Volunteer State Community College Social Media Guidelines

Social networking and social media covers a wide range of existing web sites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. It also describes new Internet services that are just starting to grow in popularity. These sites allow people to connect with each other in an interactive and conversational fashion. Social media sites provide Volunteer State Community College an opportunity to reach out to our various audiences, including prospective students, current students and alumni.

The Volunteer State Community College Office of Public Relations is responsible for the official social media presence of the College and can assist other College departments and units to best utilize social media applications to achieve objectives and further the College mission. Volunteer State Community College strives to provide open conversation in the social media, while protecting the College reputation and maintaining a collegiate atmosphere of respectful discourse.

The Official College Presence

Public Relations maintains and monitors the following official social media sites:

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/volstate](http://www.facebook.com/volstate) (Current Students)
The Office of Public Relations partners with the Office of Admissions, Office of Retention Support Services and the Advising Center for the official College Facebook page. Several people from the offices participate in updating and monitoring the page. FERPA regulations are considered in all communications. **Objective: To support student success initiatives, provide customer service and allow students to interact in a supportive online community.**

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/volunteerstate](http://www.facebook.com/volunteerstate) (Prospective Students)
The Office of Public Relations partners with the Office of Admissions for the prospective student Facebook page. Several people from the offices participate in updating and monitoring the page. **Objective: To engage prospective students and provide admissions information.**

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/VolStateAlumni](http://www.facebook.com/VolStateAlumni) (Alumni) The Foundation Office primarily monitors this page with assistance from the Office of Public Relations. **Objective: To engage Vol State alumni as they venture out into our community.**

**The Vol State Virtual Community:** [www.volunteerstatecommunitycollege.blogspot.com](http://www.volunteerstatecommunitycollege.blogspot.com)
The official College blog is written by PR staff, student writers and guest student and faculty writers. Guest material goes through an editing process to meet the College standards and practices. Content covers a wide range of events and stories occurring on the campus and
Objective: To share stories, achievements, program information and other material to highlight the College and the students, faculty and staff.

College WordPress blogs
These blogs are set up and maintained by the Office of Public Relations. They are designed for updating and use by other departments and offices on campus. There must be a Vol State employee as the primary editor to review content for these blogs. The Office of Public Relations also monitors the blog entries and will, from time to time, use entries for inclusion on the main College blog, The Vol State Virtual Community. Objective: To support the individual objectives of specific offices, departments and organizations.

Twitter: www.twitter.com/volstatecampus
Objective: Twitter is primarily used to offer timely information about events and important notices.

YouTube: www.youtube.com/volstate1
The Office of Public Relations posts material to the YouTube account in partnership with the Office of Media Services. Objective: To provide the community with engaging video content to illustrate College stories, achievements, programs and the students, faculty and staff. You Tube is also home to Vol State produced TV shows in shortened form.

Flickr: www.flickr.com/pioneers1
Objective: The Office of Public Relations posts photos of campus activities on the site to give the community a visual representation of the campus and what we do here.

Objectives

In addition to the specific objectives of each site, the Volunteer State Community College presence in social media is designed to accomplish the following general objectives:

• **Listen to student concerns** and attempt to solve problems.

• **Extend the College reach and influence** online by connecting and building relationships with key audiences, such as prospective students, current students and alumni.

• **Provide additional channels** for these key audiences to communicate and interact with the College.

• **Provide additional channels** for audiences to receive official College information.

• **Monitor the College reputation** in the social media sphere.
• Provide an additional communication tool in the event of crisis or emergency.

Social Media Guidelines for Faculty and Staff

The Office of Public Relations requests that departments or programs interested in starting a social media site contact PR first to discuss guidelines. The college logo cannot be used on a social media site without the approval of the Office of Public Relations. Be aware that Facebook controls who can operate a Facebook page, and unless the page is misrepresented as being an official Vol State site, freedom of speech applies. However, the College does monitor social media sites on a regular basis and can file an official request with the host (Facebook etc.) to take down an offensive or threatening site. Faculty or staff engaging in social media for Vol State programs or departments will be responsible for monitoring the site to make sure it conforms to these guidelines in this document. In addition, Vol State employees must adhere to all policies outlined by the College as well as Tennessee Board of Regents in-person and online. Items found to be offensive or threatening on the site are subject to disciplinary procedures outlined in said policies. The Office of Public Relations is available to answer questions or help with issues that arise.

Social Media Guidelines for Student Clubs and Organizations

Social Media Guidelines for student clubs and organizations are governed by the Office of Student Life in accordance with their policies and procedures. Be aware that Facebook controls who can operate a Facebook page, and unless the page is misrepresented as being an official Vol State site, freedom of speech applies. However, the College does monitor social media sites on a regular basis and can file an official request with the host (Facebook etc.) to take down an offensive or threatening site. Faculty or staff engaging in social media with student clubs or organizations will be responsible for monitoring the site to make sure it conforms to these guidelines. Items found to be offensive or threatening on the site will undergo the disciplinary procedures outlined in the VSCC Student Handbook regarding conduct. The Office of Public Relations is available to answer questions or help with issues that arise.

