Social Media Policy

No. 1030

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Policy Owner:
Tracy Vosburgh

Policy Author:
(Contact Person)
Kate Adkins

Affected Parties:
Undergraduate
Graduate
Faculty
Staff
Other

1.0   Purpose

Virginia Tech recognizes the value of social media platforms for a range of goals and must balance its support of social media with the preservation of Virginia Tech's brand identity, integrity, and reputation.

The university authorizes the creation and use of university social media accounts, provided their use is professional, protects the reputation and brand of the university, aligns with university priorities, and complies with other Virginia Tech policies and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, and is guided by the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.

1.0   Policy

Entities covered by this policy include all units of the university including, but not limited to, colleges, schools, institutes, departments, and university governing organizations. It also includes all faculty, staff members, and students who manage Virginia Tech-affiliated social media accounts as an account administrator.

2.1 Responsibilities

The major responsibilities each party has in connection with this policy.

Account Administrator	Account administrators are required to:
	• Consult the Virginia Tech Social Media Guidelines and/or consult with your unit's communications professional and/or university social media manager for guidance on compliance with these guidelines, as well as with the university's brand guide before launching a social media account.
	Virginia Tech Social Media Guidelines: vt.edu/social-media
	• Review training modules in Virginia Tech's brand center and attend meetings and workshops as necessary.
	• Take action if it is suspected that their accounts have been hacked or compromised. This should include changing passwords, informing supervisors, and monitoring for suspicious activity.
	• Ensure owned accounts are equipped with two-factor authentication.
	• Correct or modify university social media accounts under the administrator's control, as directed by Communications and Marketing.
	• Terminate any university social media accounts that cannot be made compliant with this policy.
	• Deactivate obsolete accounts.
	• Publish and enforce set "house rules" for code of conduct by followers of the account.

Communications Professional at the Unit Level	Communications professionals are required to:
	• Work collaboratively with Communications and Marketing to review and approve new university social media accounts.
	• Provide guidance and support for new account administrators in respective units.
	• Document the university social media accounts in respective units in the Communications and Marketing. Virginia Tech social media directory submission form: forms.gle/KjTAtUYKz8oohJj59
Individual	Individuals are required to:
	• Refrain from using or posting to university social media accounts in a manner that is in violation of this policy.
	• Transfer access to another social media manager for university social media accounts, as appropriate, when university employee or student status changes.
Communications and Marketing	Communications and Marketing is required to:
	• Oversee Virginia Tech's institutional presence on social networking platforms.
	• Determine whether to allow university social media accounts on new platforms as they become available. Authorize these accounts as appropriate.
	• Review social media accounts that represent the university for compliance with this policy.
	• Instruct account administrators to correct, modify, or terminate university social media accounts that are not in compliance with this policy.
	• Advise on action regarding complaints and comment moderation as the need arises.
	• Provide backup social media support and consultation when needed.

2.2 Principles Overview

2.2.1 Virginia Tech Principles of Community

Interactions on social media should be guided by the **Virginia Tech Principles of Community**. Inclusivity, civility, and respect at Virginia Tech are *everyone's* responsibility.

- Website: inclusive.vt.edu/vtpoc0

2.2.2 Acceptable use of information systems at Virginia Tech

Access to computer systems and networks owned or operated by Virginia Tech imposes certain responsibilities and obligations and is granted subject to university policies, and local, state, and federal laws.

Social media account administrators are required to be familiar with Virginia Tech's policy and related standards on appropriate use of computer systems and networks owned or operated by the university.

- Website: vt.edu/about/acceptable-use

The university recognizes the value of social media platforms for a range of goals, including, but not limited to, reaching new audiences and building relationships with stakeholders. This document supplements existing acceptable use policies as outlined in the Virginia Tech faculty and staff handbooks and includes:

- Student Code of Conduct: https://codeofconduct.vt.edu/
- Faculty Handbook: provost.vt.edu/faculty_affairs/faculty_handbook
- Acceptable Use of Information Systems at Virginia Tech: vt.edu/about/acceptable-use
- Virginia Tech Identity Standards and Style Guide: vt.edu/brand
- Business Conduct Standards: https://financialmanagement.vpfin.vt.edu/business-practices/business-conduct-standards.html
- Non-discrimination statement: vt.edu/about/equal-opportunity
- Freedom of Information Act: https://foia.vt.edu/

2.2.3 University social media accounts

A university social media account is any registered account administered by an official university unit on any social network used in support of the function or needs of that unit. Typically, these accounts include the name of Virginia Tech and the name of the unit.

Use of social media accounts must be conducted in a manner that is professional, protects the reputation and brand of Virginia Tech, and is in compliance with university policies.

- Business Conduct Standards: https://financialmanagement.vpfin.vt.edu/business-practices/business-conduct-standards.html

Prohibited conduct includes use of social media in a way that constitutes libel, false advertising, copyright or trademark infringement, harassment, professional misconduct, threats or other safety violations, or a violation of privacy or other rights protected under the law. Using university social media accounts for advertising may be subject to additional university policy.

