Western Michigan University
Social Media Policies and Procedures

Social Media Policy
Social media networks can be valuable communication tools, especially those that allow people to affiliate with a cause or organization and participate in conversations. There are also inherent liabilities involved with social networks, which range from messages that may offend some readers to identity theft, scams and stalking by sexual predators.

There are a variety of social media pages and blogs implying they represent Western Michigan University, its alumni, athletic teams, colleges, departments, programs and student organizations. To the extent these pages are lent credibility or implied official status, WMU may be viewed as having responsibility for the content.

There is very little value to social media pages and blogs that are rarely updated, and those that contain incorrect information about WMU are detrimental. As with all web pages, social media pages and blogs require periodic maintenance, and those that allow anyone to join and anyone to post messages or other items, must be continuously monitored.

It is not possible for WMU to monitor or control all social media pages or blogs that imply a relationship to some part of the University, nor do we wish to discourage alumni, students or others from utilizing social networks. We can, however, control which pages will be given official status.

Official status for social media pages
Only social media pages approved by university relations may be listed on any official University web page, or print or electronic publication. Once approved, they may be listed on the web pages of a corresponding office, department or program.

Criteria for obtaining official status:
- The primary administrator of the page must be a benefits-eligible employee of WMU. At least one other benefits-eligible employee must have administrative access.
- If anyone can post content to the page without administrator approval, the page must be monitored. The frequency with which the page must be monitored will vary with the volume of traffic, but should not be less than once per week.
- One way of measuring the frequency with which a page is monitored is the frequency or regularity of new information posted by the administrators. While the frequency will vary depending on the nature of the page, fan pages that have clearly been abandoned are not a service to alumni, students or prospective students.
- Official social network pages must comply with any design or other standards adopted for such pages by the University.

Advertising and sponsors (liking and following)
Web policies regarding advertising and sponsors apply to official social media pages. Policies prohibiting advertising include "liking" or "following" other pages and linking to other websites. This is especially applicable to, but not limited to, pages that may compromise the position of the University by endorsing
an opinion, product, private business, cause or political candidate. Exempt are comments and links posted by "followers" or "fans" and advertising generated by the site provider, such as Facebook.

**Free expression**

WMU encourages freedom of expression and recognizes the value of diverse opinions. Page administrators, however, have a responsibility to remove comments, images or other material deemed inflammatory, vulgar or otherwise inappropriate, especially when they appear to threaten the welfare or safety of the poster or others.

**Student organizations**

The web pages of registered student organizations are not considered official pages of the University. WMU does not attempt to monitor those pages nor exercise control, unless a specific problem is reported. The same applies to social network pages. Any student organization willing to comply with all standards for official pages, may apply and will be accorded the same status as other official pages.

**Exemptions**

These standards apply to all existing and future social network pages. Appeals for exemption should be sent to the director of electronic communication, Office of University Relations. If the director does not grant an exemption, and the applicant wishes to appeal further, the appeal may be taken to the Web Governance Council. The decision of the council will be final.

**Applying for official status**

Apply for official status at [wmich.edu/social/register](http://wmich.edu/social/register). Questions about official status for social media pages should be directed to the assistant director of electronic communication in university relations.

**Application and enforcement**

The purpose of this policy is to have a set of standards for social media pages and blogs that can be applied equitably across all areas of the University and can assist department leaders, web managers and others in planning future web use. The standards are designed to protect the reputation of the University and the safety of alumni, students, prospective students and others. If absolutely necessary, the University, through various offices, has the physical ability to remove web pages that do not comply.

**Web Advertising and Sponsors Policy**

As a public university, WMU is subject to federal and state laws regarding sources of income, political activities, use of property and other matters.

Furthermore, .edu domains are intended to designate non-commercial, academic websites.

Furthermore, the University has exclusivity agreements with certain vendors to provide certain products and services. Such agreements may or may not include noncompetition clauses for advertising in campus facilities or via University media.

The University, therefore, has a vested, legal interest in all forms of sponsorship and advertising that might appear on official University Web pages.

