



University of
Pittsburgh

Office of Equity and
Inclusive Excellence
School of Law



University of Pittsburgh School of Law

OEIE Student Advisory Council

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2-3
Should I Keep or Delete This Post?.....	4
To Post or Not to Post?.....	5
Should I Keep or Delete This Post?.....	6
Nothing Stays Private.....	7-8
Additional Resources.....	9
Conclusion.....	10



“Character is evidenced by a person’s willingness to engage in self-discipline. It is not just a question of how one chooses to engage with social media; character can be revealed in how and when one decides not to engage as well.”

Tomar Pierson-Brown
Associate Dean for Equity and Inclusive Excellence and Professor of Law



Introduction


We are in a society that is connected unlike ever before. With the touch of a button, we can speak to relatives we rarely see, send money to our friends for coffee, and even network with professionals worldwide in this global economy. The power we have at our fingertips is often awe-inspiring, yet – at the same time, the powerful tools we have to connect can spur divisiveness at a rate, unlike anything we have seen in modern history. The First Amendment of the Constitution grants us five freedoms that protect speech, religion, press, assembly, and the ability to petition the government. Our ability to speak freely is one that very few countries in the world enjoy at the capacity we do.

Due to social media platforms' novelty, law students and legal professionals are still exploring how personal social media accounts can positively and negatively affect their careers. Because the OEIE Student Advisory Council is seeking to make Pitt Law a more inclusive place, we urge students to practice inclusion and thoughtfulness in every interaction we have with our community members. We made this guide to stress how inclusion is a choice and one that we want the Pitt Law Community to make.

After reading through this social media guide and putting it into practice, students will:

1. Better position themselves to be admitted to the Bar as they would be unlikely to have any character or fitness concerns due to social media use.
2. Professional responsibility standards will be upheld as no behavior on social media would come into conflict with these rules set forth by the American Bar Association.
3. Foster a more inclusive and compassionate community within Pitt Law which is crucial as this can affect morale, grades, and even career opportunities in the future.

As a global institution of legal education that encourages critical thinking and intellectual discussion through an array of mediums, including social media, this guide aims to help prospective and current students at Pitt Law stay in accordance with all considerations of the bar examiners, the University of Pittsburgh Student Code of Conduct, and of course the Constitution.



“The legal profession affords us the privilege and honor of seeking justice on behalf of those we represent. To do our work, we are trusted with the dearly-held confidences of our clients; we draft transformative and even life-changing documents; we make critical representations on which courts decide cases. With this kind of responsibility, it is essential that we understand, from the very first day of law school, how our words and actions--all of our words and actions--are heard by and impact others because it is these same words and actions that determine our ability to succeed and ultimately to thrive as a lawyer.”

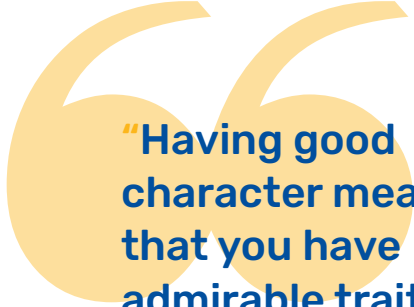
Amy J. Wildermuth
Dean and Professor of Law



Introduction


This social media guide is broken up into the following sections, each with its own purpose, to explain best practices when using social media before and during law school:

- **Should I Keep or Delete this Post?**
A decision support framework to guide whether or not older posts could be found inappropriate should be deleted.
- **To Post or Not to Post?**
A decision support framework to guide whether or not something is valuable enough to post.
- **Personal vs. Professional Social Media Use –**
Distinguish at what capacity you are using social media at a given time.
- **Nothing Stays Private**
A hypothetical about the potential consequences of careless social media use.
- **Additional Resources**



“Having good character means that you have admirable traits such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and courage. It is valuable for you to have good character, as you are applying to become a lawyer. Being honorable, smart, and honest in the work you do and on social media platforms are vital to your profession and the profession.”

