

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF EMPLOYEES

Purpose

This policy addresses for employees the proper use of personal social media accounts unrelated to the University.

Statement of Care

The University of Mary takes seriously the responsibility to care for the growth, development, and success of our employees. The support and formation of personal virtue and strong character is fundamental to the mission of the University and goes far beyond the mere workplace. Our employees represent the University on and off campus and their actions can be construed as a reflection of the University. For this reason, the University takes seriously the responsibility to guide and protect our employees, as well as the institution, against social media activity that could cause damage to personal or institutional reputation.

Hardship, disappointment, and frustration happen in every human life, and dealing with them is a hallmark of life's journey. The temptation to complain or murmur is sometimes strong, but the virtuous person chooses to act (if there is something that can be done) or to endure (if the circumstances are out of his or her control). *The Rule of St. Benedict identifies murmuring as the most serious and destructive sin against the value of community.* More than anything, the everyday difficulties of life are meant to be overwhelmed by interior habits of gratitude for the many blessings and opportunities each of us has been given. The University of Mary fails if we are unsuccessful in assisting our community members to live in this way.

There is a cultural trend to take to social media to express concerns or frustrations. This approach can cause great damage, and in some cases irreparable harm, to both the target of the post, whether an individual or the University, and the author. Rants, complaints, personal attacks, threats, and other irresponsible social media posts are often composed in an emotional state and go well beyond what the author would say in the presence of the target of the post. It is also true that posts of this nature are often misinformed, out of context, half true, or not true at all. The difficulty is that once such a post is made, it cannot be permanently retracted, even if superficially deleted from the platform upon which it was posted. This opens both the author and target of the post to damage that cannot be undone. Because of the swift nature of social media interaction, it is extremely difficult to retroactively change the court of public opinion and rehabilitate the character of an individual or institution regardless of the veracity of an inflammatory post. Furthermore, inappropriate content posted in poor judgment has long-lasting effects upon the employee and damages the reputation and public perception of the target of the post, whether an individual or the University.

The University has placed a great deal of care in establishing processes, policies, and procedures to give all employees a productive way to raise an issue, bring a grievance, and seek redress where appropriate. Employees are expected and encouraged to utilize these options. See www.umary.edu/dignity for more information.

Statement of Policy

Being an employee of the University of Mary is a privilege. This privilege carries with it personal responsibility with respect to behavior on and off campus as well as beyond events sponsored by the University. This personal responsibility extends to behavior on personal social media accounts. All employees are expected and agree by signing their appointments to be ambassadors of the Benedictine values of the University in their behavior and interactions. Receiving income from the University – which is funded by donors, students, and other entities of voluntary association – likewise creates a corresponding responsibility for the University’s reputation. By virtue of being an employee of the University, employees represent the institution in all that they do. For this reason, the University requires employees to exercise good judgment in their use of social media websites and applications and to conduct these activities in a responsible, respectful, and lawful manner.

As noted in our [Free Speech Policy](#), the University recognizes the right to free speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and its associated line of court cases in the context of higher education and beyond. The University also recognizes free speech protections are limited to the protection from state actors, not private institutions. Employees are expected to acknowledge and appreciate this distinction.

Employees are thus prohibited from making any social media posts or public statements on personal accounts or anonymously that reflect negatively on the University or with the intent or consequence of causing harm to another member of the university community. Those affected by such adverse actions or relevant officials may file a formal grievance requesting investigation and resolution under the procedures of the University’s [Conduct Grievance Board](#). The level of sanction shall be determined by the Board, but may include loss of tuition benefits, institutional memberships, suspension, and termination.

Considerations for Engagement on Personal Social Media Accounts:

- Exercise good judgment and conduct social activity responsibly and respectfully.
- Provide appropriate and relevant content, considering the perception of the end-user.
- Respect the dignity of every human person when creating posts.
- Avoid posting content that reflects poorly on the University.
- Refrain from posts that could be considered terrorizing, menacing, or harassment.
- The internet is permanent. Even if you delete something, a digital record of that post remains.
- Remember that even anonymous accounts online are easily traced back to individuals who will then be held accountable for the content and damage done by that anonymous account.

Approved

4 August 2021 revised by the President of the University

5 August 2021 by the Board of Trustees (EC)

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