



Social Media Resources and Supports for Faculty Members and Librarians

June 2022

Background and Institutional Values

The University of Toronto's faculty members increasingly use social media to engage with colleagues, students, and members of the public in real-time, dynamic ways, and to share their research and enhance their teaching. At the heart of the University's institutional commitments is the belief that freedom of expression is fundamental to the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding. The interaction of different perspectives allows outstanding research, scholarship, teaching, learning, and innovation to thrive.

The line between personal and professional use of social media is often blurred, particularly when faculty members and librarians use social media to engage in academic debate or to speak in their capacity as an expert. Social media platform norms can sometimes lead to more informal and reactive communication than with traditional communication such as in-person discussions, conference interactions, and email. On occasion, this can lead to emotionally charged online engagement that may result in complaints by and/or about faculty members and librarians. Platform algorithms (and social bots) amplify the number and pace of engagements with the goals of increasing users' activity on the platform and encouraging advertising revenue growth. Social media harassment in a variety of forms can also have a disparate impact on women, those who are gender-diverse, and/or those who are racialized or Indigenous, as well as those who address concerns related to these communities.

Various laws and policies apply to social media communications. In particular, no member of the University should engage in hate speech or in behaviour that demeans, harasses, or intimidates others; nor should any community member be subject to such language or behaviours in the course of their University work or study. The University is committed to providing support to members of our community who are experiencing harassment or intimidation in social media spaces and to exploring intervention options via its policies and procedures or through municipal law enforcement where circumstances permit. That said, the University may be limited in the actions it can take depending on the parties' relationship to U of T.

University Approach

The University addresses concerns with respect to social media on a case-by-case basis. Generally, faculty members and librarians using social media are considered to be doing so in their personal capacity, but sometimes their usage is related to research, teaching or other professional activities.

Social media activity using institutional addresses (e.g., departmental or unit Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook group) should involve consultation with the relevant unit head (e.g., Chair, Dean), who is responsible for all the content posted to such U of T accounts. Care and caution should always be used when [using the name and insignia of the University](#) and related units.

<p>U of T → U of T</p> <p>Online behavior by U of T employee towards another U of T community member.</p>	<p>External → U of T</p> <p>Online behavior by someone outside of the University towards a U of T employee.</p>
<p>U of T → External</p> <p>Online behavior by U of T employee towards someone outside of the University.</p>	<p>U of T → External → U of T → other</p> <p>Situations with multiple people engaged in online behavior that can sometimes become reactive or retaliatory.</p>

The table to the left illustrates the different ways that U of T community members can interact with others online. For a list of policies and procedures (non-exhaustive) that may apply to such interactions, please see Appendix A.

If social media activity results in behaviour that may be contrary to University policy and procedures, it may require review by U of T as the result of complaint. For example, “off-duty” conduct can sometimes lead to reports of harassment, discrimination, or other concerning behavior, including from other members of the University community.

Best Practices for Engaging in Social Media

The following best practices are recommended for faculty members and librarians engaging in social media, whether for personal online activity or professional reasons:

- Review the privacy settings on your social media profiles regularly, with a view to being alert to who can view and access your activity.
- Consider identifying posts or profiles as personal in the appropriate circumstances.
- Be aware of personal legal risks associated with postings about an identifiable individual or group that could be considered defamatory, harassing, discriminatory or otherwise illegal.
- Exercise caution in responding to threatening communications (for example, consider taking screenshots and retaining copies of such exchanges; consider reporting to the relevant social media company and/or Campus Safety).
- During times of stress, it may be healthy to disengage from social media, ask a trusted friend to monitor social media accounts, and seek guidance from University resources.
- It is also advisable to disengage from social media if using alcohol or other substances.

Supports

Resources exist at the University to support faculty members, librarians and staff who experience social media harassment or are the subject of complaints regarding their own social media postings, such as:

- For general advice and guidance, please contact your department leader (e.g., Chair, Director or Dean), or your [HR office](#).
- For safety issues, including personal safety planning, please contact the University’s [Community Safety Office](#).¹

¹ If you are in immediate physical danger, please call 911 or campus police at 416-978-2222.

- For guidance on social media concerns based on a protected ground from discrimination, please contact the [Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office](#) or [other U of T equity offices](#).
- For guidance on social media concerns related to sexual harassment and/or sexual violence, please contact the [Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre](#).
- For University-related communications management, please contact your Divisional communications office.
- The University's [Employee and Family Assistance Plan](#) is available for counselling and support for qualified employees.
- University faculty and librarians working in affiliated clinical settings, please also contact your setting's HR and security teams.

Appendix - University Policies, Procedures, and Resources*

Policy	Application
U of T Free Speech resources and policies	https://freespeech.utoronto.ca/
The Provostial Guideline on the Appropriate Use of Information and Communication Technology	Prohibits users of University information technology from engaging in harassment, threatening behaviour, hate crimes, libel and defamation, discrimination, theft, fraud and plagiarism. This guideline recommends that when exercising free speech using University information technology, authors should identify their comments as "personal opinions" and ensure their audience understands that the author is not speaking for the University.
The Policy with Respect to Workplace Harassment and Human Resources Guideline on Workplace Harassment and Civility and Guideline on Discrimination on Prohibited Grounds and Discriminatory Harassment	Requires University employees to follow workplace conduct policies and guidelines that can encompass online activity. Online activity, including derogatory social media postings targeting certain individuals or groups, can constitute workplace harassment and/or potentially negatively impact the workplace.
The University's Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA)	Requires faculty members to be fair and ethical in their dealings with students and colleagues, within the context of their teaching, research and service activities. It also states that faculty members are expected to avoid discrimination and refrain from infringing on their colleagues' academic freedom. Requires librarians to be fair and ethical in their dealings with library users, colleagues and staff within the context of their professional obligations and responsibilities.
Code of Student Conduct and other student-related policies	List of relevant links on the website of the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students

Other Divisional / Unit guidelines and advice on social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Toronto Mississauga campus Social Media Guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University of Toronto Press Social Media Guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation Social Media Guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temerty Faculty of Medicine Social Media Guidelines for medical trainees Temerty Faculty of Medicine Standards of Professional Behaviour for Clinical Medical Faculty
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Safety Office E-Safety Tips

*Please note this list is not exhaustive.