Provisional Guidelines for the Instructional Use of Social Media at USM
October 17, 2011

Introduction
While social media tools like Facebook, blogging tools, and wikis offer exciting possibilities for teaching and learning, the public nature of social media affects their potential for educational use. Accordingly, this document provides guidelines for best practices in the appropriate use of social media and lists considerations instructors should take into account in adopting them for educational use at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Best practices
First and foremost, instructors need to be aware that many social media tools are offered within the “protected” environment provided via university-recognized means. Current university-recognized software applications include Blackboard, the university course management system through Eagle Learning Online, Turnitin, the university’s academic plagiarism detector, and web-based course materials, such as MyMathLab. Blackboard offers blogs, wikis and other collaborative tools, including email and interactive class or group sessions. In addition, the Blackboard announcement tool provides another mechanism for communication with students. Both Turnitin and MyMathLab offer student discussion boards and safe ways for students to submit assignments. Whenever possible, instructors should use the social media tools offered within university-recognized modalities as opposed to those offered by sites external to the university. (For more information about the potential offered through Blackboard, contact the Learning Enhancement Center at http://www.usm.edu/lec. For more information about Turnitin, please see http://www.usm.edu/ie/turnitin.html or contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.)

In addition to Blackboard, the other appropriate avenue for electronic communication of official class information between instructors and individual students is email, with instructors expected to use their @usm.edu addresses.

Faculty members also need to be aware that Blackboard and other university-sanctioned course tools provide mechanisms for archiving course content, whereas such is not necessarily the case with social media tools.

For instructors who choose to use external social media sites, however, some suggested best practices are as follows:

- Social media can be appropriate for one-way communication from instructor to students with information related to course content, but not related to individual information about students nor course-specific requirements.
- Social media such as blogs outside of Blackboard may be an appropriate means to deliver optional non-essential readings, links, etc., to students.
• Communication with students through social media should be limited to educational purposes only. While students often seek out instructors for advice or help concerning non-course issues –i.e., adjustment to college, homesickness, etc. - social media’s public nature makes it inappropriate for any communication on any subject demanding privacy.
  o Any communiqué distributed through a social media tool that pertains to a course requirement should only duplicate a message distributed through a USM-affiliated e-mail or announcement posting within Blackboard to insure that all registered students are appropriately notified.
• Faculty should keep in mind that not all students will have a familiarity with “standard” social media tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.). An orientation or training opportunity/module prepared by the faculty member may be needed within the course structure.
• If an instructor will require use of social media in a course, the instructor should stipulate such in the course syllabus and be prepared to support the selected tool.
• If an assignment must be submitted through a social media site, that site should be password protected or otherwise not open to the public.
  o As pointed out elsewhere, instructors are encouraged to utilize the assignment submission capabilities of university-sanctioned tools wherever possible.
• Although it may be appropriate for students to post material online, faculty should remind students that material on websites and social media sites is public and may not be covered by copyright law. Students who are reluctant to surrender their copyright should be given an alternative means to completing the assignment.
• Remember that social media sites and other third-party providers of data storage have no obligation to preserve the data and are subject to hacking, delays, or service interruptions. Frequently back up any course data, and take care not to post any information that would compromise a student’s confidentiality.
• Instructors and students should delete course-related content from social media sites at the conclusion of the course. Instructors are encouraged to archive such content before deleting.

Instructor use of social media services for non-educational purposes should be consistent with overall university guidelines and employee policies.

Facebook – an example, with implications for Google+ and beyond
Given the wealth of personal information subscribers may post to Facebook, the platform offers special challenges to instructors in their dealings with students.
Some best practices for this service (one that could serve as an example for other current and perhaps future social media tools) are as follows.