Charmaine McCall
Assistant Dean of
Admissions and Financial Aid

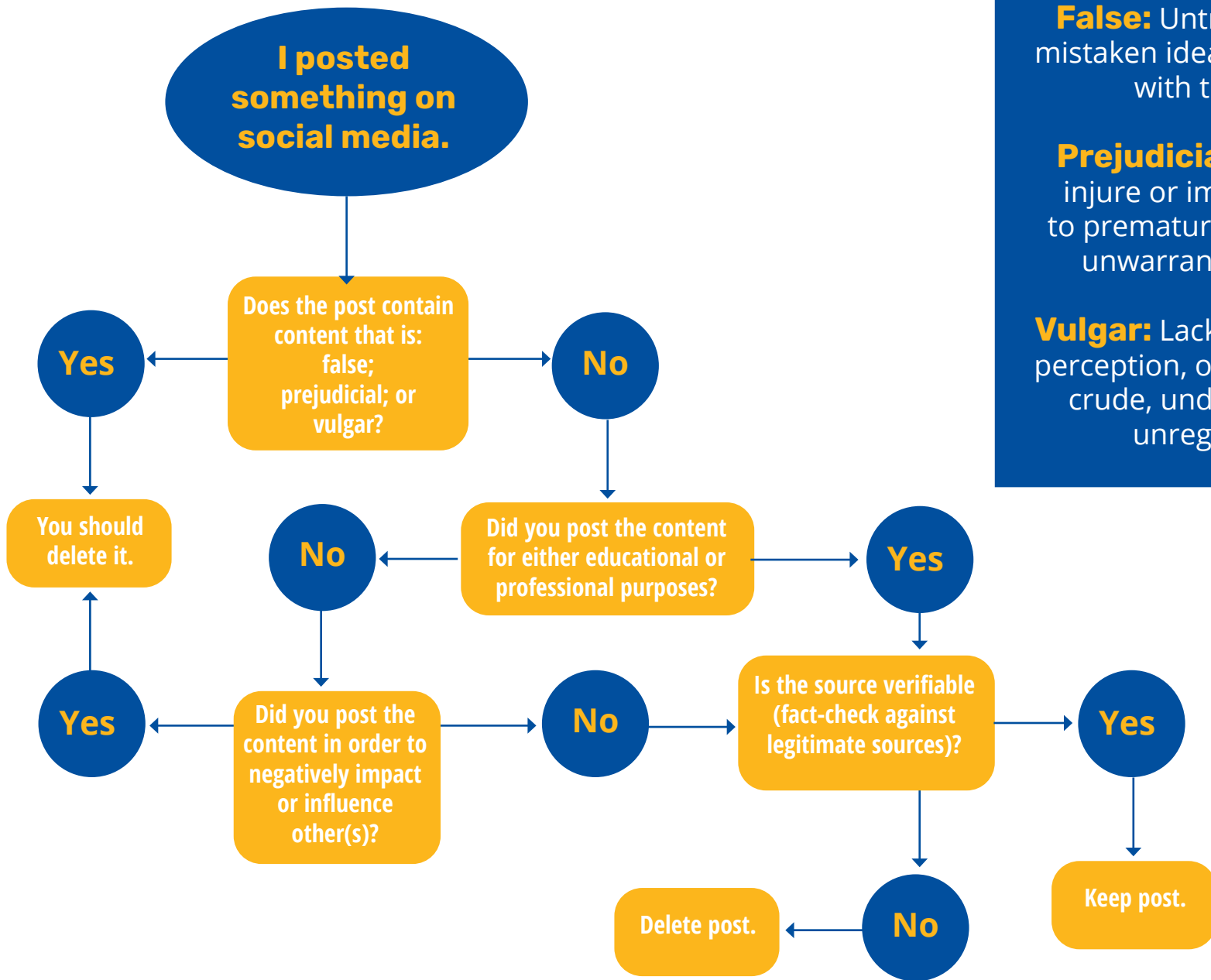


“Shakespeare’s famous line that ‘good name in man and woman . . . is the immediate jewel of their souls’ is particularly true in the case of lawyers. A client can tolerate a judgment error or other mistake from their attorney, even a significant one. But I have never seen a client interested in retaining a lawyer they could not trust and who did not share their core values.”

Hamoudi Ala Hamoudi
Vice Dean and Professor of Law



Should I Keep or Delete This Post?



False: Untrue; based on mistaken ideas, inconsistent with the facts

Prejudicial: Tending to injure or impair, leading to premature judgment or unwarranted opinion

Vulgar: Lacking cultivation, perception, or taste; morally crude, undeveloped, or unregenerate

To Post or Not to Post?

T = Is it True?

H = Is it Helpful?

I = Is it Inspiring?

N = Necessary

K = Is it Kind?

Keep In Mind...

Self-Awareness

- Think about the current social, economic, and political climate
- Consider how the post would affect others and yourself

Intention

- Think about what goal you are trying to achieve in your post
- Voicing your opinions on political issues or other matters is okay, so long as your intention is not to harm others - remain respectful and cognizant of your words



Should I Keep or Delete This Post?

Personal vs. Professional Social Media Use

Be purposeful about what you choose to post and remember that you are never truly anonymous on the internet. Sometimes it's easy to forget that your posts - even the ones that you think are private - may reach an unintended audience.

