

# 8 Things You Should Know before Using Social Media in Your Course

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Planning to use social media in your upcoming course? It can be a great way to enhance social learning and improve engagement. There are a variety of available platforms, and many [creative ways that faculty are integrating social media](#) into their teaching practice.

When deciding to use social media for a classroom assignment, ask yourself how the digital medium will foster engagement and enhance learning outcomes. You also need to be aware of the implications of having students post content on *third-party services* (those not provided or hosted by your institution). Social media usage in the classroom intersects with both FERPA and Copyright Compliance, so keep this checklist handy as you develop your class activity.

## **Include details about the activity in your syllabus & course description.**

Clearly describe how social media will be used in your course description and syllabus so that students understand how they will be engaging with the public platforms before they enroll in your course. Asking students to visit public websites for assigned readings or to listen to podcasts is very different from asking them to publish their course work on Blogger or YouTube. If you decide to use social media and you don't outline the details from the beginning, be prepared to provide options for students who may not be willing to use the public platform.

## **Use contracts.**

Get written permission from students at the beginning of a course if they will be required to post to a public course blog or some other social media site. Even if they opt to use an alias, you should still have a contract in place that outlines how the student will be engaging with the public website. You may even want to include your own guidelines for usage of social media if your school or institution's policies don't meet all your needs.

### **Link to institutional policies.**

Include a link to your institution's digital media ethics policies in the syllabus and ensure that students have read and understand what they mean. If such policies don't exist, work with your department or school to develop guidelines. In my own research on this topic, I have observed that the creation of digital media policies tends to be decentralized in nature. Institutions create general social media policies, but then constituencies within the institution build upon those policies to create more discipline specific statements. [One such example](#) is schools in health sciences and medicine including a policy regarding patient privacy or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability ACT (HIPAA).

### **Use aliases for social media accounts.**

Encourage the use of aliases or pseudonyms to protect students' identity on social media sites. Ultimately, the student will decide whether to use an alias, but you can model using your own alias with an account that has been set up for the purpose of the course work.

### **Teach your students to use digital media responsibly.**

Incorporate learning outcomes into the curriculum that will prepare students to engage with social media in an academic and professional setting. Millennials know how to use social media for personal interactions, but they may not consider the consequences of publishing content without a filter. They may also not fully understand usage rights of the digital world. It is up to us to show them how to search for content that they can freely and legally use for their assignments. At the same time, they should understand how [Creative Commons](#) licenses can be used for their own intellectual property that they will post on the Web.

### **Know where to provide assignment feedback.**

Provide feedback to students through the learning management system, not the social media site. As [Perry Drake](#) points out, “When using Twitter, Facebook, or other social platforms, never reveal information about students that might indicate their grades, course enrollments, class schedules, and so on. Doing so could be noted as a FERPA violation if called out by the student.”

### **Don't use personal accounts for university business.**

This suggestion might seem really obvious, but I have seen student coursework on YouTube that was linked to a university website. What happens if that student decides to remove the video or add other questionable content to her YouTube channel? What if her account gets hacked? The institution does not have control over what the student will do with the personal account. It's best to use the institution's YouTube channel for showcasing student work.

### **Understand the Terms of Service.**

Review the Terms of Service for the social media platform before you commit to using it in your course. It is important to understand that even if you choose to have a “closed” space on a particular platform, there may still be risks regarding security and privacy. Also always have a “Plan B” in place in case there is an issue with continued availability of service. What if you can’t access student work because the site is down? Have students been trained to keep back-up, offline copies of their work?

Still need to enhance your own knowledge of social media, copyright and open source content before using it in the classroom? Have you considered OLC’s [Social Media Mastery Series](#)? This program will guide you through the process of evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant research and legal issues related to social media in education. You will also share strategies with colleagues as you develop your own plan to effectively incorporate social media into your teaching practice. There is still time to register! The next cohort begins on May 3, 2017.

### **Sources**

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