

## **Background**

Social media offers tremendous opportunities to connect, build community, share information, and collaborate on new ideas. The number and popularity of social media platforms continue to grow, and the use of social media has increasingly spread from personal to professional contexts. The ubiquity of social media in daily life necessitates the development of guidelines to promote ethical use of social media for all members of the FIFSW community. This policy should be considered a living document that requires frequent review and updating, given the rapidly changing nature of social media and technology.

This document outlines the social media policy for all members of the FIFSW community. This includes FIFSW MSW and PhD students, faculty members, sessional lecturers, course instructors, as well as administrative, professional, and research staff. The policy was created based on a review of materials exploring social media in the context of the social work profession, relevant policies and guidelines of the University of Toronto and a review of social media policies from other faculties and schools of social work. Social media policies from the following schools/faculties of social work were considered in the development of this draft outline: King's College, Renison University College, University of Northern British Columbia, University of Regina, University of Victoria, University of Windsor, University of the Fraser Valley, Carleton University, Dalhousie University, McMaster University, Ryerson University, St. Thomas University, University of British Columbia, University of Manitoba, and University of Ottawa. Guidance materials were also reviewed from New York University's Silver School of Social Work and the University of Michigan's School of Social Work.

## **Preamble**

The FIFSW operates within the University of Toronto and members of the FIFSW community are expected to comply with the conduct guidelines and policies set out by the University of Toronto. Online conduct of members of the FIFSW community should also comply with these guidelines and policies.

Conduct should be influenced by the core principles of the University of Toronto. The University of Toronto is committed to freedom of speech and expression, which includes the right to "examine, question, investigate, speculate, and comment on any issue without reference to prescribed doctrine, as well as the right to criticize the University and society at large".<sup>1</sup> The University of Toronto strives to "be an equitable and inclusive community, rich with diversity, protecting the human rights of all persons, and based upon understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of every person".<sup>2</sup> This commitment to equity prioritizes a "working, teaching and learning environment that is free of discrimination and harassment".<sup>3</sup> The University of Toronto's Statement on Human Rights further details this commitment by emphasizing that the University "acts within its purview to prevent or remedy discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual

orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, receipt of public assistance or record of offences”.<sup>4</sup>

These principles are translated into conduct expectations, policies and guidelines for students, faculty and staff. The University of Toronto emphasizes that these obligations apply to all conduct of University of Toronto community members, whether information and communication technology is involved or not.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside its commitments as part of the University of Toronto, the FIFSW has responsibilities to the profession of social work. As such, FIFSW students and faculty, as well as any staff members with a social work degree, must abide by the ethical and practice policies and guidelines of the social work profession. Further, all members of the FIFSW community are responsible for complying with broader legislative conduct requirements. Therefore, this policy should be understood as a requirement nested within FIFSW community members’ obligations to the FIFSW, the University of Toronto, the social work profession, and broader legislation.

The FIFSW’s social media policy is in addition to any existing or future relevant professional, FIFSW, and University of Toronto policies and guidelines. Current policies and guidelines from these sources have been used to inform the development of the FIFSW’s social media policy. Relevant professional, FIFSW, and University of Toronto policies, guidelines and materials are listed at the end of this document.

### **Social Work Ethics**

As social workers and social work students, the actions of members of the FIFSW are guided by the Canadian Association of Social Work (CASW) Code of Ethics.<sup>6</sup> The code sets out expectations for professional conduct, and is built around core social work values. Each value is detailed in a set of underlying principles.

- Value 1: Respect for Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons
- Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice
- Value 3: Service to Humanity
- Value 4: Integrity of Professional Practice
- Value 5: Confidentiality in Professional Practice
- Value 6: Competence in Professional Practice

The CASW Code of Ethics does not specifically address the opportunities and challenges associated with social media. As noted in the CASW report on social media use and social work practice, however, “while social media presents a different forum for the sharing of information and building connections, the ethical issues remain the same and ethical principles and standards must equally apply”.<sup>7</sup> This statement forms the overarching guide for this policy, emphasizing that the responsibilities of FIFSW community members remain the same for conduct online as well as offline.

