

**RENISON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Preamble

The academic unit has a policy regarding ethical use of all forms of social media to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the academic unit and its field practicum community and demonstrates how the policy and procedures are consistent with the relevant human rights legislation, with the mission of CASWE-ACFTS, and with the mission of the academic unit concerned. (CASWE Standards for Accreditation, May 2012).

With more and more social workers embracing social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, the question arises — where do you draw the line in terms of boundaries with your clients or other professional relationships?

The rapidly changing world of social media has exceeded our ability to understand the impact that these forms of communication may have in the world. As professional social workers increasingly use social media, we need to establish guidelines that protect us and those with whom we work from potential negative consequences consistent with the CASW Code of Ethics.

The **CASW Code of Ethics** outlines the core social work values as:

- *Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons*
- *Pursuit of social justice*
- *Service to humanity*
- *Integrity of professional practice*
- *Confidentiality of professional practice*
- *Competence of professional practice*

Policy Statement

The School of Social Work recognizes the importance of the internet and is committed to supporting your right to interact knowledgeably and socially on the internet through interaction in social media. The School of Social Work strives to provide its members with an environment of free inquiry and expression. Freedom of expression and academic freedom in electronic format have the same latitude as in printed or oral communication.

Members of the School of Social Work community are responsible and accountable for their actions and statements. The use of unfounded or derogatory statements or misrepresentation is not viewed favorably by the School of Social Work or your practicum agency and can result in disciplinary action up to and including school/practicum termination.

Guidelines for Interactions about the School of Social Work and Your Practicum on the Internet

These guidelines in this social media policy will help you make appropriate decisions about your school and practicum-related online exchanges. They will help you open up respectful, knowledgeable interactions with people on the internet. The guidelines also protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the School of Social Work and your practicum, including colleagues, employees and clients. Note that these policies and guidelines apply to school and practicum-related sites and issues and are not meant to infringe upon your personal interaction or commentary online. As professional social workers however, it is our responsibility to understand and live by the Code of Ethics consistently.

- Do not approach field instructors, faculty or staff to connect on social media sites
- If you are developing a Website, social networking group or writing a blog that will mention the School of Social Work, your practicum and / or their employees or clients, identify that you are a student and that the views expressed on the blog or website are yours alone and do not represent the views of the School of Social Work and/or practicum agency.
- Unless given permission in writing by either the School of Social Work or your practicum supervisor, you are not authorized to speak on behalf of either the School of Social Work or your practicum agency.
- If you are developing a site, group or writing a blog that will mention the School of Social Work, your practicum and / or their employees or clients, as a courtesy to the School and/or agency, please let the School of Social Work and/or your practicum supervisor know that you are writing them - ***and you should clearly state your goals and what your social medium intends to say or reflect.*** Representatives of the School of Social Work and/or your practicum supervisor may choose to visit from time to time to understand your point of view.

Confidential Information Component of the Social Media Policy

You may not share information that is confidential about the School of Social Work, your practicum setting and/or clients and colleagues.

If you have any question about whether information has been released publicly or doubts of any kind, speak with the Director of the School of Social Work, the MSW Program Coordinator/BSW Field Coordinator or your field instructor before releasing information that could potentially harm the School of Social Work, your practicum and / or their employees or clients.

Respect and Privacy Rights

Speak respectfully about the School of Social Work, your practicum and / or their employees or clients. Do not engage in name calling or behavior that will reflect negatively on the School of Social Work or your practicum's reputation.

The School of Social Work encourages you to write knowledgeably and accurately, using appropriate professionalism. Despite disclaimers, your Web interaction can result in members of the public forming opinions about the School of Social Work, your practicum and / or their employees or clients.

Photographs

Taking and sharing photographs without consent is a breach of confidentiality. Agencies increasingly use photography for professional consultation, research and education purposes. Know your agency's policy regarding photography including any limitations on its use.

Legal Liability

Recognize that you are legally liable for anything you write or present online. It must be noted that anything published on the web is NOT confidential. Students can be disciplined by the School of Social Work for commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment. You can also be sued by any individual or organization that views your commentary, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment.

Guidelines for Interactions with Clients (Past and Present) on the Internet

- Do not “friend” your clients (current or past) and do not allow your clients (current or past) to “friend” you.
- Do not use messaging on websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to contact your clients or respond to clients who may have contacted you. These sites are not secure.
- Become intimately familiar with the privacy controls on these networks and ensure that the general public cannot see personal details of your life you would prefer to share only with your immediate friends and family.
- Only use your professional (work/practicum) email address to communicate with clients.
- All email communication with clients should be of a professional nature and not involve personal discussions and/or disclosures of any kind.
- Do not discuss details of your work with clients.
- If you choose to communicate with your clients by email, please be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your and their Internet service providers. While it is unlikely that someone will be looking at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the Internet service provider.

Tips for Responding to Social Media Requests from Clients

Here are examples of what you can say to clients who request or attempt to contact you through any form of social media:

Friending

“I do not accept friend requests from current or former clients. This holds true on Facebook, LinkedIn, and all other social networking sites. My reasons for this are that I believe that adding clients as friends on these websites can compromise confidentiality and blur the boundaries of our working relationship. If you have questions about this, please feel free to bring them up when we meet and I will be happy to talk more about it.”

Interacting

“Please do not use messaging on websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to contact me. These sites are not secure and I may not read these messages in a timely fashion. If you need to contact me, please use the system outlined in our first meeting.”

Email

“I prefer to use email only to arrange or modify appointments. Please do not use email to send content related to our work together, as email is not completely secure or confidential. If you choose to communicate with me by email, please be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your and my Internet service providers. While it is unlikely that someone will be looking at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the Internet service provider. You should also know that any email I receive from you and any responses that I send to you will be printed out by me and kept in your file.”

Consequences

The use of unfounded or derogatory statements or misrepresentation of the School of Social Work, faculty, staff, colleagues, clients or fellow students can result in disciplinary action up to and including school/practicum termination.

**Approved May 2011
(Updated July 2012)**