

Vernon College Social Media Guidelines and Practices

Introduction

Vernon College (VC) supports participation on social networks including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram as they provide the College community with an effective channel to share and exchange thoughts, ideas, news, events and experiences through discussions, postings, photos, videos and other content.

The Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) has developed the following guidelines to ensure the most effective use of social media for the College's external marketing and outreach efforts. Individual faculty or student pages are not covered by these guidelines; however, faculty/staff or student groups are advised to follow these guidelines if their social media presence could be construed as College-affiliated.

Because social media and Web communication tools are ever-changing, this will be a living document and may be adjusted to reflect issues that arise in the implementation and management of social media pages or changes in the medium. Feedback is a key component to ensuring that guidelines represent the best interests of the entire College. If you have any questions, comments, concerns or suggestions, please contact the Office of Institutional Advancement.

Social Media Guidelines

The official social media pages for Vernon College are maintained by OIA. They are:

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Vernon-College>

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/VernonCollege>

Individuals or departments wishing to contribute information or make suggestions for the main College pages should contact the Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations. Departments or groups that establish an online presence are solely responsible for content and regular maintenance of those pages.

Departments and Other VC Organizations

VC departments or other College organizational units wishing to develop a social media presence should contact the Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations before setting up pages or accounts. This will ensure appropriate steps are taken when developing a social media page/account. In cases where pages already exist, please contact the Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations and provide links to the page(s) with the name of the administrator(s) responsible for maintaining these pages. The Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations must also be made an administrator of each departmental or organizations page.

Responsible Parties: Online administrators should connect their department or organization page(s) with the official VC social media pages. For example, if the department or organization has a Twitter account, it must follow the official VC Twitter account.

Content Development: All content posted on College departmental or organizational social media outlets must relate directly to College business, programs and/or services. Content placed by site administrators must not promote individual opinions or causes that are not directly related to College purposes.

Photos and Videos: Uploaded photos and videos must relate directly to VC and will not be used as a promotional tool for programs, products or services outside the College. Administrators are asked to use their best judgement when posting pictures. If you are taking generic group photos inform the participants that these photos will be posted on social media and allow those not wanting to be in the photo to step out of the shot. Release forms must be signed by any student or other individual featured in photos or videos. (A best practice would be to have your students sign a form at the beginning of the each semester) All photo releases must be collected and kept by the social media site administrator. All photos and videos must adhere to existing College policies, copyright laws and the terms and conditions of the specific social media tool.

Release Forms: Can be found in the Photo Release Forms folder on the Vernon College (T) Drive.

Updating and Adding Content: All pages and social media tools must be maintained and kept as up-to-date as possible. Sometimes social media sites are created with the best of intentions only to be abandoned or allowed to go stale without any new content for long time periods. Such sites do a disservice not only to the College's reputation but also to your department or organization. Social media presences, sites and accounts not maintained or frequently updated will be recommended for closure by the Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations.

Rights and Responsibilities

VC respects First Amendment rights and embraces free speech values. Our goal is to encourage free speech on College-affiliated social networking pages as well as to promote community values and ideals.

In general, users should primarily adhere to the terms and conditions of the specific social media tools they are using. Even so, VC reserves the right, but assumes no obligation, to remove comments and block messages on Vernon College social media sites that are racist, sexist, abusive, profane, violent, obscene, spam, that advocate illegal activity, contain falsehoods or are wildly off-topic, or that libel, incite, threaten or attack VC students, employees, guests or other individuals. VC also reserves the right to remove postings or block messages selling products or promoting commercial or other unofficial ventures.

Social media administrators and content providers for the College should make every effort to make sure their sites and presences are free from spam, malicious or misleading links and information, or other content that deviates from the College's policies and mission. The Vernon College Technology Policy is located on pages 127-131 the Employee Handbook (<http://www.vernoncollege.edu/Resources/Human%20Resources/2015-16%20Employee%20Handbook.pdf>). Vernon College assumes no responsibility for any consequences resulting from external postings on its social media presences.