In Ontario, social workers and social work students are also guided by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW), which is the

regulatory body for social workers and social service workers in Ontario. While the OCSWSSW's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice do not specifically reference social media, they set out the minimum standards for professional practice and conduct and should be broadly applied to all areas of practice, including the use of social media.<sup>8</sup>

### **Purpose and Scope**

The FIFSW's social media policy is intended to foster the ethical use of social media, and to support the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the FIFSW and field practicum contexts. The policy is also intended to inform student, staff and faculty use of social media and to encourage thoughtful and knowledgeable social media conduct.

The FIFSW's social media policy applies to all members of the FIFSW community, including FIFSW students, faculty members and staff. This policy also applies to official FIFSW social media sites.

This policy is intended to govern the social media activities of FIFSW community members related to their roles in the FIFSW. It is not intended to infringe upon rights to free speech and personal use of social media. Members of the FIFSW community who are social workers or social work students, however, should understand and live by the Code of Ethics consistently, in professional and personal social media use.

Members of the FIFSW community are also encouraged to be guided by this policy if their social media account is intended for FIFSW community members (e.g., the FIFSW Alumni Association; MSW cohort/field of study/graduation social networking groups). Even though these sites are not part of the official FIFSW online presence or moderated by the FIFSW, reference to the FIFSW or the University of Toronto can imply representation and this policy should therefore be considered.

FIFSW students are expected to comply with this policy in all aspects of their program, including classroom, research and practicum contexts. When in practicum, students are also expected to review, understand and comply with the social media policy of their practicum agency. In the absence of a social media policy at their practicum agency, this policy acts as a minimum standard to guide student behaviour.

For the purposes of this policy, social media is intended as a broad term, representing online technology that enables people to collaborate, connect, communicate and share information and resources.<sup>9</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, mobile and web-based platforms for email, instant messaging, social networking, online publication (e.g., blogging, vlogging), forums, and virtual communities.

### **Guidelines**

#### *Privacy and Confidentiality*

The same expectations of privacy and confidentiality that govern offline behaviour apply online and to the use of social media. This includes the expectations of confidentiality detailed in the CASW Code of Ethics, the OCSWSSW's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the University of Toronto's Standards of Professional Practice Behaviour for all Health Professional Students, and in the FIFSW Practicum Manual.

Additional considerations apply for social media use. General guidelines for privacy and confidentiality include:

- Content shared through social media platforms becomes part of the public domain.<sup>10</sup> Members of the FIFSW community should not share any client information – including non-identifying information – on social media platforms.<sup>11</sup>
- The right to privacy and confidentiality extends beyond clients to include students, faculty members, FIFSW staff, and practicum agency staff. As is the case for offline conduct, members of the FIFSW community are expected not to share information that is confidential or identifying about any of these groups.
- Confidentiality also extends to all information at practicum agencies. Students in practicum cannot post or share any practicum agency material without consent from their field instructor.
- Consent is required before photographs and videos can be taken at the FIFSW and/or practicum agencies and shared online. Posting photographs or videos without consent is a breach of confidentiality.

As with any other potential breaches of confidentiality, immediately contact Milad Tabataba if you have any questions or concerns about whether information has or could breach confidentiality.

**Milad Tabataba | Registrar & Assistant Dean | Email: milad.tabataba@utoronto.ca**

### *Online Representation*

The University of Toronto is committed to maintaining respect for the core values of freedom of speech, academic freedom, and freedom of research. These guidelines are not meant to infringe upon faculty members' freedom of speech, academic freedom, and freedom of research. On social media, members of the FIFSW community should be clear that they are expressing their own views rather than the views of the FIFSW, the University of Toronto, or their practicum agency. For personal social media accounts, the University recommends including a statement such as “views expressed are my own”.

FIFSW Faculty Members and staff are encouraged to use the FIFSW or University of Toronto crest or wordmark professionally and to refrain from doing so for their unofficial personal or group social media accounts. Other members of the FIFSW community are asked to refrain from using the FIFSW or University of Toronto crest or wordmark on their social media accounts. Some websites – such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate – prompt users to identify their affiliations and then populate user pages with university crests. This is not a violation of policy.

### *Respectful and Professional Use*

Social media use by members of the FIFSW community should be guided by the same conduct expectations that apply in their academic or employment roles. For all groups, this includes the CASW Code of Ethics, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the University of Toronto's Policy and Procedures: Sexual Harassment and the University of Toronto's Statements on: Human Rights; Equity, Diversity, and Excellence; and Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment.

