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Office of Land-Grant Communications

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School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences Rules and Guidelines: Social Media Policy

Social media has changed the way we communicate, both as an institution and as individuals. With tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, blogs, etc., anyone with an Internet connection now has the ability to create a dynamic Web presence, update it from wherever they are whenever they want, and share their content instantly with friends and followers around the world.

Social media has given Alcorn State University and our various departments the opportunity to use technology to network with a number of current and future students, faculty and staff, parents, alumni, donors and supporters, etc. The field of social media continues to grow, and because of this, it is imperative that we understand how to correctly and appropriately use social media to create strong relationships, share information, advance knowledge, raise awareness, build support, participate in important conversations and collaborate on new ideas.

Alcorn State supports the use of social media by departments and units in the course of their work to connect with students, fellow faculty and staff, alumni, fans, colleagues, and more, sharing the sense of community present on campus with a much broader array of people. However, keep in mind that social media should only serve to supplement and not replace the official channels of communicating with your audiences. This document is designed to provide guidance, advice, and tips on how to do so safely, effectively, and within the University guidelines.

This policy establishes the criteria and procedure for creating a University presence or participation on social media sites on behalf of the University. It also offers “best practices” for the successful management of these endeavors.

University presence or participation on social media sites is defined as: 1) Media sites established by the University on University-owned domains; 2) Accounts on external sites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc., on behalf of the University; and 3) Personal accounts on external sites that are approved for use or participation by University employees as part of their job duties.

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This policy applies to faculty and staff, including student employees, who engage in social media for work-related purposes or who are asked by supervisors to use or participate in social media as part of his or her job responsibilities.

Things to Consider Before Engaging in Social Media

Creating a successful social media page requires careful planning and resource allocation. Before you begin to use social media on behalf of Alcorn State University, please remember the following:

Keep in mind other Alcorn State University policies:

This document does not affect other University policies that might apply to use of social media, including (but not limited to) the Harassment Policy, Computer Use Policy, Workplace Violence Policy and University Web Policy. If your use of social media would violate any of the Institution's policies in another forum, it will also violate them in an online forum.

Get necessary approval

Before starting a social media site for your academic department, or Ag unit, make sure you have approval from the Division of Media Relations. Only authorized Alcorn State University employees may be a "content owner" or "administrator" for university social media websites. Social media accounts that are being set up to represent an overall School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences "voice" or initiative must first be approved through Division of Media Relations.

Approval Process

All Alcorn-related social media initiatives must first be approved by the proper authorities. Submit an explanation of the proposed social media initiative to the Director of Media and Communications, School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences.

The following questions shall be considered when there is a request to establish a University-hosted social media site and to participate in Internet discussions via social media on behalf of the University:

- Will the site be used in such a manner that positively supports the institution's values, mission and goals?
- Can engagement with the audience add value to both the University and the audience?
- Is the approach as effective or efficient as other approaches that might be used (i.e. would an existing initiative or the University's main website accomplish the same goals)?
- Does the use of social media enable the University to offer services it might not otherwise be able to offer or enhance current services?
- Do sufficient resources exist to appropriately manage the platform?
 - At least two faculty or staff members shall be designated to monitor the medium, identify problems that emerge and take action when necessary. Having multiple content owners or administrators at all times for every social media application will ensure that the application can continue to thrive and be updated regularly even if one of the existing administrators changes jobs or leaves the University.

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Prepare for the necessary time commitment

A social media site will only be effective if the administrators take the necessary time to generate interesting and interactive content and build relationships with the online community. A channel that lies dormant can be worse than no channel at all. Keep the page fresh, posting at least twice per week, but not so frequently that you will fill up users' timelines. Posts should be brief and end with a link to content on the Universities' website when possible. Keep in mind that the overall goal is engagement. Be sure to share other relevant Alcorn State content, thank people for re-tweets (when appropriate), initiate and join discussions

- Pages shall be updated on an ongoing basis by the department or unit that created them.
- Establish a process to enable rapid response to any problems that may arise.
- Ensure an engaging, interesting environment for visitors. To be effective, pages must be dynamic and will require updating frequently.
- The approved faculty or staff member shall continuously monitor the social media platform, identify problems that emerge and take action when necessary.
- The Division of Media Relations is charged with the responsibility to monitor social media initiatives, counsel those who represent the University online on adherence to these policies, and take action to restrict or remove an employee's ability to publish should efforts to correct the situation fail.

Use of the University Brand

Any use of University marks, such as logos and graphics, shall comply with the *Alcorn State Brand and Graphic Identity* policies of the Division of Media Relations. Please use official logos and graphics that represent and adhere to the University's guidelines. Don't use the Alcorn name for endorsements. Do not use logos, word marks, or any other brand's artifacts for personal use on social media. If you choose to promote a product, cause, political party or candidate on social media sites, do so via your own, personal account.

- Alcorn State University does not monitor the personal social media sites of its employees; however, the University reserves the right to review any site or activity deemed as potentially in violation of the guidelines listed here where the University is in any way affiliated. On personal sites, identify your views as your own. If you identify yourself as an Alcorn State faculty or staff member online, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the institution. Ensure that your personal social media sites contain content that is appropriate.

