

Social Media Guidelines

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San Diego State University recognizes the importance of social media networks. Social media is a powerful tool to exchange information, raise the visibility of the university and engage with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community. While social media is an effective communication tool, it also brings its own unique challenges. Individuals who contribute to SDSU social media accounts in their capacity as representatives of SDSU and as a part of their employment must be attentive to these guidelines.

The guidelines detailed below serve as guidance and also provide best practices to SDSU faculty, staff and students who are managing university social media channels. For the purpose of these guidelines, SDSU channels are those that are associated with a university email account and exist on behalf of and to promote the university and university-related activities.

Social media accounts are defined as having an account registration with a social media platform, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest.

The purpose of social media is to create conversation and community. SDSU deeply values and supports free speech and freedom of expression, which are fundamental rights and core to our nation's democracy. Our campus is committed to its academic mission and public mandate to serve as a place where individuals from diverse perspectives can freely express and explore ideas, concepts and opinions.

Our social media sites are not monitored 24 hours each day, 7 days each week, and no one should utilize our social media accounts to seek emergency services. Anyone in need of emergency help should call 9-1-1. Additionally, we will remove comments with images or content that violate someone else's copyright if the owner informs us that their property was posted on our social media accounts.

If an urgent or crisis situation arises on social media (e.g., threats of violence, self-harm, harassment, or discrimination), social media account managers should immediately report the situation to SDSU University Police at 619-594-1991 and inform Strategic Communications and Public Affairs (StratComm) at stratcomm@sdsu.edu for guidance.

How to Use These Guidelines

These guidelines are meant to be best practices and a helpful resource to anyone using social media. For the SDSU community, they are intended for all students, faculty and staff who manage or contribute to official SDSU social media channels. Official SDSU channels are defined as those that speak on behalf of the university and have oversight by university employees.

Social media channels include but are not limited to those for divisions, schools, academic departments, offices or programs. Social media channels can include social networks such as Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn. The guidelines can also be useful for individuals managing accounts in their official SDSU capacity, including deans, vice presidents, faculty and staff.

These guidelines can be a useful guidepost for ensuring that social media activity is consistent with university policies and complies with state and federal laws.

About Personal Social Media Use

While these guidelines may be helpful for personal social media use unaffiliated with an SDSU account, they are not designed for employee's personal use of social media.

Some maintain several social media channels, with some for personal use and others for official SDSU business. Individuals must use care to separate the two uses and may not use university resources to distribute personal communications.

It is recommended that you clearly identify your personal communications for transparency. Employees who use personal social media channels to talk about work or SDSU-related matters are encouraged to disclose their affiliation with the university, or by adding a disclaimer to their social media accounts stating that their thoughts are their own.

All students, faculty and staff are responsible for what they post on their own social media channels and sites, and on the sites of others. Unless your job duties at SDSU involve the use of your personal social media accounts on behalf of the university, and this use is explicitly

authorized in writing by a school dean, department head or vice president, an employee's personal use of social media is not considered to be related to employment responsibilities at SDSU. Consequently, SDSU will not be liable for and will not indemnify an employee for any liability that results from postings they generate for their own personal social media activities and accounts.

Nothing in these guidelines should be read to restrict the ability of students, faculty or staff to engage in protected activity and speech, and the guidelines are not intended to govern or restrict communications, free speech or academic freedom.

Guidelines for Social Media Use on Behalf of SDSU

The following guidelines pertain to individuals who oversee, manage, post to and respond to messages on behalf of SDSU on university social media accounts:

SDSU pages must be approved. A SDSU social media page is an account that is managed on behalf of divisions, departments and programs or university-related business. All SDSU-affiliated social media channels that are created must be approved by the area's appropriate administrator, whether a dean, department head or vice president. Each social media page should have at least two administrators (one primary and one backup) to ensure continued access in case of staff turnover. One of these administrators must to be a staff or faculty member.

Requests for new channels and groups should be routed to Strategic Communications and Public Affairs (StratComm) prior to being created to ensure appropriate consultation and support. Such pages require input and maintenance to be effective. Again, if you feel there is a need and value to generating an official group or page for SDSU, ask your supervisor and consult with them and StratComm before allocating time or resources to the endeavor. Before creating a page, check to see if there is already an existing profile to avoid creating duplicate pages. If you discover your department has a social media channel that is inactive or falsely presenting as an SDSU page, contact StratComm by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu.