For students, this also includes FIFSW student guidelines, the University of Toronto Code of Student Conduct and the Student's Companion to the Code of Student Conduct. For faculty members and staff, additional guidelines for behaviour include the University of Toronto's: Human Resources Guideline on Workplace Harassment and Civil Conduct; Policy with Respect to Workplace Harassment; and the Guideline for Employees on Concerns and Complaints regarding Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment.

As noted in the above documents, online harassment and/or discrimination are strictly prohibited. These behaviours would be considered breaches of this policy.

Respectful and professional use includes the following general guidelines:

- Respectful and professional conduct includes treating others with dignity, politeness and consideration, being respectful of others' right to express opposing views, and managing conflict respectfully.<sup>12</sup>
- FIFSW students are encouraged to view their social media presence as another area to demonstrate "respectful engagement" and foster a space for "learning, sharing and development of ideas and perspectives".<sup>13</sup>

### *Professional/Practicum Use*

As with other sections of this policy, online conduct should be informed by the same FIFSW, University of Toronto, and professional social work policies that govern relevant offline behavior.

Students in practicum must review and follow the policies of their practicum agencies and engage with their field instructors about appropriate online conduct.

The Practicum Office has detailed guidelines for students in practicum to protect confidentiality.<sup>14</sup> Several are of particular relevance to social media, including:

- Personal devices are not recommended for client communication; boundary issues, stress and personal safety may be at risk when personal devices are used.<sup>15</sup>
- Students cannot use their personal devices to save client information. The Practicum Manual notes that:<sup>16</sup>
  - NO practicum related information is to be removed from the setting – in hard copy, memory key, lap top, or smart phones.<sup>17</sup>

- The University of Toronto requires encryption of all personal and confidential electronic information that is kept outside of secure U of T servers.
- Students should familiarize themselves with the policy of the practicum setting related to how the setting handles electronic data.
- Students are asked to review the University of Toronto FIPPA Guidelines Regarding Security for Personal and Other Confidential Information.<sup>18</sup>

Essential guidelines specific to social media include:

- Members of the FIFSW community should not connect or engage with current or former clients on social media.
- Students are encouraged to postpone personal social media connections with FIFSW faculty members and staff, as well as field practicum staff, until students have completed their social work education. When deciding whether to connect on social media, students and faculty are encouraged to consider the nature of their social media account (e.g. is the content personal or professional?; is the account public or private?). These guidelines apply particularly to personal social accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) rather than professional accounts (e.g., LinkedIn, ResearchGate).
- FIFSW faculty members and staff are encouraged to share course content with current students on official university platforms (i.e. Quercus) rather than social media platforms.
- Members of the FIFSW community should understand and appropriately use privacy controls on all social media platforms.

Beyond these essential guidelines, this document is not intended to provide clinical or practice guidelines related to social media use. For more information in these areas, members of the FIFSW community are encouraged to review the relevant CASW and OCSWSSW reports referenced at the end of this document.

### *Social Media and the Classroom*

The use of social media in the context of the classroom should be guided by the same expectations that govern general class behavior. Accordingly, classroom notes, lectures, discussions and other course materials should be kept confidential and not shared on social media unless authorized by the instructor. These guidelines are also intended to protect copyright and intellectual property rights.

Classroom photos and recordings cannot be posted online without consent of the instructor and students. In some courses, recordings are made and posted online to support student learning. Faculty members should take steps to ensure student privacy, including getting student consent before posting, posting to private sites and disabling comments features on video posts.

Conduct on Quercus – the University of Toronto’s online classroom platform – is governed by the University of Toronto’s guidelines on the appropriate use of information and communication technology.<sup>19</sup>

### **Breaches of this policy**

For students, breaches of this policy will be addressed as set out in existing relevant policies and guidelines, including Academic Integrity,<sup>20</sup> the Guidelines for the Resolution of Problems in the Practicum Section of the FIFSW MSW Practicum Manual,<sup>21</sup> and the University of Toronto Code of Student Conduct.<sup>22</sup>