Make it easy for people to find your site

To maximize exposure and participation with your social media site you will want to make it as easy as possible for people to find it when searching online. A couple of suggestions on how to do this:

1. Please ensure that Alcorn State University is listed prior to your department, program, office, or Ag unit's title.
2. Try to avoid only using acronyms when naming your site.

Raising money via social networks

Charitable contributions to or on behalf of any organization whose mission is to support Alcorn State University, cannot be solicited, nor can they be accepted, unless approved in advance by the Division of Media Relations.

Posting on Behalf of Alcorn State University

Sharing Alcorn State news, events or promoting faculty, staff and student work through social media is an effective and low-cost way to engage various audiences of the University. In addition to the general guidelines discussed above, employees creating or posting on social media sites on behalf of Alcorn State should remember to:

Be Accurate

Make sure you have all the facts before you post. All research, data reporting and analysis made public on the Web should be verified for accuracy. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible. That is how you build the trust of your community.

Realize your posts are public

Remember your audience. Your online presence is available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, colleagues, alumni and other stakeholders. Consider this in content selection before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm or provoke any of these groups. If you have any questions about the appropriateness of the material you are posting to a University social media site, please check with your supervisor.

Keep confidential matters private

Do not post proprietary information about Alcorn State University, including information about students, alumni or employees. Remember that most records related to students are protected from disclosure under the federal law known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Disclosing any personally identifiable student education records through social media sites is a violation of FERPA. Information collected in connection with research may be protected under a Nondisclosure Agreement, research protocol or other applicable law or agreement. Any protected information must not be disclosed through social media.

Be transparent

If you are posting as a representative of Alcorn State University, your posts are viewed as representing the views of Alcorn State University, so make sure to post responsibly and with respect to others in your community. Your posts directly reflect upon the University.

Responding to negative comments

When you find yourself disagreeing with others, keep your comments appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a position where the communication becomes antagonistic, avoid being defensive. Please be respectful of other people's opinions. Do not publish content containing slurs, personal insults or attacks, profanity or obscenity, and do not engage in any conduct on a social media site that would not be acceptable in Alcorn State University workplaces or classrooms.

If an employee is involved in an online altercation where disciplinary action seems necessary, Office of Human Resources shall be consulted and will determine an appropriate course of action for staff members. For faculty, the appropriate dean or the provost shall be contacted and will determine an appropriate course of action.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

If you receive a question you cannot answer forward the question to the proper authority. If you see incorrect information about Alcorn State University, contact the Division of Media Relations at 601. 877. 6130 for assistance. Also contact, the Director of Media and Communications at 601.877.2306 if you are having trouble creating or monitoring your social media site.

Best Practices

- Protect confidential and proprietary information: Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Alcorn State, students, employees or alumni. Employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination. Employees must adhere to state and federal laws related to security and privacy information (e.g. FERPA and HIPAA).
- Encourage comments from followers of your social media platform, but monitor interaction to ensure that discussion does not attack individuals or entities, does not use offensive language and is not threatening. Reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments from users.
- Respect copyright and fair use: Be mindful of the copyright and intellectual property rights of others and of the University. General information about copyright laws can be found on the U.S. Copyright Office website at <http://copyright.gov/>.
- Have a plan: Users should consider their messages, audiences and goals, as well as a strategy for keeping information on social media sites up-to-date. A Division of Media Relations staff person can assist and advise you with your social media planning.
- Link back to the University: Whenever possible, link back to the University website. Ideally, posts should be brief and redirect a visitor to content that resides within the main website. When linking to a news article about Alcorn State, check with the proper authorities first.
- Do not use any University logos or other images, or iconography on personal social media sites.
- Do not use the University's name to promote a product, cause, or political party or candidate.
- Strive for accuracy: Get the facts straight before posting them on social media.
- Review content for grammatical and spelling errors: This is especially important if posting on behalf of the University in any capacity.
- Be respectful: Understand that content contributed to a social media site could encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. Responses should be considered carefully in light of how they could reflect on the University and its institutional voice.

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- Remember your audience: Be aware that a presence on social media is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, current employees, colleagues, and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm or provoke any of these groups.
- Terms of service: Obey the Terms of Service of any social media platform employed.

An Overview of Social Networking Sites:

Facebook: An online social networking service in which “Pages” representing individuals, businesses, organizations and brands share their story, interacting with an audience of “Friends.” Viewers may “like” or comment to support a status.

Twitter: A real-time information network that connects the user to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news in a “Tweet” of 140 characters or less.

Instagram: A fun way to share and experience moments as they happen with the Alcorn community through a series of pictures, videos and captions.

YouTube: A social platform that allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small.

Blogs: A website (such as Tumblr) on which an individual or group of users record opinions, information, etc., typically in the form of a short article.

LinkedIn: A business-oriented social networking site encouraging brand awareness, development of professional identity, professional opportunities, business deals, as well as new ventures.

Pinterest: A content sharing service that allows members to "pin" images, videos and other objects to a virtual bulletin board. Users can create an unlimited amount of boards, each on a different topic.

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