- Since privacy controls on Facebook can be changed with no notice by the service, instructors are discouraged from posting any information about themselves that they do not want students to know. Instructors should take special care in posting photographs or status updates that reflect ill on them or of the university.
- Carefully consider whether to “friend” students on Facebook. Some instructors choose not to friend students at all; others choose to accept student friend requests but not to extend them; still others set up separate Facebook accounts for their professional and personal lives.
- Instructors should remain mindful of maintaining a professional relationship with students and of the hazards posed by Facebook in maintaining these professional boundaries. Accordingly, instructors should exercise caution in commenting upon students’ status updates, pictures, or other Facebook postings. Such postings are, after all, public.
- Instructors’ roles as mentors place upon them a greater burden for maintaining standards of respectfulness in all dealings with students.

Privacy and Intellectual Property Considerations
1. The use of social media tools for instructional purposes must comply with existing university requirements, policies and guidelines. Compliance includes, but is not limited to HIPAA, FERPA and ADA requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Records &amp; Personally Identifiable Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>In compliance with privacy laws under FERPA, the following information about students must never be communicated via a social media site’s networking tools:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Grades or test scores</td>
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<td>• Financial aid status</td>
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<tr>
<td>• EmplID (PeopleSoft)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Religious Preference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disability or health status</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Class schedule, including locations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Residency Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Financial obligations owed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Academic standing or GPA</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Social Security number</td>
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<td>• Marital status</td>
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<td>• Veteran status</td>
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Directory Information

Though subject to public disclosure in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, best practices suggest that the following information should not be shared on via social media used for instructional purposes:

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<th>• Student's Name</th>
<th>• Student mailing address</th>
<th>• Telephone number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• E-mail Address</td>
<td>• Major</td>
<td>• Dates of Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classification</td>
<td>• Degree(s) Earned</td>
<td>• Previous Institutions Attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weight and height of athletic team member</td>
<td>• Honors and awards</td>
<td>Student's photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dean's/President's List</td>
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- Students should not be required to post any personal information online.
- Instructors should obtain written permission of use prior to posting any photographic or video images or voice recordings of students.
- Instructors should consistently monitor any social media sites utilized for instructional purposes within their course(s) and promptly remove posts that compromise confidential information.
- A general operating principle in the use of social media within courses is “Respect the privacy of the students.” In addition, faculty should be responsive to student concerns about privacy issues derived from the instructional use of social media. For more information about meeting FERPA requirements in particular, see http://www.usm.edu/registrar/ferpa/index.php
- The use of social media tools must meet ADA accessibility requirements. Instructors are invited to contact the Office of Disability Accommodations (http://www.usm.edu/oda/index.php) with any questions concerning accessibility issues in the instructional use of social media tools.

2. USM faculty should respect copyright and intellectual property rights in their use of social media for instructional purposes. Likewise, faculty should be aware of terms of use that may entail the utilization of information from a social media site beyond the scope of its immediate application within a course.
- Faculty should provide proper citations and, where necessary, obtain the necessary permissions to use or reproduce copyrighted content.
- Instructors should be aware that third-party services often assume ownership or property rights to republish any material posted on their
sites. These rights are routinely asserted in terms of use agreements demanded of users. Accordingly, materials that are sensitive or subject to copyright should not be published to a social network. Faculty should read and be aware of the legal stipulations of these agreements, typically listed the sites under the labels “Terms of Use,” “End User License Agreements” (EULAs), or a “Statement of Rights and Responsibilities.” Often users are tacitly agreeing to terms of such agreements, which are subject to change at any time, simply by signing on to a social network.

- Although it may be appropriate for students to post material online, faculty should remind students that material on websites and social media sites is public and may not be covered by copyright law. Students who are reluctant to surrender their copyright should be given an alternative means to completing the assignment.

**Acknowledgements**

Media-use guidelines from the College of Central Florida and Southeastern Missouri State University were consulted in drafting these guidelines. Many of the suggestions contained here are adapted from these institutions.

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**Proposed Process**

These guidelines are to remain provisional during the Fall 2011 Semester. During the semester they will be distributed to the university community for comment.

**Ad Hoc Committee on the Instructional Use of Social Media**

Colin Colburn – Graduate Student Senate/History
Dave Davies – Honors College/Mass Communication & Journalism
Andrew Hayley – History
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