Points to consider before posting to personal and professional social media accounts

Are you posting on behalf of your school, employer, or student organization?

Adhere to the social media policies set forth by the organization you are representing.

Does your social media account reference your school or employer?

Consider adding a disclosure that states all opinions expressed are your own.

Does your post violate the student Code of Conduct?

Make sure your post is free of intimidating, hostile, or offensive content.*

Personal

Social media for personal use is a great way to communicate with family and friends, socialize, and be entertained. Here are some topics usually left for personal social media accounts:

- Personal updates; relationship status, birth of a child, new pet
- Photos of trips, special events, friends, and family
- Political opinions, articles, news videos

Professional

A professional social media account linked LinkedIn can be a valuable tool that helps you create your professional identity. Here are some tips for maintaining professional social media accounts:

- Updates about job changes; promotions, looking for new opportunities
- Sharing industry news; articles, journals
- Be respectful when you post, comment, or respond to someone directly
- Avoid writing negative or emotionally charged posts

Nothing Stays Private

It's Ash Wednesday, a holy day for Catholics. In a private group chat, Student X posts a picture of Student Y, who has ashes on their forehead, and makes disparaging comments about their religious observance. Someone in the group takes a screenshot and posts the screenshot on Facebook. The post goes viral, impacting the whole Steel City Law Community. How do you think this incident affects the following groups, both directly relating to the event and in its long-term effects?

To the right are just a few thoughts Student Y may be having because of this incident. How do you think the members of the communities below will react?

How will this affect them?

Write out your thoughts in the boxes below.

I wonder if I will be treated differently from now on because of this.

Should I wipe off my ashes or skip class?

I hope someone doesn't take a photo of me.

Will the professor say anything?



Student Y

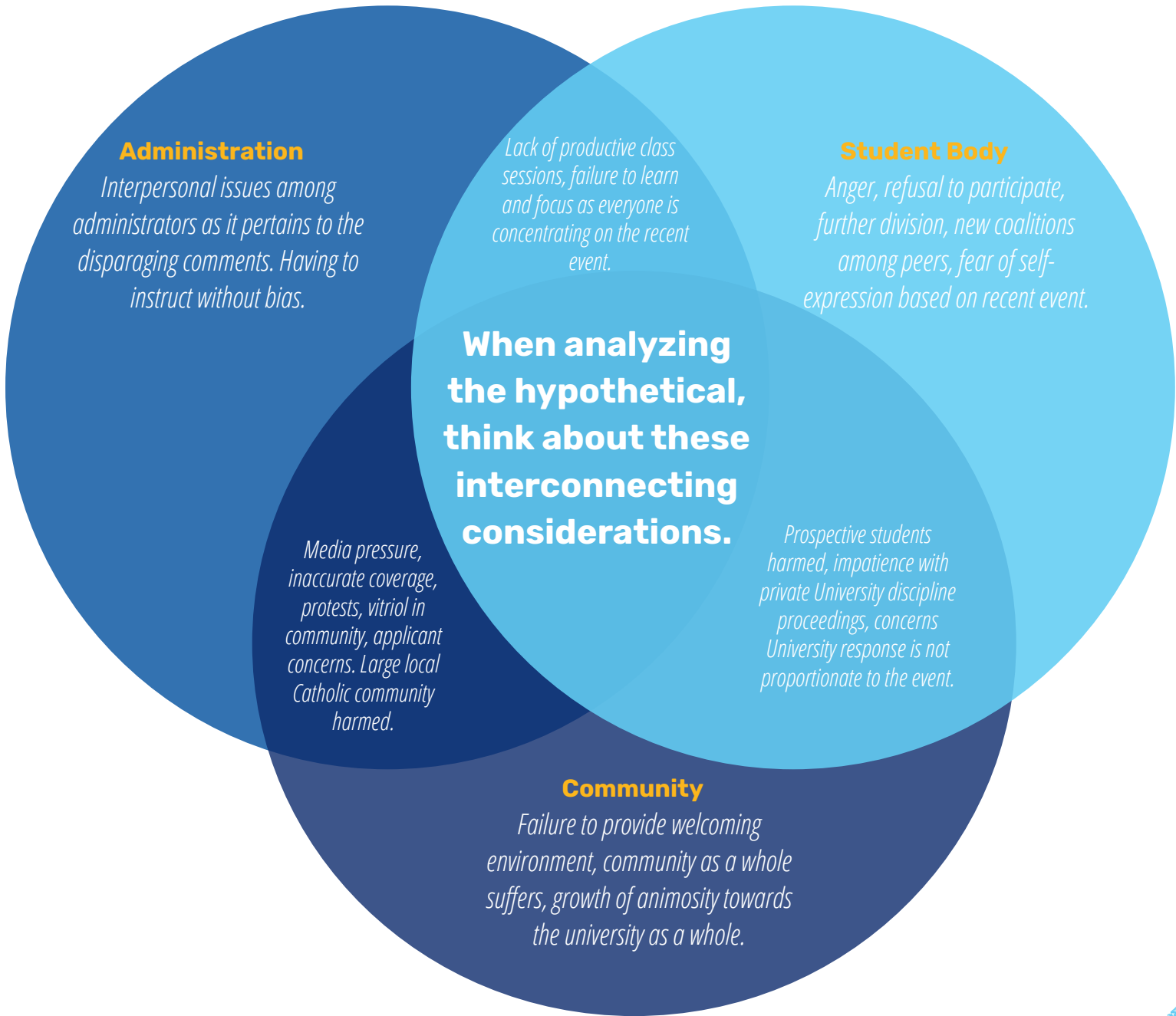
I'm disappointed a fellow classmate would do something like this.

