INTRODUCTION

Social media is one of many important communication methods. The University of Southern Mississippi utilizes to engage with the campus community. This channel, unlike most others, provides instantaneous, two-way communication access to prospective students, current students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents of current and prospective students, media and other audiences. Additionally, social media allows the University to share information, raise awareness of our mission and values, build support and engage the University community.

These social media guidelines have been created to provide helpful direction to areas of the University interested in using social media as a tool for marketing, public relations, crisis communication and student relations purposes.

PRIMARY UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

There are an abundance of social media channels available—and more being created every day. The Office of University Communications strategically makes decisions to pursue only these platforms that meet criteria related to popularity among our audiences, channel success and growth rate, communication need and resource availability.

Facebook (facebook.com)
www.facebook.com/usm.edu | https://www.facebook.com/SouthernMissGulfPark
Facebook allows people and organizations to connect through establishing an online community. As of September 2015, Facebook had more than 4 billion monthly active users.

Twitter (twitter.com)
@SouthernMiss | @SouthernMissNow | @USMGulfPark
Twitter is a social media channel that allows users to connect and discover the latest news, ideas and opinions in 140 characters or less. Companies use Twitter to connect to their audiences in real time.

Instagram (instagram.com)
@OfficialSouthernMiss | @USMGulfPark
Instagram is a photo and video sharing mobile app with a community of 400 million monthly active users, with 90% of users under the age of 35.

LinkedIn (linkedin.com)
https://www.linkedin.com/edu/school?id=18750
LinkedIn is the largest professional network on the web. It has more than 400 million members worldwide, and more than three million businesses have LinkedIn pages. In 2013, LinkedIn also launched university pages.
MANAGING ACCOUNTS

Each social media account needs a coordinator to manage the content and monitor engagement. This person should be able to create regular updates and respond to feedback/questions from users who seek to contact the University through that specific social media platform.

Areas of the University with previously established social media accounts may need to review whether the accounts are necessary. Before creating an account for your office, department, etc., you are encouraged to evaluate whether social media can work as an integral tool to meet your unit’s communication goals and objectives, the needs of your audiences, and if content creation and maintenance will be feasible. Accounts that have been inactive for three or more months and/or accounts with very few followers and little engagement should most likely be closed. Some areas of the University may find that the primary University accounts administered by the Office of University Communications can assist in posting information and updates as needed on behalf of your area.

For social media platforms that are instrumental in providing public relations- and marketing-type support to various areas of the University, account coordinators should observe the guidelines below.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

THE UNIVERSITY BRAND

Visual Identity
It is important that the account coordinators follow The University of Southern Mississippi’s graphic standards manual to ensure the University maintains a strong, unified visual identity online. This includes using logos and/or text for avatars, thumbnails and other photos. To avoid confusion, the stand-alone dome icon should be reserved for use on the University’s primary social media accounts. Images for backgrounds, avatars and covers should be in good taste and representative of Southern Miss. The Office of University Communications can provide guidance and assistance with the creation of images for your social media platforms.

Official University Accounts
Social media accounts that are University-driven should include signifiers that clearly designate the page, handle, channel, etc., as an official channel of the University. Including this information in the “About” section of your channel, using the University logo when applicable, and including links to the University’s websites or other University-driven social media accounts will help convey this image.

When applicable, the following information can be listed: A short message such as, “Welcome to The University of Southern Mississippi’s official Facebook page for ________” with the name of the college, department, office or area of the University included in the blank.
Additionally, a page disclaimer can be incorporated. The University’s primary Facebook page uses the following statement, which can be adopted by other areas of the University, “Disclaimer: While we welcome all feedback, comments will be moderated so please be respectful of comments posted by others and refrain from hate speech or profanity.”

Potential Links to Include

- Alumni Association: www.southernmissalumni.com
- Athletics: www.southernmiss.com
- Emergency Updates: www.southernmiss.info
- News: www.usm.edu/news
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/southernmiss

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Account- and User-generated Posts
Account coordinators should be mindful that all content posted on University-driven social media accounts is reflective of Southern Miss. If you make a mistake, admit it and move forward with a simple update such as “Correction:” or “Update:” followed by the updated, correct information; your followers will be more likely to forgive and move forward as well if you are forthcoming and honest. Never post content that contains profanity, hate speech, personal attacks against others or slurs. In situations where an audience member makes a questionable post on a University-driven social media account, care should be taken to respond appropriately. Please refer to the Southern Miss Social Media Decision Tree for more guidance. University Communications recommends that you do not delete a user comment just because it is negative, but delete it only if users are using hate speech or profanity. Account coordinators should try to resolve the problem by responding to posts when possible and appropriate. It is acceptable to delete posts that involve political endorsements or banter, advertisements and spam.

University News/Announcements
University Communications recommends that major University announcements not be leaked through social media. This includes situations where the University is waiting to officially release information to the public and members of the media at a press conference. Pay close attention to the information released by the Office of University Communications in the University’s mailout to faculty, staff and students, on the home page of the website and the primary social media accounts when there is major University news to be released. Please use caution before posting “breaking news” to your social media accounts or speculating on big announcements that do not have details included in official University correspondence.
Attribution
Copyright and fair use laws should be followed; as with any other communication vehicle, account coordinators should not plagiarize. Attribute sources by linking to the website where the original content was generated, noting the author.

Faculty/Staff/Student Interaction
A Committee on the Instructional Use of Social Media at the University has established social media guidelines for faculty and staff to use for interactions with University of Southern Mississippi students. All employees of Southern Miss are urged to familiarize themselves with these policies, which can be found on the Institutional Policies webpage (www.usm.edu/institutional-policies/020109-social-media-provisional-guidelines) and on SOAR.

Privacy
In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and student privacy policies, personal information of University of Southern Mississippi students should never be disclosed. Care should also be taken not to compromise the privacy of the University’s faculty and staff members.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Facebook Pages/Profiles/Groups
Companies and organizations should have a Facebook page, not a Facebook profile. Facebook’s policies note that profiles are meant for individuals while pages are for businesses and organizations. Groups allow individuals to share information, photos, updates, etc., privately or publicly and work well for those seeking to share content among a smaller group of people. These are recommended for situations with a small audience such as groups of students who are seeking to create small alumni groups to keep in touch or similar instances.

Tracking
Take advantage of free metrics and tracking capabilities that are available. This will help you become more educated on your audience’s interests. Facebook has built-in metrics that page administrators can access. Other helpful tracking sites include bitly.com, goo.gl, hootsuite.com and many others. The Office of University Communications uses goo.gl and Sprout Social, which charges a monthly fee to manage several accounts in one platform. If account coordinators need assistance with establishing metrics for their accounts, please contact University Communications.