweeting and retweeting three to eight times per day.

Give Credit/Gratitude

It is important that you interact or give credit to followers who are promoting UTRGV. This can be done by utilizing the following retweet functions:

- RT: Use for word-for-word re-posting (Twitter's function for retweet). Figure 1.
- Heart: a heart (favorite) is the equivalent of a Facebook “like” in the sense that it shows that you acknowledge a tweet and show support for it. It is a good idea to mark a favorite posts that directly mention your social media account and you want to actively promote. Figure 2.
- RTs can be used as a very powerful word-of-mouth marketing tool.

Because of this, it is important to thank a person for retweeting information. This shows gratitude and thankfulness for a follower's efforts. Do not, however, send back-to-back “thanks!”. The tweets will appear in succession on your feed, showing a lack of sincerity.



Figure 1. Retweet (RT)



Figure 2. Favorite (Heart)

Again, Twitter is real-time, public information. This means that once something is sent, people WILL see the tweet. Even if you delete the tweet from your wall, it will still be on your followers' streams. Because of this, it is crucial that if you make a mistake that you DO NOT try to cover it up!

Example: An errant tweet was mistakenly sent by the American Red Cross. The tweet was removed after one hour (showing an acceptance and responsibility of the tweet) and was combated with a good- humored tweet acknowledging the mistake.

Facebook

Anything posted on your page (status updates, photos, and videos) can be made into ads that can be pushed out to users' newsfeeds and mobile feeds. With Facebook's various algorithm changes that have transformed everyone's home feeds into news-style feeds, it isn't easy to reach deep among your followers with every publication. Promoted posts are your best resource for a wide and deep chance at high impressions on your publications. Although not every post is promoted post quality, significant publications that you want a lot of eyes to see should be considered contenders for a possible promoted post. Unless followers are consistently "liking" nearly every post you publish, they will be less likely to see any post you publish.

Tone

When messaging and posting, it is important to remember that social media is real-time. Fans expect timely responses. The creation of an "on-duty" schedule that sets responsibilities, style, and tone in responding to comments on your page can assure that this stays real-time. Staying responsive and conversational throughout your Facebook page will build a sense of community and promote the use of your page. Posting should occur anywhere from three times per week to a daily occurrence. People who comment on specific post on Facebook do expect a timely response to their comments. In the example below (figure 3), a follower is asking about the specific details of an event. We verified the information with the department and provided a timely response.

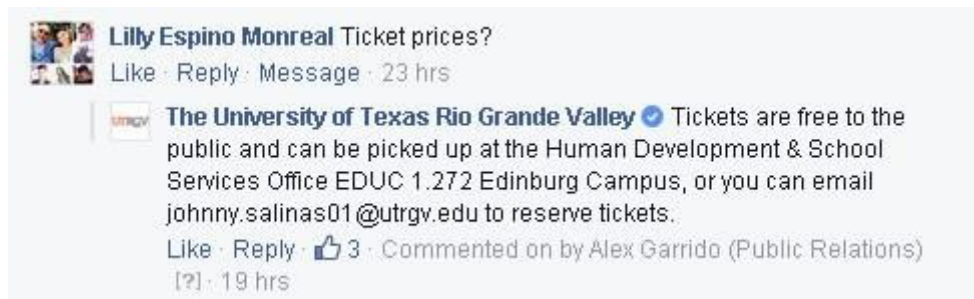


Figure 3. Helpful response.

Messaging Tactics

Other Facebook messaging tactics that could be used, like asking for a "like," are being discouraged by Facebook itself. So, providing open-ended questions (or photographs paired with a question) to spark interactions, @mentions, and requests to share some sort of content are better tactics for engagement that won't get you flagged by Facebook. A good idea is to use rich media and hashtags to expand the reach of your posts. Images can be used as links on Facebook and you might add a "call to action" within the image. By adding specific hashtags related to the post, you help the post reach people who are generally interested in similar topics and you contribute to a virtual repository where all post with a particular hashtag are aggregated.

