

Recommendations for using Social Media in the Classroom

Helen Garrett, University Registrar; Tara Coffin & Janice Fournier, UW Information Technology

Social media lends itself to a multitude of applications in the academic setting. More students than ever are engaging with their peers, seeking information, and reaching out for academic support over social media. For instructors interested in integrating social media into their courses, we offer the following suggestions.

Prepare

Review social media privacy settings. Students and instructors may be unfamiliar with social media privacy settings. Review these settings before the start of the course and be prepared to answer student questions.

Be transparent about the use of social media in the classroom. Set clear expectations about the use of social media in the course description and syllabus. Ensure that students know how social media will be used in the classroom setting prior to enrollment. Include this information in course requirements and suggest any alternatives that may meet these requirements.

Provide an option to opt out. If students are required to use social media in the course, or for a specific assignment, provide an easily accessible alternative for students who do not want, or are not able, to use social media, such as an alternative assignment or accommodation. Students who don't want to use their personal account may consider using a course-specific social media account.

Stay up-to-date. Social media features, privacy settings, and student behaviors in relation to social media change frequently. Keep this ever-evolving environment in mind during course planning.

In Practice

Get students thinking about social media and their privacy. Encourage students to review their privacy settings frequently and to adjust as appropriate. Students should be familiar with how their content is shared and who has access to it.

Be responsive to student preferences and needs. Don't assume all students are familiar with social media or have the needed hardware to access it in your class. Assess student preferences, knowledge of and comfort with social media. Consider making a change to how social media is used in the classroom, and be prepared to connect students to the resources they need to fully participate in your course.

Protect information. Instructors should take care not to reveal any personal data about students in their use of social media, including posting images or recordings that may identify students.

Let students initiate contact requests. Students should be the ones to initiate any friend requests or contact over social media. As an instructor, you should never initiate a one-on-one social conversation with a student over social media.

Take care with responses to students. If a student initiates social dialogue over social media, it is not considered part of the educational record, but it is still important to respond with care.