For staff and FIFSW faculty members, breaches of this policy will be addressed as set out in existing relevant policies and guidelines, including the Human Resources Guideline on Workplace Harassment and Civil Conduct,<sup>23</sup> the Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment,<sup>24</sup> the Guideline for Employees on Concerns and Complaints regarding Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment,<sup>25</sup> the Policy with Respect to Workplace Harassment,<sup>26</sup> and the Policy and Procedures: Sexual Harassment.<sup>27</sup>

### **Related policies and regulations**

#### Relevant Social Work Professional Policies/Guidelines

- CASW code of ethics (2005)<sup>28</sup>
- CASW social media use and social work practice (2014)<sup>29</sup>
- OCSWSSW code of ethics and standards of practice (2008)<sup>30</sup>
- OCSWSSW practice notes:
  - Communication Technology & Ethical Practice: Evolving Issues in a Changing Landscape (2012)<sup>31</sup>
  - Professional and Ethical: Communication Technology Practices and Policies for a Digital World (2014)<sup>32</sup>
  - Social Media and Practice: Protecting Privacy and Professionalism in a Virtual World (2011)<sup>33</sup>

#### Relevant University of Toronto Student and Workplace Policies/Guidelines

- Standards of Professional Practice Behaviour for all Health Professional Students (2008)<sup>34</sup>
- University of Toronto Code of Student Conduct (2002)<sup>35</sup>
- Student’s Companion to the Code of Student Conduct (2016)<sup>36</sup>
- University of Toronto Human Resources Guideline on Workplace Harassment and Civil Conduct (2018)<sup>37</sup>
- Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment (1994)<sup>38</sup>
- Guideline for employees on concerns and complaints regarding prohibited discrimination and discriminatory harassment (2018)<sup>39</sup>
- Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence (2006)<sup>40</sup>
- Statement on Freedom of Speech (1992)<sup>41</sup>
- Statement on Human Rights (2012)<sup>42</sup>

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- Policy on Information Security and the Protection of Digital Assets (2016)<sup>43</sup>
- Appropriate use of Information and Communication Technology<sup>44</sup>
- Policy with Respect to Workplace Harassment (2017)<sup>45</sup>
- Policy and Procedures: Sexual Harassment (1997)<sup>46</sup>
- Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (2017)<sup>47</sup>
- Conflict of Interest and Close Personal Relations<sup>48</sup>

#### Relevant legislation

- Ontario Health and Safety Act (2018)<sup>49</sup>
  - Specifically, Bill 168, which is an amendment to Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. It came into force on June 15, 2010 and is intended to protect workers from violence and harassment.<sup>50</sup>
- Ontario Human Rights Code (2018)<sup>51</sup>

#### Relevant FIFSW content

- FIFSW Academic Plan, which includes content on FIFSW mission and values, and details strategic directions for the upcoming years. The upcoming academic plan (2017-2022) includes a focus on knowledge mobilization, including an increased FIFSW social media presence.
- Information for current students, which includes academic integrity and academic policies.<sup>52</sup>
- The MSW Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency Program Field of Study Manual, which includes information on academic policies.<sup>53</sup>
- MSW Student Practicum Manual, which includes information about student professional behavior and social work ethics.<sup>54</sup>

### **For questions and/or more information**

The FIFSW recognizes the challenges of engaging with social media, and it is important that members of the FIFSW community seek support whenever needed. Concerns and uncertainties will invariably arise, and it is important to explore these as soon as possible with a trusted member of the FIFSW. Members of the FIFSW community are encouraged to seek guidance from relevant FIFSW staff, including academic advisors, the practicum office, the Associate Dean Academic and the Dean.

### **References**

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<sup>48</sup> University of Toronto Conflict of Interest and Close Personal Relations [https://www.provost.utoronto.ca/planning-policy/conflict-of-interest-close-personal-relations/#section\\_3](https://www.provost.utoronto.ca/planning-policy/conflict-of-interest-close-personal-relations/#section_3)

<sup>49</sup> Government of Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1, 2018, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o01>

<sup>50</sup> Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Bill 168, Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Violence and Harassment in the Workplace) 2009 <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-39/session-1/bill-168>

<sup>51</sup> Government of Ontario, Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19>

<sup>52</sup> FIFSW Current Students <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/current-students/>

<sup>53</sup> FIFSW MSW-ITR Manual, 2018, <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/MSW-ITR-Manual-2018-19.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> FIFSW Practicum Manual, <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/practicum/practicum-manual-2/>