FACULTY GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media's popularity, and the numerous opportunities it provides for communications, means that many academics are using it for both personal and professional applications. Unlike employees in many other job-sectors, however, faculty members are seen as closely tied to the university with which they are employed and that means that drawing a clear boundary between their personal and professional presence on social media becomes that much more difficult – if not impossible - to achieve.

Mount Royal provides guidelines for the use of social media, but these are specifically intended for any person who is using social media as an official spokesperson for the University. The guidelines do not extend into personal use of social media, and do not limit the Academic Freedom rights of academic staff members under the Collective Agreement..

Having said that, when you are active on social media people may associate you with Mount Royal; it is, therefore, necessary to use good judgement and follow best practices when posting on social media.

With this in mind, this document is being provided to MRFA members to assist them in using social media. This document is provided without prejudice. It is not a formal nor approved set of guidelines, nor is it to be considered legal advice; rather, it provides tips and points of consideration which faculty should be aware of when engaging in Social Media.

Use disclaimers but be forewarned

It is common practice for employees post a disclaimer on their personal social media such as, "The opinions expressed here are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer" or "This (media) is for my own personal and recreational use. Posts to this (media) do not reflect the views of my employer". Some users are also starting to add to their Twitter pages, "Retweeting does not necessarily reflect my endorsement of the views expressed in the tweet". Wording can vary but the idea remains the same.

Using disclaimers, though, is not without its problems:

- Disclaimers can provide a false sense of security that you will not be held accountable for the communications present on your personal social media.
- Many viewers of social media do not take notice of the presence of disclaimers.
- On some social media platforms (Facebook, for instance) it is difficult to anchor a disclaimer in a place where it will always be visible.
- Disclaimers cannot prevent actions being taken against you if you violate (even mistakenly) certain laws, codes or policies.

Since disclaimers do not necessarily serve their intended purpose it is important to engage in social media in a mindful way.

Social Media Best Practices

Ensure that you are not portraying yourself as representing Mount Royal:

- Avoid use of the university name, logos or insignia. The use of these are governed by MRU's Style Guide (available on MyMRU).
- Direct comments or queries about department, program or university matters to the appropriate official channel. This may include directing queries to Chairs or Deans or even asking students to move a conversation over to a place where you wear your "official" capacity as an MRU Employee, for example via @mtroyal.ca email or your office hours.
- Avoid engaging with the media on matters connected to Mount Royal if you are contacted via your personal social media. Members of the press will assume that your opinion reflects an "MRU" viewpoint. Direct media representatives to the appropriate official spokesperson. If you are in doubt about how to direct a query, Contact the MRFA for information.

Reminder: The above applies to your personal social media applications and platforms. If you are in charge of social media in an official capacity, please see Mount Royal's Social Networking Guidelines

Protect privacy (yours and others'):

A little extra consideration about how public you make yourself, as well as how private or confidential items you share or post might be, is well worth your time. While items posted in error can frequently be retracted in some way, **it is virtually impossible to completely erase their presence on the Internet once they have been posted. The likelihood that retracted items have already been archived, shared or downloaded is quite high.** For that reason, it is recommended that you:

- Take some time to look at your privacy settings and be thoughtful about to what extent you would like to control who sees your social media and how it will be used. However, regardless of how secure your privacy settings seem to be, the settings of those in your network may be entirely different. Note that platforms such as Facebook default to public settings, unless manually changed by the user.

- Be mindful of the fact that not every "like", "friend" or "follower" is beneficial to you or to your reputation.
- Never post confidential or proprietary information about Mount Royal or any person affiliated with Mount Royal – colleagues, staff, students or alumni.
- Be aware of MRU's policies on Acceptable Use Policy for Mount Royal Computer Resources, Code of Conduct, and Conflict of Interest, as well as Copyright legislation and Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation.
- Be aware of any additional parameters set out by your professions' Codes of Conduct or Ethics.

Be honest and accurate:

The rules on social media are very similar to the ones we follow in the classroom. Don't be afraid to respond to queries sent to you with a "Let me get back to you" or "I don't know". If you need to, take the time to learn what you need to learn before walking into unfamiliar territory. Your social media reputation will flourish if your readers/followers know that you do your homework before providing answers or making statements.