Staff or faculty oversight is required. Always plan for a staff or faculty member to oversee and monitor the social media account if others, including students, are contributing to the account. The staff or faculty providing oversight must also maintain administrative rights on the social media accounts. University social media channels should have a designated lead responsible for posting; do not leave accounts open for all to post original content or respond to comments. For example, the social media accounts must be connected to the department or oversight staff or faculty member's email address. This is important for security reasons, and to also ensure that social media leads are able to provide prompt responses and to triage issues to appropriate

offices. Some issues reported via social media may have Title IX or other legal implications requiring active monitoring.

Campus social media managers are encouraged to review these social media guidelines and meet with StratComm's Social Media team. Contact StratComm by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu.

Be respectful and responsible. While managing SDSU social media accounts (division, college, program or other unit-level accounts), be mindful both of what you are including and of how the information will be received. SDSU is prohibited to post anything that is obscene, defamatory, or libelous. The university channels exist to support and encourage community building and connections, to promote the work of the SDSU community and to share information aligned with the university's mission and principles, which includes the university's commitment to support free speech and freedom of expression. If you have any concerns about whether or not you should post certain information, speak directly with your appropriate administrator. You may also contact StratComm for consultation by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu.

Keep legal and policy requirements in mind. University social media accounts are subject to existing legal and policy requirements. Individuals contributing to SDSU social media accounts must follow university policies and federal requirements such as the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA), [Title IX](#), and [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act](#) (HIPAA) of 1996.

Be Selective. Not everything needs a response. SDSU is a large public institution and, as such, is open to criticism about any number of operational or policy actions. When you see criticism online, don't take it personally. And do not feel compelled to respond to each and every criticism. If you have the ability to correct an error or a factually incorrect statement, or give someone direction to a resource that could do so, doing so is helpful.

Do not engage in debate, or simply tell someone they are wrong. When responding, be professional and courteous, as you are representing the university via university channels. Always view the profile before engaging or responding.

Example: I can't believe SDSU is raising tuition for Mission Valley.

Appropriate Response: We appreciate you voicing your concerns and hope to clear up this misconception. The SDSU Mission Valley plan does not increase student tuition or fees. The California State University system-wide student costs are set by the Board of Trustees.

Please note that the example above aims to provide clarity to a user’s question in a kind and professional manner. Provide accurate information to comments when you are able to do so.

If you feel there is a post or comment that is sensitive and needs a response, forward it to your supervisor, or to email StratComm by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu.

Unofficial Social Media Accounts

Any social media account that will not be an official university account must be clearly identified as an “unofficial” or “fan” account consistent with applicable laws and the guidelines and best practices for the particular social media platform. Unofficial accounts may not use trademarked SDSU wordmarks or logos.

University faculty and staff should not manage or moderate unofficial social media accounts in their capacity as university officials; faculty and staff, operating in their official capacity on behalf of SDSU, are responsible only for managing official social media accounts. Do not use your personal social media account to respond in your official university capacity.

If you need guidance for how to address information, including misinformation, on an unofficial social media account, email StratComm at stratcomm@sdsu.edu.

Do not delete comments or posts. As a general rule, do not delete comments in response to social posts, even if they are considered contentious or concerning and when you believe they do not align with institutional values or SDSU’s Principles of Community. A California State University (CSU) system-sponsored platform, such as social media channels introduced on behalf of a university department or program, is a government forum. As a governmental entity, the CSU may not restrict the content of most speech, including postings by the public on the CSU’s social media accounts.

The only exception to this practice is in situations where there is a credible and immediate threat that places a specific individual or group of people in danger. In those cases, comments may be hidden or removed to prevent harm.

The social media platforms themselves (such as Instagram, Facebook or X) can and do have established community guidelines about appropriate postings to their sites. If you believe that a posting may violate state or federal law, or university policy (if the poster is a student, faculty or staff) and/or a social media platform’s community guidelines, contact StratComm at stratcomm@sdsu.edu. Our team will assist you in reviewing the issue and identifying the appropriate way to address the content, as appropriate. If you have concerns about an individual

and/or incident, always dial 9-1-1 if there is evidence that someone is in danger. You may also report the issue via SDSU's [General Incident Reporting Form](#).

Protect confidential and proprietary information, use of personal accounts. Social computing blurs many of the traditional boundaries between internal and external communications. Be mindful of the difference. Sensitive information should never be shared via social networks, even via “Direct Messages” that might appear to be private. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about SDSU, or SDSU employees, students, affiliates, or alumni that would violate such persons’ rights to privacy under applicable federal and state laws and regulations. Be attentive to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) and university policies. Do not share RedID numbers, social security numbers, banking information and other personal identifying information in the social media space. Also, respect embargos (the date before which information cannot be shared via a public channel or forum), which may be set by a researcher’s funding agency or other organizations.

