

# Use of social media in academic courses

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This document discusses use of social media platforms in academic courses. Specifically, it considers requiring students to post on social media platforms that are not secured by USC, such as through Shibboleth verification.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Before incorporating use of social media in a course, review the considerations outlined below and the corresponding suggestions.

### Possible purposes of social media in an academic course

* sharing work with others outside the course (authentic audiences)
* collaborating with others outside the course
* student-instructor and/or student-student communication outside the classroom
* a place for students to post their work on assignments
* a laboratory for studying social media

### Before using social media in an academic course, ask yourself:

* What specific educational goal is achieved through the use of social media?
* How is the use of social media the best strategy to achieve the educational goal?
* What expectations do you have for students when posting on social media for the course?

### Considerations and suggestions

#### FERPA

* Keep in mind that FERPA guidelines must be followed at all times. “According to FERPA, personally identifiable information in an education record may not be released without prior written consent from the student.” The types of information covered by FERPA include not just student grades, but student course enrollments and instructor feedback on assignments.
* FERPA-restricted information cannot be made public, including instructor feedback on student work and grades.
* Consider how you will be commenting on any student work posted to social media and where you will be keeping secure grades for any student work posted.
* Have students use an online alias to protect their identity if persons outside the instructor and course-enrolled students will have access to the social media platform.

#### Academic purposes

* Clearly describe how social media will be used in your course description and syllabus so that students understand how they will be engaging with public platforms before they enroll in your course.
* Incorporate learning outcomes into the curriculum that will prepare students to engage with social media in an academic and professional setting.

#### The learning curve

* Although most students may be familiar with some uses of social media, this cannot be assumed for all students. Basic skills should be taught. Students are likely accustomed for using social media in a different manner than they will in the course, such as for personal interaction rather than academic/professional interaction.
* Consider building in time for instruction on how to use the tool or providing how-to resources.
* Plan time to train students on use of social media, and assess basic skills before counting on them for an assignment.
* Consider instructing students on the differences between personal and academic/professional interactions.
* Limit the number of social media accounts students will be asked to use, to reduce the burden of creating and using accounts in multiple platforms.
* Inform students how to delete their social media accounts once the assignment/semester is over, and how the instructor plans to securely store or delete any work shared with them over social media.

#### Inappropriate content

* Students may post inappropriate content. Examples include offensive material, cyberbullying, personal and/or FERPA-restricted information about themselves or others.
* Consider course-specific policies and training around these issues.
* Plan how the instructor and/or TA will monitor online content and respond to inappropriate posts.
* Establish clear expectations for online behavior, and enforce expectations.
* Remind students that the USC Code of Ethics applies to their social-media behavior in the course. Include a link to the USC Code of Ethics in the syllabus and ensure that students have read it.

#### Privacy concerns

* Many social media platforms share user data with third parties, such as advertisers. Students may not be aware of this fact, or may be unwilling to give their consent.
* Understand the terms of service for online platforms used in your course.
* Due to an instructor’s position of power, students may be reluctant to express their concerns. Encourage students to contact the instructor with their concerns.
* Consider how to handle cases where students do not want to participate in the assignment because of privacy concerns and alternate assignments the instructor can provide for completing the work.
* When students are assigned to post information to public social media platforms outside of the university LMS, they should be informed that their material may be viewed by others.
* Students should not be required to release personal information on a public site.

#### Technology concerns

* Use of social media may pose a practical challenge for some students.
* Before selecting a social media platform, research its accessibility compliance.
* Include a digital equity policy in the syllabus informing students of where they can acquire the necessary technology needed to complete a social media assignment (i.e., USC’s loaner laptop program)
* Inform students of any costs related to using social media on their personal devices, such as data consumption or social media requiring a fee.
* If unsure about the use of social media for academic purposes, consider university-vetted alternatives such as Blackboard that already provide free and secure use.

Resources used [accessed Aug 29 2018]

[5 pros and cons of social media in the classroom.](https://www.schooliseasy.com/2014/02/social-media-in-the-classroom/)

[8 Things You Should Know before Using Social Media in Your Course.](https://teaching.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/8_things_you_should_know_before_using_social_media_in_your_course.pdf)

[F.E.R.P.A.](https://arr.usc.edu/records/ferpa/)

[FERPA and Social Media.](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/ferpa-and-social-media/)

[Is Your Use of Social Media FERPA Compliant?](https://er.educause.edu/articles/2014/2/is-your-use-of-social-media-ferpa-compliant)

[Tips from Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices.](https://teaching.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/tips_from_social_media_for_educators-_strategies_and_best_practices.pdf)

[Towards a social media pedagogy: Successes and shortcomings in educative uses of Twitter with teacher candidates.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316643365_Towards_a_social_media_pedagogy_Successes_and_shortcomings_in_educative_uses_of_Twitter_with_teacher_candidates)