

## **University of Illinois College of Medicine Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices**

The University of Illinois College of Medicine acknowledges existing University of Illinois “[Guiding Principles](#)” of free speech and academic freedom, as well as UIC’s “[Open Expression Policies and Procedures](#).” We affirm those principles, policies, and procedures in all venues. We urge UI COM students to review these documents and familiarize themselves with their rights as students and UI COM community members.

In addition, the College acknowledges that students may use social media to, among other things, build networks of like-minded people, stay connected, and share knowledge and information.

In the following guidelines on digital professionalism, the College reminds students of their special professional obligations regarding social media<sup>1</sup> and other publicly accessible online communications. We offer the following supplemental best practices and guidelines for these professional communications. These apply to the use of all internet- and mobile-based tools involving user-generated content (text, images, or sounds) and interaction, and electronic communications platforms, whether University-owned or private. These also apply to any comments or images a student might contribute to content generated by others (e.g., blogs, opinion pieces, videos, podcasts, and e-mail distribution lists).

### Overview

The College of Medicine encourages open communication in all forms, subject to the professional standards that are important in securing and maintaining the trust of the communities we serve. Recognizing students’ constitutional rights to free speech and that nothing herein should be read inconsistent with those rights, the College expects that communications by students, electronic or otherwise, conform with applicable College and University policies and do not materially interfere with its core enterprise, our clinical affiliates’ enterprises, or violate our patients’, research subjects’, faculty’s, staff’s, or students’ privacy rights or trust.

The College does not actively monitor student on-line communications except in college-based educational fora such as remote electronic meetings or education-related electronic communications (e.g., email strings or messaging platforms). The College does not monitor private messaging in these places (although all UIC communications platforms are potentially subject to monitoring, recording, and search in accordance with the University’s Acceptable Use of Computational Resources Policy or with applicable law or legal process). College administrators and leadership, however, may become aware of, and choose to review, communications that appear to violate relevant law or policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Social media encompasses a broad range of forums including, but not limited to blogs and microblogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, photo/video sharing sites, product/services reviews, social bookmarking, social gaming, virtual worlds, and news sites.

Communications accessible by third parties that contain personal health information (PHI) about patients are always prohibited and may constitute grounds for immediate action in accordance with College of Medicine policy, as well as federal, state, and local law.

Only students authorized by the medical school administration may portray themselves as representing the College or conduct official business in the name of the College or one of its units. Use of any social media to represent the College of Medicine in this way must be approved by the College's administration (typically, the college or regional dean or designee), and uses of logos for UI-COM, the University of Illinois at Chicago, or the University of Illinois for the same purpose also require express written approval of the UI-COM Office of Publications or equivalent regional campus office.

As future practicing physicians, students are expected to observe social media standards and guidelines from professional organizations and licensing agencies. The guidelines here reflect the standards adopted by the American Medical Association ("[Professionalism in the Use of Social Media](#)"). The American Medical Student Association (AMSA) has also published [guidelines for social media use](#) that may be helpful.

### General Guidelines

1. Students should participate in social media in ways that conform to the standards of The College of Medicine Professionalism Code as expressed in the College's Student Academic Policies and Professional Standards. Violation of College standards of professional conduct may result in sanctions up to and including dismissal.
2. Students should ensure that all content they post to social media and other online forums—inclusive of text, photos, voice recordings, and videos—comply with all applicable UI-COM policies regarding privacy and confidentiality in matters pertaining to patient, research subjects, and student records as well as all applicable policies of the health care facilities in which the students are present as part of their curriculum.
3. Students should observe patient confidentiality in keeping with HIPAA and other applicable laws and policies. It is important to avoid communications that could in any way convey a patient's identity, even accidentally, including dates of service. Patients with rare diagnoses, unusual physical appearances and/or having specific status within the community may be easily identifiable even in the absence of names, record numbers, or other personal identifiers. Students should only use designated secure communications when sharing any kind of patient information with authorized parties.
4. Students should exercise prudence if engaging with patients on social media, if a prior social relationship does not exist.

5. Students must not take unauthorized photographs, audio or video of patients, clients, research subjects, volunteers or cadavers, even those only depicting body parts. Unauthorized photos of patients and standardized patients, or in the anatomy lab, constitute a violation of the Professionalism Code.

6. Students should avoid making comments that fall outside the protections of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment (e.g., unlawful/discriminatory harassment, “true threats”, incitement to violence, “fighting words”, hate crimes and other illegal behavior, as these terms are defined by law).

7. Students may never disclose UI-COM’s confidential or other proprietary information to any third party, as doing so may compromise the University’s research efforts, business practices, and information security. Students are required to respect copyright, trademarks, and other intellectual property rights of the University and others.

8. Students should never make representations that they speak on behalf of the College of Medicine unless they have been formally authorized to do so. If a student wants to express their personal views, they should make it clear that such views are theirs alone and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of UI COM and that the student is not communicating on anyone else’s behalf.

9. Students should not represent themselves in public social media, in any online forums, or in any written or electronic communications as licensed health professionals (except to the extent they have a valid health professional license in the U.S.) nor should they provide nor represent that they can provide medical advice. If College administration or leadership is made aware of students conveying medical misinformation or medical advice of any kind on social media or elsewhere, that may be treated as a Code of Professionalism violation.

10. Students should be aware of and adhere to any social media policies at any clinical site where they engage in courses and/or clinical rotations.

### Best Practices

In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines, the College recommends the following best practices:

1. Be aware that posted information may persist even after attempts to erase or delete it. Certain communications may remain accessible to third parties, including the University, other students, faculty, staff, patients, and future residency programs or employers. Furthermore, information posted on social media and other online sites may have legal and professional ramifications including use as evidence in lawsuits and licensure proceedings. Use available privacy settings to avoid dissemination of information beyond your intended audience.

2. Routinely monitor your own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on your own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about you, is accurate and conforms to College of Medicine policies and standards.
3. The Office of Student Affairs is a resource – before or after the fact – for questions about whether any of your on-line communications violate professional standards or are imprudent in some other way.
4. Notify College of Medicine administration if you identify on-line communications involving College of Medicine students that appear inconsistent with College standards of professional conduct or the best-practice recommendations presented here.
5. If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact the Office of Student Affairs at your local campus.

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