Also, as a reminder, do not use your personal social media account to respond in your official university capacity.

SDSU social media pages contact information should be up-to-date. All social media pages related to SDSU should include accurate contact information, including email addresses and phone numbers. Additionally, the social media pages should include the correct link that directs back to SDSU’s web properties.

Review before posting. Always review all aspects of a social media post before publishing, including the copy, multimedia, link and call-to-action. Ensure all posts align with SDSU’s brand tone and voice. All posts should be factually accurate and grammatically correct. If you are unsure about a post, get a second opinion from a colleague or supervisor. Please also refer to the university’s [Editorial Style Guide](#) for direction.

Be careful when using multimedia elements, including photographs, video images, printed materials. Be aware of the media (photos, videos, GIFs) used in social media posts. All media used should be high-quality and related to your department or organization. Do not manipulate copyrighted photos, video or music without permission or license for use. The [SDSU Image Library](#) is also available to the campus for university use. Seek consultation with StratComm by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu to ensure that you have the correct intellectual property rights to use the image. Similarly, ensure that you have appropriate rights before posting any copyrighted written materials. Again, StratComm can assist in determining whether such rights have been secured.

When photographing people for print, web or video projects, please use a [model release form](#) for adults or a [minor model release form](#) for children under 18 to ensure that subjects are aware of reproduction and usage rights of their image. If the individual is 18 or older, verbal permission is sufficient. If using user-generated content that has already been posted via social media, asking permission via direct messages is sufficient. Keep these records on file; you do not have to share them with StratComm.

Be active and do not allow channels to fall dormant. Remember to update and monitor your social media accounts regularly. Posting relevant and timely content is key to establishing a successful social media presence. Additionally, actively responding to comments and engaging with your audience will keep your followers interested. When interacting with your audience via university channels, do so in a professional and respectful way.

Follow San Diego State University brand guidelines. When creating or maintaining an SDSU social media account, follow [SDSU brand guidelines](#). Doing so will create consistent branding across the university's social media accounts and will show your audience that your page is an authentic SDSU page.

Have a plan. Before getting started with social media, it's crucial to have a plan. During the planning stages, assign the designated team members that will help maintain and monitor your social media channels. While creating your strategy for social media, identify your goals, target audience and how you will measure success. It's important to also identify what type of content you plan to share on social media and if there are any opportunities to collaborate with other partners on campus.

Make it accessible. Remember the importance of accessibility when creating social media content. This includes using alt-text description on social media platforms that allow you to do so, including captioning on videos, and being aware of color contrast on any social media imagery. For more information about accessibility, visit <https://accessibility.sdsu.edu/accessible-digital-materials/accessible-social-media>.

Maintain good password hygiene. Keep your SDSUid password secret. Your SDSUid is your single identifier to securely access many campus information technology services including your email, financial information and academic record. Never share it with anyone, including friends, family, or any email sender claiming to be from Library Hub, Computing Services, or any help desk. Also, do not use your SDSUid password for accounts such as Facebook, X or your bank, or re-use your personal passwords for your SDSUid password. Also, regularly update passwords for SDSU accounts, either once or twice each year. Strong passwords protect against intrusion by

others; consider using a phrase that you will remember, and sprinkle in numbers or special characters to make it even stronger. Social media account credentials (i.e., login information) must be securely stored and accessible to designated administrators.

Recommended Best Practices for Employee Personal Social Media Use

We have been asked to provide recommended best practices for personal social media use. The above guidelines are created for university accounts only, but you are free to use any and all parts of the guidelines as best practices for your own personal accounts. In addition, there are a number of other sites that provide best practices for social media use, and we recommend that you consult them as well, which provide the following reminders:

Be transparent; identify yourself. Your personal social media should not be set up in a way that leads others to believe that it is a university sanctioned or SDSU-managed site. It should be apparent (and clearly stated) that your opinions on your personal sites are yours and do not represent the views and opinions of SDSU or the CSU.

Be mindful of confidential and proprietary information. Be mindful to avoid sharing confidential and proprietary information regarding the university on social media.

Do not forget your day job. Consistent with the CSU Responsible Use Policy, personal blogging should generally be done on personal computers and on personal time, as to not interfere with work performance.

Social Media Resources

There are several social media resources available:

- Request a [Social Media Consultation](#) by emailing stratcomm@sdsu.edu.
- Contact San Diego State University [Strategic Communications and Public Affairs](#).
- Refer to [SDSU's Free Speech site](#) for guidance on First Amendment rights and responsibilities.