Most social networking sites establish guidelines regarding language, posting of pictures and videos, and various other topics. Be sure to read the guidelines carefully, follow them strictly, and report College users that violate any terms or conditions.

Reporting Concerns

Because social media sites are interactive tools, page administrators should monitor pages closely and frequently to supervise user conduct. Any questionable conduct can and should be reported to VC. Please contact the Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations if you have a concern about content posted on VC's social networking pages/accounts.

Social Media Best Practices

Effective use of social media requires constant attention. It's best to develop a strategy before you embark on any social media initiative representing a department or VC organization. The following steps will help you create your strategy.

1. Define Purpose and Goals

What are your goals? How does social media fit with your other communication efforts? While starting a social media endeavor is easy, maintaining a presence requires time, effort, and resources. Make sure you have a clear purpose before you begin. Think about how you are going to measure your efforts against your goals over time so you are able to determine your success.

2. Choose a Tool

While there are many ways to participate in social media, you should figure out which tools are best for you. Which will best serve to achieve your goals? Avoid committing to too many social media tools. It's better not to participate at all than to let a social media tool become poorly maintained. The best approach is to focus on one or two mainstream tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, and engage actively.

3. Consider Existing Options

Does the College participate in this social media site or tool already? If so, can you join forces with existing initiatives? Joint efforts are easier to sustain and also are more influential.

4. Commit Resources

How much time can you commit to social media efforts? How will you keep it active? And, do you have the resources? Assess the resource costs needed, and make sure you have the resources to commit to the initiative. It's better to do nothing than to establish an ambitious social media presence and engage only half-heartedly. Also, think about how long you can commit to your social media tools: will you leave the site up indefinitely, or is it a limited-time project? What is your exit strategy?

5. Assign Responsibilities

Who will "own" your social media presence? Who will perform regular updates, and who will be contributors? Although you may have multiple contributors from your department or program, one person should own the initiative and be responsible for day-to-day operations, monitoring interaction, responding to users, and adding new content. Consider assembling a team composed of a site owner, site editor, and contributors.

ALWAYS give more than one person access to your social media pages, even if it's just making sure they know the username and password. Sometimes staff members change jobs or leave the institution, and you don't want to lose the ability to update your pages when that happens!

Managing Content

Honesty and transparency are key components of social media interactions. Do not adopt a false persona online. When engaging in a dialogue on behalf of Vernon College, disclose your affiliation and role up front. Be mindful that all your contributions are public, so participate as you would in any other public setting.

Many of us make personal use of social media, such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, as private individuals rather than as spokespersons of the College. However, we may be identifiable as belonging to the College community: e.g., because of our "vernoncollege.edu" email address or as members of the "Vernon College" network on Facebook. While these guidelines are for those participating on social media sites on behalf of VC, the guidance is sound for the personal context as well, especially if you are visibly connected to the College in your social media presence.

Privacy Concerns

Remember that social media is public. When engaged in conversation with students, use caution when discussing their enrollment status, financial aid, class schedule or any other academic matters covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>. Always use the social media site's private-messaging function to talk to the student about their specific case. If no such function is available, then have the student contact you by email, phone, or private method other than social media.

Moderating Interaction

Social media sites allow users to post comments, photos, responses, and other content on pages. As administrator of these sites, consider removing posts or comments if they are:

- * Exceptions to freedom of speech. Remove posts that are defamatory or obscene, may cause panic, use fighting or threatening words, or incite criminal behavior.
- * Limited purpose violations. For sites with a limited purpose identified on the site, remove posts that are clearly unrelated to the subject of the page.
- * Violations of the social media site's terms of use or terms of conduct (e.g., Facebook Terms of Use, YouTube Community Guidelines). Remove posts that are in violation of the terms of use of the site host. Make sure you understand the terms of use of the host site so you can enforce them.

Responding to Negativity

Inevitably there will be posts that are negative and even offensive but do not warrant removal. In this case, respond as follows:

- * Respond immediately to correct misinformation.
- * Allow time for others to respond.
- * When appropriate, decide who should respond and craft a correct response (with fact checking and involvement as needed).