

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

This is a fluid document and will continue to evolve with the medium.

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Objective

As official communicators on behalf of the College of Engineering at Iowa State University, our primary objective is to engage, inform and align our audience with the stories, services and discoveries happening on campus as we carry out our land grant mission.

Social media provides a unique opportunity to not only tell our story, but to listen to our audience and gauge their reaction to the messaging. It offers numerous formats to tell a story, including words, images, audio and video. We are able to pick and choose our medium and tell our story in many different ways, all based on the audience's expectations.

Most importantly, social media gives us the ability to build a relationship with our audience. Rather than simply broadcasting a message with the hope it is heard and accepted, we are now able to hear directly from our followers and custom tailor our message to them.

Purpose

The first thing we must consider before embarking on social media is what role will social media play in our existing communication plan. **Social media in and of its own is NOT a communication plan.** It is simply another channel with which to communicate a carefully crafted message to our audience, and must be carefully planned just as any other channel, such as a webpage, email or press release.

- Who is your target audience?
- Who will take on the responsibility of posting and listening for feedback?
- How will you maintain communication frequency on your social media channels?
- How will you measure success?

Contact Erin Rosacker with Strategic Relations and Communications to make sure your social media accounts are properly [listed in the campus directory](#).

Brand

Social media accounts must follow all [Iowa State Brand Standards](#). Social media is not an opportunity to set yourself apart from the rest of the university. Aligning your social presence with the university's existing brand makes everyone on campus stronger. Let your story stand out, not your avatar.

Conversations

Social media is not a bullhorn. Social media is a conversation. If you plan to speak, you must plan to listen. Nobody wants to be “sold” to in every conversation. Sometimes you need to post “just because”. Some of your more effective, engaging posts on social media will have no ulterior motive, other than to engage your audience, build a bond and strengthen the connection.

Listening to our audience will likely turn up questions which we don’t have the answer to. We must still respond, politely, so they know we are listening.

- Basic enrollment, scholarship, scheduling, study abroad, etc. questions can be quickly and easily referred to the appropriate webpage:
 - “Thanks for reaching out! You can find more information about applying to Iowa State at www.engineering.iastate.edu/future, and if you still have questions, there is contact information at the bottom of that page that will put you in touch with an advisor who can answer all your questions!”
- Research specific questions should be responded to quickly:
 - “Let me check with the faculty member in charge of this lab, and I’ll get right back to you!”
 - “The principal investigator on this project is [tag faculty], I’ll bet they have a better answer for you!”
- Questions asking personal information, direct contact information, etc., should be answered offering to pass the information along:
 - “Sorry, we’re not allowed to post direct contact information on social media, but I’ll pass your question and a link to this post along to [individual] and hopefully they’ll be in touch!”
 - Forward a link to the post/tweet/etc. to the party involved and allow them to make the choice if they’d like to reach out, IF the post is professional in nature.

Tips:

- Be transparent – if you’re not a professor, don’t pretend to be one
- Be conversational – it’s generally better to use a lighter tone outside of the body of your message, it is relatable and our audience will connect
- Be succinct – answer a question briefly, don’t write an entire article in response, the best-case scenario is that you inspire a follow-up question, perhaps even from a different audience member. **Follow-up questions spark conversation!**
- Be consistent – if you’re typically light-hearted and humorous on a social network, use that voice with all communication on that network, speak in a way the audience expects
- Don’t attempt to answer a question you are not able to or authorized to answer
- Always be polite and friendly
- Use and follow hashtags, such as #CycloneEngineer to encourage our audience to tag their stories so we can more easily find them and share them

Transparency

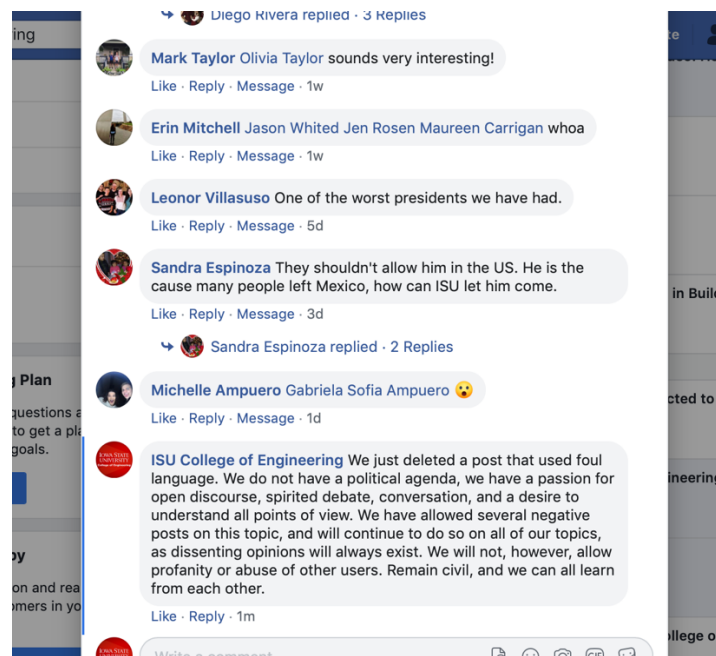
Social media is about conversation. Some of the topics we post about have the potential to be controversial, and not everyone involved in a conversation will have the same opinion. This is another reason why *listening* is such an important part of a social media communication plan.

It is important that our social media fosters a healthy debate on important topics, while at the same time not allowing for profanity or abusive, aggressive speech toward other members of the community.