**Definitions**
• "Advertising" is defined as offering space on a University web page to a third party (non-WMU) for the purpose of promoting or marketing any product, service or cause, in exchange for compensation.
• "Donors" are defined as those who contribute to the University through the WMU Foundation and are eligible for tax-deductible consideration as defined by the Internal Revenue Service.
• "Sponsors" are defined as those who make contributions to University activities, which might typically include local retailers, who may anticipate public recognition or other benefits for their contributions.

Commercial advertising
• Consistent with existing WMU Rules For Use of Computing Resources, which prohibits commercial use, it is University policy to prohibit commercial advertising on all wmich.edu Web pages.
• Commercial advertising may be permitted on University-owned .com domains, provided a request to include advertising was part of the original or supplemental WMU application to purchase and maintain a .com., .net or other domain.

Political advertising
• Political advertising is expressly prohibited on all websites and pages funded in part or whole by Western Michigan University or maintained in part or whole using any University resources.
• This prohibition does not extend to materials presented as part of closely related academic instruction; political or public policy information presented in a factual, nonpartisan fashion; publicity of political speakers or events at WMU; views expressed on personal pages; or views expressed on Web pages of registered student organizations.

Sponsor listings
• Listings of sponsors of a specific event or series of events are permitted. Example: A list of local retailers sponsoring Bronco Bash or other student activity.
• Listings that imply sponsorship of a WMU website or page, or of a University college, department, office or other unit are prohibited. WMU is the exclusive sponsor of all University units and web pages.
• Sponsor listings may contain any or all of the following:
  o Simple text listing of sponsor names, addresses, phone numbers and/or web addresses.
  o Sponsor logos.
  o Web links to sponsors' websites.
• Web sponsor listings may not contain hours of service, price information, inducements such as coupons or special offers, or any information other than that listed above. Such additional information might constitute commercial advertising, which is prohibited.

Donor listings
• Donor listings are permitted on WMU web pages. Recognition of persons and organizations supporting the University, its academic programs, its students and faculty, and other activities through charitable gift contributions as defined by the Internal Revenue Service and as recognized by the WMU Foundation are permitted.
• There are specific IRS regulations with regard to limits on donor recognition and other benefits given to donors. To protect the tax-deductible status of donor contributions, departments are strongly encouraged to contact the WMU Foundation before publishing any donor listings.
Powered by

- Co-branding of WMU web pages with third-party providers of software and services through the use of phrases such as "powered by" or "provided by" is prohibited unless stipulated by contract with the third-party provider, or required as a function of identifying ownership via copyright or similar notation.
- When necessary, such listings should be in the footer of the web page and appear as text only in the least prominent manner possible.

Other forms of promotion

- WMU receives dozens of requests every month to place links on WMU web pages to third-party commercial sites, sometimes with the enticement of special discounts for WMU students, employees or alumni. There are some instances in which such links are a legitimate service to the WMU community, such as links to area hotels and motels found on the Visit WMU pages.
- To help assure consistency, all requests for links to third-party commercial sites should be sent to the director of electronic communication, Office of University Relations, for review and approval. Decisions of the director may be appealed to the Web Governance Council.
- These restrictions do not extend to related professional organizations, honor societies, or associations of which Western Michigan University is a member.

Exceptions

- Web pages promoting affinity programs and business partnerships duly approved by appropriate officers of the University are exempt from all restrictions except those relating to donor listings and political advertising.
- Other specific exceptions must be approved in writing by the Web Governance Council or by the director of electronic communication as authorized by the council to act on its behalf.

Application and enforcement

- The purpose of this policy is to have a set of standards for advertising and sponsor listings on WMU web pages that can be applied equitably across all areas of the University. If absolutely necessary, the University, through various offices, has the physical ability to remove any noncompliant or offending material from University web servers and to cancel any third-party web hosting services purchased in the name of the University.

Contact Information:
Office of Marketing and Strategic Communications
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo MI 49008-5433