- Sales, Solicitation and Advertising on Campus: policies.vt.edu/5215.pdf

The university is not responsible for content shared or generated by non-university social media accounts administered by groups or individuals not sponsored by the university.

2.2.3.1 Registering an official university social media account

Existing and new university social media accounts are requested to be registered with the university. The purpose of this is to keep an updated directory for visitors to the university's websites and to allow for periodic quality control checks to occur. Registration can be found on the guidelines website: vt.edu/social-media

- Full account name
- Two best contacts (Virginia Tech employees) with email addresses

2.2.3.2 User Agreements for Social Media Accounts

When a social media account is created, the social media platform requires the account creator to agree to certain terms and conditions for use of the site by clicking "Yes" or "I accept" as part of the account creation process. These are legal contracts, and they often contain terms and conditions that create risks for the account creator and the university (for officially-recognized Virginia Tech accounts). In view of this, account administrators are delegated authority to create official social media accounts and are authorized to accept the terms and conditions. University may request legal and/or administrative approvals prior to approving new account creation if necessary.

2.2.4 Business and personal use of social media

Virginia Tech employees may be authorized to use social media at work to promote the Virginia Tech brand and encourage active engagement with the university community. These individuals must maintain Virginia Tech's brand identity, integrity, and reputation, while minimizing potential legal risks.

Social media posters must also be aware of NCAA rules governing interactions between the institution and its employees, and prospective student-athletes. All employees should refrain from replying to tweets, Facebook posts, mentioning the prospective student-athletes name or twitter handle (or the like) in a tweet or other social media post(s) or directly messaging prospective student-athletes prior to them signing a National Letter of Intent. Always check with the Athletic Department's Compliance officials before posting anything that may violate these rules.

2.2.4.1 Exemptions from this policy

This policy does not seek to limit personal use of social media by faculty, staff, or students. Virginia Tech employees and students may mention their university affiliation in the bio or about sections of personal social media accounts but are prohibited from using university brand elements on those accounts in ways that violate branding guidelines or other university policies.

Note that, even if you are using social media personally, you should be mindful that you may still be seen as a representative of your college, unit, or the overall university.

Users must adhere to the terms and conditions specific to each social network platform and follow policies for the use of personally owned devices in the workplace at Virginia Tech.

- Mobile Communications Devices Policy: https://policies.vt.edu/assets/3960.pdf
- Freedom of Information Act: https://foia.vt.edu/

Account Administrators	Account administrators are required to: • Post on Virginia Tech-affiliated social media platforms only using the account name of his or her department or unit. • Maintain the privacy of administrators of Virginia Tech social media and also preserve consistency of the units' institutional voice. • Use professional discretion when liking or following other social media accounts and posts. Liking or following sites or feeds should reflect the opinions of Virginia Tech. Refrain from engaging in these activities for personal interest or communication.

Individuals	Individuals with access to a university social media account are required to: ● Use social media for professional purposes; personal purposes that might reasonably create the impression the content is authorized or controlled by Virginia Tech, unless using a social media application's sharing feature to share content from an official university source, is prohibited. ● Post content that is not discriminatory, threatening, or unlawful. Users are responsible for their conduct when using social media for personal or business purposes.

2.2.5 Social media house rules

Virginia Tech encourages social media users to interact with the university and each other but is not responsible for comments or posts made by followers of or visitors to Virginia Tech accounts. Comments posted by these individuals may not reflect the official views or policies of the university. In accordance with this, university social media accounts should include a version of community commenting guidelines in the accounts' about sections.

Note: Before removing non-English comments, use translation tools to verify if the comment indeed violates the other standards as listed.

2.2.5.1 Example of house rules

Virginia Tech welcomes comments on our social media posts and encourages interaction among Hokies around the world. Users are expected to follow the Virginia Tech Principles of Community as guidance for posts to remain true to the spirit of Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). The university encourages respectful dialogue while supporting speech protected by the First Amendment.

Additionally, all content and posts are bound by the Terms and Community Guidelines for that service. Further information can be found at https://brand.vt.edu/communications/social..html.

Virginia Tech reserves the right, but is not obligated, to remove comments that:
- are off-topic;
- are profane, violent, or obscene;
- are an unauthorized commercial solicitation;
- encourage or support discrimination against protected classes;
- are duplicate or spam;
- advocate illegal activity;
- are misleading or contain falsehoods and/or inaccurate information; or
- libel, incite, threaten, or make ad hominem attacks on Virginia Tech students, employees, guests, or other individuals.

Concerns related to Virginia Tech's social media content can be emailed to socialmedia-g@vt.edu. Comments made by outside users are the opinions of the authors, not of the university.