Give credit where credit is due:

Upholding an online reputation relies on acknowledging authorship and ownership when you pass information along. On Twitter, try to use RT (retweet) in order to make references clear. On Facebook, use "share" as opposed to cutting and pasting. It goes without saying that, following the rules of copyright, permission, Intellectual Property rights, and fair dealing should be a priority when creating your posts and/or using images. More information on Copyright at MRU is available [online](#) and members with specific inquiries can contact MRU's Copyright Advisor at mrucopyright@mtroyal.ca.

Be a Respectful Communicator:

Freedom of expression, freedom of inquiry and academic freedom are pillars upon which robust and productive intellectual encounters rest. The speed of social media, however, as well as its conversational format, can occasionally lead to misunderstandings between people. Additionally, written communications do not allow for the visual cues that will alert readers to things like tone or intention of a particular remark.

To engage in social media is to leave yourself open to reading posts that may be negative in some way – whether about you, your profession or your university.

Take a breath when reading and responding to electronic communications. Negative posts are opportunities for well-reasoned responses to correct misinformation or to open up fruitful debate. If you're on social media, you are agreeing to be a part of a dialogue. Some conversations are easier than others**.**

One of the negative aspects of maintaining a social media presence is that the arm's-length distance of communication can sometimes provide the opportunity for bullying or harassing behaviors. Occasionally, even threats of physical violence can occur.

A [recent study out of the U.S](#) discusses the increase in reports of such incidents specifically between professionals in higher education (King & Piotrowski, 2015). Another [study out of Simon Fraser University](#), notes that this is an especially difficult issue to unravel because the university setting is one in which an individual's right to be free from harassment is held in constant tension with the principle of upholding individuals' rights to freedom of expression (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2015).

If it is difficult for faculty to separate their personal from professional selves in social media, so too is it difficult for faculty to assess when the line has been crossed between social media responses that are engagements in critical debate and responses that seem to be bullying or harassing. In many cases, this line is one that is unique to every user of social media.

> ## If you receive responses that you feel are inappropriate, you have options:

- **Ignore Them.** The goal of social media agitators (trolls) is to elicit a response and, frequently, trolls move on if they are ignored for long enough.

- **Mute Them.** If you're tired of seeing what someone is saying about you on Twitter, mute them. They are not notified that they have been muted. If you believe their commentary may be escalating to something harassing, you may ask a friend or colleague to check your social media on your behalf.

- **Block Them.** Most social media platforms allow you to selectively prevent others from following you, seeing your posts, or commenting on your content. Unlike "muting" someone on Twitter, however, users are typically notified that they have been blocked.

- **Respond to Them.** If someone is sharing misinformation about you or your work, it may be wise to attempt to set the record straight with a response. If you choose to do this:
    - **Stick to facts that are not open to interpretation.**
    - **Keep responses brief and concise.**
    - **Correct inaccuracies.**
    - **Maintain your dignity: be polite, professional and unemotional.**
    - **If you are ever in doubt if you should post or what you should post, err on the side of caution. Taking no action/making no response is sometimes the best decision.**
    - **Resist "fighting fire with fire": responding in a defensive or combative way will only bolster most trolls' ambitions.**
    - **Remember that trolls are not interested in rational or open-minded conversations. If you choose to respond, do so briefly and calmly and then move on and leave them behind.**

- **Record Them.** If you begin to feel that posts or messages are reaching a level that constitutes bullying or harassing behavior, and **always** if any post or message threatens you in any way, keep a record of all posts you have received. Take and save screen shots of posts in case you need to report the behavior to the university, to legal counsel, or even to the police.

- **Report Them.** There are a number of avenues you can pursue if you need to report the presence of inappropriate responses on your social media. You can, as appropriate, choose to report to: the Chair or Program Co-ordinator of your department/ program, the Concerning Behaviour on Campus Committee if appropriate, or the Calgary Police (in the case of threats of violence). If you are unsure of how to proceed don't hesitate to ask for help. The MRFA can put you in touch with the services / offices needed to help you to create a safety plan if you feel that you are in danger. We can also act as an advocate for you if you think it would be helpful.