Administration

Faculty

Students

Community Stakeholders



“As students come to Pitt Law, they are taking their first steps in becoming members of the legal community and ones of public trust. These beginning steps include thinking about how you project yourself to others and what character traits others may see in you. Your character and integrity define you. Every action you take after being sworn in as a Pitt Law student will impact your identity on a professional and human level.”

Alexandra Linsenmeyer
Dean of Students



Additional Resources

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

- [youtube.com/watch?v=1ZcU84pROa8&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch Creative](https://youtube.com/watch?v=1ZcU84pROa8&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch+Creative)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=ruCt784JQN4&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch Creative](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ruCt784JQN4&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch+Creative)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=58e3pa0br_Q&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch Creative](https://youtube.com/watch?v=58e3pa0br_Q&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=Catch+Creative)
- law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment
- law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/part-99
- law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1232g

CASES

- caselaw.findlaw.com/us-5th-circuit/1686791.html
- law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca8/14-2988/14-2988-2016-10-26.html
- wakeforestlawreview.com/2018/04/can-schools-discipline-students-for-social-media-posts/

ARTICLES

- americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-33/july-2014/marketing-yourself-on-social-media--california-ethics-opinion-gi/
- americanbar.org/groups/litigation/publications/litigation-news/top-stories/2017/attorneys-online-comments-can-lead-to-positional-conflicts/
- mdcourts.gov/data/opinions/coa/2016/32a15m.pdf
- floridasupremecourt.org/content/download/242823/file/2009_FBBE_Character_Fitness_Report_Short_Version.pdf
- harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/
- THE NOTION AND PRACTICE OF REPUTATION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN SOCIAL NETWORKING: FROM K-12 THROUGH LAW SCHOOL, By Roberta Studwell lawpublications.barry.edu/facultyscholarship/90/

CODE OF CONDUCT

- http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017_Code_of_Conduct_Clean.pdf

“I believe that it is important for Pitt Law students to develop personal and professional relationships with classmates and peers based upon trust and an open channel of communication. Matters of character and integrity are an important foundation to these collegial relationships, which I hope will be enduring.”

Vincent Johnson

Director of Equity and Inclusive Excellence

Conclusion

This social media guide was made with prospective and current members of the Pitt Law community in mind to help navigate the use of social media in community-conscious ways that align with various concerns, including professionalism, character and fitness standards, and the Student Code of Conduct.

While social media is a powerful and useful tool that allows us to be more connected than ever before, it is important to recognize that there are potential pitfalls in how we choose to communicate on social media. Negative or problematic social media posts can potentially undermine the inclusive community that all of us here at Pitt Law are striving to foster, where individuals of different backgrounds and perspectives are welcome.

Remember that your integrity and moral character are always on display as a Pitt Law student and member of the legal profession. Responsible social media use is a step that all Pitt Law community members are empowered and encouraged to take to show their commitment to a more inclusive Pitt Law community.

Sincerely,

The OEIE Student Advisory Council

*Veronica Vivero-Condon
Sandrine Gibbons
Nikki Kaing
Sara Planthaber
Mike Zula*



“Bar Examiners are fundamentally tasked with evaluating the character and competence of aspiring attorneys to protect the public and preserve the integrity of the profession. As the first step in the professional journey, law schools owe a dual-duty: first to help the profession by assessing the character of our students and instilling high ethical standards for them. Second, we owe a duty to our students to mentor them and help them demonstrate they possess the requisite character for the profession.”

*Rob Wible
Director of Academic Success
and Bar Exam Services*