3.0 Procedures

3.1 Launching or assuming responsibility for university social media accounts

Account Administrator	Account administrators are required to:
	● Contact their unit's communications professional to establish a university social media account. If your unit does not have a communications professional, contact Communications and Marketing.
	● Familiarize themselves with this document and the university Brand Guide when launching new university social media accounts or assuming responsibility for existing ones.
	● Correct or modify university social media accounts under their control, as directed by Communications and Marketing and/or the unit's communications professional.
	● Terminate any university social media accounts that cannot be made compliant with this policy.
	● Select, train, and oversee additional social media managers and administrators associated with an account; it is recommended to have at least two administrators on every account created.
Communications Professional at the Unit Level	Unit communications professionals are required to:
	● Oversee creation of new social media accounts in their units to ensure compliance with best practices.
	● Maintain a list of social media accounts in their units and encourage registration to the university register.
	● Train account administrators in their units about their roles and responsibilities under this policy.
	● Familiarize themselves with this policy and the university brand guide.
	● Be accountable for ensuring that content posted to their accounts meets university guidelines.
	● Be responsible for ensuring central Communications and Marketing is informed in matters of issues or crisis management.

3.2 Required actions upon change in an individual's university status

Individual	When the status of an individual with access to a university social media account changes (i.e. role change within unit, transfer to another unit, or separation from the university), the individual is required to:
	● Surrender that access. The account administrator will transfer that access, as appropriate to another staff member.

Account Administrator	Account administrators are required to:
	• Review individuals' access to all social media platforms, social media tools and revoke where appropriate.
	• Review and modify passwords for all accounts to prevent unauthorized access when appropriate.
	• Review social media policy, strategy, and brand guidelines with Communications and Marketing and the communications professional at the unit level.
Communications Professional at the Unit Level	Unit communications professionals are required to:
	• Review social media guidelines, strategy, and best practices, as well as brand guidelines with new account administrators.
	• Update the list of university social media accounts in their units and encourage registration in the university social media register.

3.3 Related Virginia Tech Policies

Policy	Website
Acceptable Use of Information Systems at Virginia Tech	vt.edu/about/acceptable-use
Administrative Data Management and Access Policies	https://policies.vt.edu/assets/7100.pdf
Business Conduct Standards	https://financialmanagement.vpfin.vt.edu/business-practices/business-conduct-standards.html
Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Statement	vt.edu/about/equal-opportunity
Freedom of Information Act	https://foia.vt.edu/
Mobile Communications Devices	https://policies.vt.edu/assets/3960.pdf
Student Privacy/FERPA	https://www.registrar.vt.edu/FERPA.html
Virginia Tech Faculty Handbook	https://faculty.vt.edu/academic-personnel/academic-policies-and-resources/faculty-handbook.html
Virginia Tech Identity Standards and Style Guide	branding.unirel.vt.edu/brand
Virginia Tech Policies	https://policies.vt.edu/PolicyLibrary
Virginia Tech Sales, Solicitation, and Advertising on Campus	https://policies.vt.edu/assets/5215.pdf
Virginia Tech Student Code of Conduct	https://codeofconduct.vt.edu/

3.4 Contacts

Subject	Contact	Email/Web Address
Guidelines clarification and interpretation	Communications and Marketing	socialmedia-g@vt.edu
Establishing a new university social media account	Communications and Marketing	socialmedia-g@vt.edu
	College/Unit Communications Professional	Unit-specific
Social media community guidelines	Communications and Marketing	socialmedia-g@vt.edu
Resources/training opportunities	Communications and Marketing	socialmedia-g@vt.edu
Reporting violations: Social Media Usage Related to Students Bias Reporting	Communications and Marketing	socialmedia-g@vt.edu
	Student Conduct	studentconduct@vt.edu
	Division of Student Affairs	www.apps.dsa.vt.edu/bias

4.0 Definitions

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

Account Administrator	A Virginia Tech faculty member, staff member, or student who administers or authors content for any university social media account.
University Social Media Account	Any account administered by an official university unit on any social network used in support of the functions or needs of that unit. Typically, these accounts include the name of Virginia Tech and the name of the unit (i.e. Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences). **Note:** Accounts administered by any other groups or individuals are considered non-sponsored accounts, and the university is not responsible for the content shared on these accounts. This may include student-organized groups and events.
Communications Professional at the Unit Level	A university staff member within a unit charged with communications oversight at the unit level.
Social Media	A website or application external to Virginia Tech that permits sharing of information between people. This includes internet-based social networking applications, blogs, forums/chat rooms, collaborative information and publishing systems (Wikis), video- and photo-sharing platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.), and other websites with user-generated content.
House Rules	Community commenting guidelines by which the account administrator can moderate conversations that reside on the account.
Unit	A college, school, institute, department, research center, office, service or transaction center, or any other operating Virginia Tech-affiliated group.

User	A person who places postings, commentary, or other content on a university social media account or space.
Influencer	An individual or institution that has a large social media following and a strong affinity for Virginia Tech. A social ally.

5.0 References

Commonwealth of Virginia, Policy 1.75 – Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media
https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hrpolicy/pol-1-75-electronic-communications-and-social-media.pdf

6.0 Approval and Revisions

Approved May 23, 2018 by the Vice President for Advancement, Charles Phlegar.

- Revision 1
  Technical update to provide clarifying language in section 2.2.5.1. Updates to department titles, links and references.

  Approved May 2, 2024 by Vice President for Communications and Marketing, Tracy Vosburgh.