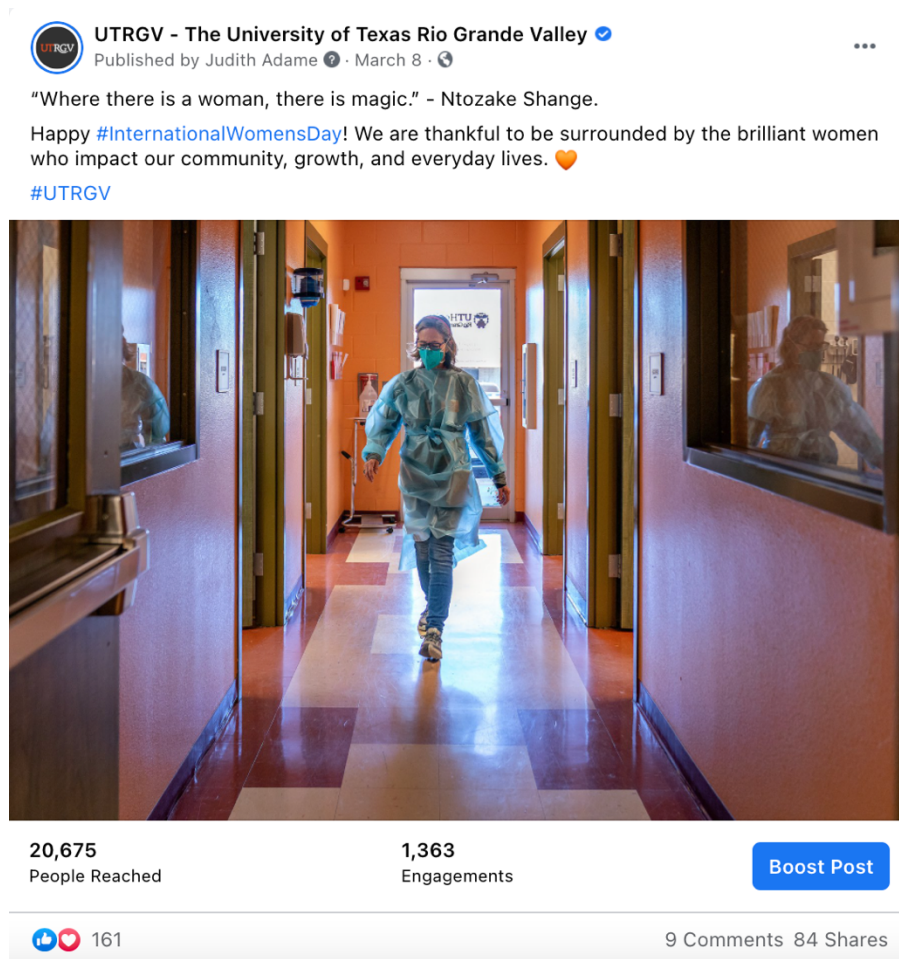


Figure 4. Use hashtags to aggregate posts by topic.

LinkedIn University & LinkedIn Company Page

LinkedIn can be the breeding ground for institutional connections via current students to alumni, alumni to alumni, or faculty and staff to the general public. Over the past couple of years, this website has proven to be a perfect place to recruit faculty and staff, as well as to advertise in general. More important, however, is the ability to build a community amongst current students and alumni (potential future employers).

To leverage this social media tool to its fullest extent, we encourage all administration, faculty, and staff to join both the University Page and the Company Page. Advertising can be done through LinkedIn's Company Page, and brand

messaging and relevant news for alumni and potential new students for recruitment should be utilized on the University Page.

LinkedIn is not as commonly used with “personal” tones when communicating. Rather, it is used to highlight your alumni achievements and to demonstrate that the UTRGV community is here to support current students and alumni.

YouTube

Video is the absolute optimal medium for offering prospective students a candid, visual representation of the unique educational experience offered by a school. UTRGV should try to create and upload one marketing-focused video per month to maintain a strong YouTube EDU presence. Share these videos on your other social media platforms. Make sure the video is edited to be engaging and short.

Potential concepts for these videos could include:

- Campus tour, student testimonials, graduate interviews
- School program profiles featuring instructor and student interviews
- Athletics, team profiles

Instagram

Instagram is a great marketing tool that doesn't require you to say much. The rich media used on Instagram can also be shared on your other social platforms. However, it is best to create specific content for each specific social media platform to better reach people using the platform. Instagram is a visual social network where people can share beautiful and unique pictures and videos. If you want to communicate a lot of information, consider creating a quick 15 second reel to share on Instagram instead of having a static image.



Blogger, WordPress and Other Blogging Platforms

An institutional blog can add great value to any social media campaign, especially if the blog is regularly maintained. A blog's content can be sourced out from multiple authors. Faculty, staff, students, Social Media Managers, and even alumni can write a 500–700 word blog post. A blog post doesn't have to be long and wordy. A blog post just needs good content that engages or informs the reader, not too different than all content for social media.

Find out how many potential authors you have available. Create an editorial and scheduling calendar based off who you have available to write. Find out at what frequency your pool of authors could contribute. Can they write a 500–700 word blog post once a month, once every semester?

In your social media posts and tweets, create an engaging tagline and link back to the blog post. This strategy is going to build better brand awareness and build link authority with Google, which helps the institution extend its reach.

Official Departmental .EDU Blog

An official, university-hosted, blog might be requested if your department needs it. The university department blog will be hosted within the utrgv.edu domain and will require close supervision. A blog request will create a specific subdomain within the main university site, therefore, you must submit this kind of request via a ServiceNow IT Request using my.utrgv.edu