Additional Guidelines for All

All Departments, offices and student organizations interested in establishing a presence on any social media site are asked to follow these guidelines:

• Learn about social media. Which social media platform is right for you? Sites should be chosen to fulfill specific objectives. Each site has strengths and weaknesses. Also, keep in mind that social media is an extremely fast and open medium. In many cases, a step by step approach
in which you learn to use the different tools as an observer is advisable. The first step to participate is to listen.

• **Have a plan.** Before you get started in social media, think about it from a communication perspective. Ask yourself:

  **Who is my audience?** Are you primarily trying to reach current students? Prospective students? Alumni? Each audience has different interests and responds to different messages and different communications approaches.

  **What do I want to accomplish** with this audience? How will social media help me accomplish my goals? Keep in mind that the nature of social media is two-way communication. If you aren’t willing to engage in that kind of dialogue with your audience, then maybe a social media presence isn’t right for you.

  **How do I want my audience to respond?** What is the ultimate goal of using social media? Develop the right metrics to measure how well you are meeting your goals.

• **Integrate social media into your communication plan.** Social media is not a stand-alone solution to your communications and marketing challenges.

• **Experiment.** If you’re not yet familiar with the social media tools you’re interested in using, start by creating a personal account and learning how it works. Sign up for Facebook. Create a Twitter account. Read blogs and other sites that keep tabs on the latest in social media.

• **Choose the right tool.** Once you’ve learned about the social media, choose the right tool for your objectives. Beware of jumping on a bandwagon just because one social media tool is the “in” thing today. As we’ve seen during the brief history of social media, trends and tastes change very quickly. MySpace was created in 2003 and was the dominant social network for a few years, but it has since been eclipsed by Facebook. Who knows which social media tool might be the next big thing?

• **Follow all campus and TBR computing policies.** Your use of social media should comply with the Vol State “Use of Information Technology” and “Intellectual Property Policy.” They can be found at [www.volstate.edu/policies](http://www.volstate.edu/policies). The TBR “Information Technology Resources” and “Intellectual Property” policies also may apply. Visit [www.tbr.edu/policies](http://www.tbr.edu/policies) to view.

• **Follow all campus and TBR policies regarding privacy, personnel, records, etc.** Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Vol State students, prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni or business partners. Employees using social media on behalf of
the College still must follow all applicable federal requirements such as FERPA and HIPAA, as well as NCAA regulations. Adhere to all applicable campus, TBR, Tennessee and Federal privacy and confidentiality policies. Employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action up to and including termination. A listing of policies, procedures and regulations is available at: www.volstate.edu/policies

• **Feed your creation.** Like living beings, social media sites will die if they are not fed regularly. This means providing frequent updates to your Facebook, Twitter or other social media account. Some organizations rely solely on RSS feeds to automate their information. But in these conversational media, personal messages are more effective, even if they are meant to convey official information. Providing short status updates – with links to official information if appropriate – is always more valuable than an impersonal news feed.

• **Contact us.** Let us know if you are considering creating an online presence for your organization, office or department and we can help you with linkage and development. Also contact us if you would like any guidance on developing your social media presence. E-mail us at PR@volstate.edu

**Best Practices**

When posting on behalf of a College department, office or organization, please follow these guidelines.

• **Don't tell secrets.** It’s perfectly acceptable to talk about your work and have a dialogue with the community, but it's not okay to publish confidential information. Confidential information includes things such as unpublished details about proprietary research, details of current projects, financial information, student information and personnel information.

• **Protect your own privacy.** Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on the Vol State website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal should be set to limit access. Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.

• **Be honest.** Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. Vol State is committed to the principles of transparency and honesty. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for Vol State. Nothing gains you notice in social media more than honesty - or dishonesty. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. But also be smart about protecting
yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and also be cautious about disclosing personal details.

• **Respect copyright laws.** It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.

• **Respect your audience, Vol State, and your coworkers.** The public in general, and Vol State’s employees and students, reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Don’t say anything contradictory or in conflict with the Vol State website. Don’t be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory - such as politics and religion. Use your best judgment and be sure to make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are yours alone and do not represent the official views of the College. College and TBR anti-discrimination policies apply to these issues. To view the policies visit [www.volstate.edu/policies](http://www.volstate.edu/policies) and [www.tbr.edu/policies](http://www.tbr.edu/policies).

• **Controversial issues.** If you see misrepresentations made about Vol State in social media, you may point them out. Always do so with respect and with the facts. If you speak about others, make sure what you say is factual and that it does not disparage that party. Avoid arguments. Brawls may earn traffic, but nobody wins in the end. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct. Contact Public Relations if you see an issue develop.

• **Be the first to respond to your own mistakes.** If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly - better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

• **Think about consequences.** Your words have power and in social media they can travel quickly. Don’t say anything you will regret later. Once it is up on the web it can be found by just about anyone. It also could be re-printed almost anywhere and in a very short period of time.

For more information about the use of social media at Vol State e-mail pr@volstate.edu or call 615-230-3570.

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