

# STATEMENT ON GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

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The Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) in consultation with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Educational Technology Services (ETS), and the Privacy Office recognize that social media are embedded into the lives of many 21<sup>st</sup> century students. In recent months COCI has received proposals for new courses that include the use of third party social media platforms that are not licensed by the University as part of the instructional activities. COCI recognizes that the use of social media as a communication channel can help create a collaborative learning environment and engage students in a discussion of course topics in a more dynamic and current, authentic way. Instructional staff (e.g. professors, lecturers, graduate instructors, etc.) earnestly work to keep their curriculum relevant and to find timely ways to engage students in course topics. However, requiring students to register for, post, upload, or otherwise communicate via a social media platforms not licensed by the University (such as Facebook, Twitter, Piazza, and many others) raise concerns about privacy, accessibility, and equity that make such required assignments potentially problematic.

COCI asks that instructors first and foremost consider the question: *Does your use of the social media platform adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)?* It is the instructor's responsibility to adhere to FERPA. Among other items, student records that are protected under FERPA include: grades, class lists, and schedules. Participating in a social media platform as part of a class assignment could potentially disclose a student's class enrollment. Comments or feedback on social media could disclose a student grade. Or class activity planning via social media (e.g. field trips, outside research, etc) could disclose a student's schedule. Each scenario places the student, instructor, and University at risk.

Furthermore, COCI recommends that instructors consider the following questions as they contemplate using social media in their pedagogy:

1. *What pedagogical enhancement does the assignment gain by being on a third party social media platform?* When thinking about using a social medium it is important to have a clear objective and understanding of how this medium will enhance or be a value-add to the course instruction. Tools and applications that are licensed by the campus may suit your pedagogical goals in a fairly similar manner but include the added benefit of having been reviewed for adherence to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and privacy concerns.
2. *Is the functionality you need available in an application either produced or licensed by the University that can support the same outcome?* If the University provides or licenses a service that allows for the same, or equivalent, benefit as the third party social media platform, the University service should preempt any third party tool. This helps to ensure that University policy, protections, and support is provided to the instructional activity.

3. *What is the vendor/company doing with the information they are collecting about the student?* Facebook is an obvious case where the company markets directly to account holders. There are also platforms that market “free” tools for instructors and students directly applicable to online learning. However, these companies sometimes/often are mining the data generated by students to use as a revenue generation tool (e.g. providing it to potential employers).
4. *What tools are being provided by the instructor/university, or must students have personal access in order to participate?* Some social media forums are multi-device functional and transition easily from laptop to smartphone to tablet. Some are solely designed for single device use. Willingness by students to use social media does not necessarily equate with all students being able to access the tool equally. Also, social media platforms may not support the assistive technology tools used by students who experience disabilities. Students who are unable to or unwilling to access the social media platform may feel they have no choice, or are being singled out unfairly.
5. *What are the long-term ramifications of the assignment?* Part of the experience of college is for students to explore their own ideas and opinions that may transform over their time at Berkeley and beyond. The permanency of social media means that a single comment posted today can follow the student across their entire life. As an example, many employers now research a potential candidate’s social media profile(s) prior to making hiring decisions.

In the same measure, some students curate their social media persona very carefully, choosing to promote political, social, and personal beliefs in very specific ways. Engaging in a class assignment may not align with individual expressions the student has self-established. Issues of constitutionally protected freedoms and highly valued academic expression freedoms become relevant in this scenario. With many third-party platforms requiring the use of real names, the ability of a student to use an alias or pseudonym may not be viable under the legal terms of the third party platform. Knowing that these questions are broad and that the nature of social media is ever changing, the Center for Teaching and Learning has established a repository of resources for instructors to find more support (see: <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/teaching-social-media>).