Our official policy is that we DO NOT delete any comment* on our social media accounts unless it uses profanity, exposes confidential information (in regards to intellectual property, academic information such as exams, or personal information about an individual without their consent), abusive, aggressive speech toward others or unauthorized promotion or sales of a product or service. We NEVER block a user from our social media accounts. Repeat offenders can be prohibited from posting comments, just make sure you keep evidence of their prior postings to justify our action.

In the event that we are required to remove a post for the above reasons, the following actions should be taken:

- Take a screenshot of the offending post prior to removal;
- Delete offending post;
- Without repeating what was said, immediately create a post in its place stating that we did remove a post, why it was removed, and restate the official policy.



We are an open forum, and everyone is allowed to participate in our civil discourse.

**Comments determined to be “spam” can be deleted. In the event of extreme and repeat offenders, we will consult with ISUPD and Iowa State’s office of legal counsel.*

Voice

While all our communications should remain professional and inclusive, social media does allow for different voices to strengthen audience engagement. The best way to determine what voice a specific audience might connect with is to simply listen to the audience for a time prior to actually posting content.

When appropriate, social media can be an opportunity to use methods not encouraged on other platforms, such as humor, polls, questions, good-natured rivalry with that school to the east and more. If you're ever in doubt if a non-traditional post is appropriate, ask a colleague, or **DON'T POST. ALWAYS** err on the side of caution with these types of posts.

Typically, it's best to establish a voice for each platform and remain consistent on that platform. If Twitter is where your more informal voice is successful, it's best to maintain a more informal tone, even on more serious posts. Use your best judgement – **casual tone does not mean misspellings, poor grammar, etc.**

Often times, the most effective voice is an image, not words. Images attract the eye. Effective images entice the audience to read the post. A well-written post will hopefully result in a click to our website for more content.

Accessibility

It is important that our messaging is available to our entire audience. Not everyone is reading the words you wrote in a tweet. Not everyone can listen to the voices in a video or a podcast. This does not mean the information is any less important to them.

- All videos should be closed captioned. YouTube and Facebook allow captioning, other social media outlets do not. An open captioned version of the video can be created by simply adding the text from closed captioning as graphics on the screen. If time does not allow creating a second version of the video, consider sharing a link to the video on YouTube or Facebook instead of posting the video directly to other social media platforms;
- Images should include text descriptions, both under the image and in the image's metadata;
- Podcast transcriptions shall be available on our website;
- Emojis are not accessible.

***Closed-captioning** is a transcription of a video that the user can turn on or off, based on their individual needs and/or desires. **Closed-captioning** can include several tracks, each in different languages, all user-selectable and defeatable.*

***Open-captioning** is a transcription of a video that the user can NOT turn off. It is permanently burned into the image and is not-changeable. Generally, **open-captioning** is available in a single language, and additional languages require different versions of the video.*

Crisis Communication

In the unfortunate event of an emergency situation on campus, it is crucial to everyone's safety to have a universal message, and central sources for that message.

For this reason, **we DO NOT create any messaging during a crisis, except in extreme and urgent situations.** Always consider personal safety first.

We defer all crisis communications to the Iowa State University Police Department and the Strategic Relations and Communications office.

In the event of an emergency situation on campus, we will actively **RETWEET and SHARE** content created from these official accounts, but we will not add or reformat any information of our own. We do not want to dilute the message in an emergency. We do not want our audience to actively engage with us, or come to us for up-to-the-minute information.

The quickest way for our audience to get the most current information in an emergency is for them to go straight to the source.

By not creating any content of our own, and not adding content to official information, we remove ourselves from the equation.

In the event we are the first to come across a message of conflict or crisis while performing our duties on social media, DO NOT RESPOND. Immediately report the content [to the proper authorities](#).

More Best Practices

- Be responsible – don't confuse your official accounts with your personal account, if possible, use a different device for personal and work accounts
- Review and follow the [campus guidelines for political activities on campus](#)
- At the very least, download a second app to separate work and personal use
- Items you like on social media can be seen by other users (See Figure 1)
- Steer clear of political subjects if possible
- Timing is important – check your analytics and see what day/time is popular among your audiences
- Be careful when scheduling posts in advance – don't schedule too far out, and if a crisis situation occurs, cancel any scheduled content
- Tag other campus accounts, like and share others' content – we are a team



Figure 1: This image shows what other Twitter users see when another user "likes" a tweet. In this instance, a user logged in under the Iowa State Lectures account inadvertently liked a tweet which was political in nature.

Conclusion

When used effectively, social media can be a very powerful tool to strengthen our bond with prospective students, current students, parents, faculty, staff, corporate partners and alums of the College of Engineering.

Social media can also be a lightning rod when used incorrectly. Following a few basic guidelines and using our own common sense can prevent most issues that may arise.

Knowing our guidelines for handling other non-ideal situations allows us to defuse many situations quickly, without incident.

Working together as a team, we can leverage our various social media accounts and platforms to be as effective as possible to increase the visibility of the wonderful stories we see on campus.

Appendix

Iowa State University policies that apply to social media use:

Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources

<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/ITacceptableuse>

Personal Use and Misuse of University Property

<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/policy/personaluse>

Email, university communications

<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/policy/email/>

Privacy: FERPA

<http://www.registrar.iastate.edu/info/ferpanotice.html>

Privacy: HIPAA

<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/policy/healthinfo/>

Student code of conduct

<http://policy.iastate.edu/policy/SDR>

Discrimination and harassment

<http://policy.iastate.edu/policy/discrimination/>

Faculty conduct policy

<http://www.provost.iastate.edu/resources/faculty-handbook> (chapter 7)