Social Media and News Media Guidelines

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Owner: Office of University Communications

Aurora University embraces principles of free expression and civil discourse, which are central to our ability to fulfill our transformative mission. We affirm that our campus community has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, to engage in civil discourse and respectful disagreement, and to seek, receive, and impart diverse ideas in Aurora University venues. For more information, read our full **Statement on Free Expression and Civil Discourse**.

Participation with media, both social media channels and news media outlets, can be an important way for members of the AU community to share resources, expertise, and ideas, and also find useful information.

This document provides general principles for engaging with news media (page 2) and detailed guidelines for the use of social media (pages 3-9).

News Media Guidelines

The Aurora University president is the official spokesperson for the university and the only person authorized to speak on behalf of the university. The president may delegate this authority to others as she determines appropriate.

Faculty and staff are free to respond to requests from media regarding their scholarship, research, and professional expertise. Anyone other than the president or her designee who speaks to the media must make it clear that the opinions they are sharing are theirs alone and do not represent the official opinions of Aurora University.

If any member of the university community beyond the president or her designee(s) is approached for a comment or interview by a member of the news media, the community member should first notify the Office of University Communications, which will provide background and context on the media outlet and reporter. In general, community members will be encouraged to participate in media stories.

Social Media Guidelines

The social media guidelines and policies outlined below pertain to AU faculty, staff, and students representing AU. Social media policies applying to employees are also available in the Employee Handbook and social media policies pertaining to students and student organizations are also available in the A-Book Student Handbook and the Spartan Athletic Handbook.

The university encourages all AU faculty, staff, and students to keep in mind the speed and manner in which information posted on social media can be relayed (and often misunderstood) by readers. When in doubt, do not post!

The guidelines are designed to clarify who is authorized to act in an official social media role on behalf of AU, and to establish acceptable use of AU's official social media sites by the authorized employees.

General Guidelines

Posts and content added by the administrators of the official AU social media accounts are official Aurora University content. Opinions expressed on social media channels by other users do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Aurora University. We adhere to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) guidelines for ethical practices in college admissions. We also adhere to NCAA social media recruiting rules for athletes and coaches.

Authorized Social Media Personnel

Social media is the use of mobile technologies and web-based applications to connect with the online community. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, blogs, Twitter, Instagram, Vimeo, YouTube, and Facebook. They are powerful communications tools that have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations.

An AU-branded account includes any and all accounts administered by university employees using the AU name, logos, and/or nicknames, or accounts that represent an AU division, department, or program. AU-branded accounts represent the university. Individuals who run the accounts may not express personal opinions or use university branding without authorization or accountability.

Institutional Guidelines for AU Accounts

When using social media for your division, department, or campus center, there are legal, professional, and ethical guidelines that must be conformed to, as well as best practices that will enable you, your platform, and your audience, to thrive.

Any account that is run by AU staff and faculty and represents an AU division, department, team, group, campus location, or center is defined as an institutional account and is therefore the responsibility and the property of AU. All institutional pages and accounts must comply with

AU's institutional guidelines. Failure to comply may result in admins being removed or a page being permanently disabled.

- **Respect confidentiality.** As a university, we have a responsibility to ensure that confidential or proprietary information about AU students, employees, or alumni is never revealed. When featuring individuals on your social media channels, ensure you have written permission to use any identifying information. Do not feature AU students, employees, or alumni without permission. All content shared on university channels must adhere to AU, state, federal, and NCAA privacy laws and policies (including rules governing social media interactions between the university and prospective student-athletes), FERPA, and HIPAA.
- **Respect property.** To protect yourself and AU from repercussions, ensure that all content you post conforms to copyright laws. Do not use creative assets such as audio, video, or visual content that you do not have the rights to. Instead, make use of the many sites online that offer free stock photography, music and video content.
- **Protect AU's reputation.** As a representative of AU, the content you share should reflect the university's values and be in line with the university's institutional voice. Ensure that all content represents AU in a professional manner, is in good taste, and adheres to our institutional guidelines. Remember, departmental/divisional social media presences are an extension of AU, not a personal platform.
- **Be appropriate.** Content shared on AU social media platforms should not violate any policy within the faculty, employee, or student handbooks. When using social media, if an employee expresses either a political opinion or an opinion regarding the university's actions, or endorses a product or service, and also identifies oneself as an employee of the university (or if it can be inferred that the employee is an employee of the university), the poster must specifically state that the opinion or endorsement is the employee's personal opinion or endorsement and not the university's position.
- **Protect AU's logo and visual identity.** Follow AU's branding guidelines to ensure that your use of colors, fonts, and the AU logo is in line with our policies. The AU logo may not be modified under any circumstances.
- **Prioritize accessibility.** As a university, we have a responsibility to ensure that all content we share complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This includes optimizing content for screen readers by including an alt tag description for images, using camel case (capitalizing the first letters of compound words) for multi-word hashtags, and providing captions or a transcript for video and audio content. Email pr@aurora.edu for more guidance on your responsibilities regarding digital accessibility.

Launching a New Account

The Office of University Communications is responsible for stewarding AU's over-arching digital presence, and it is important that new and existing social media accounts are launched and managed in a way that complements AU's holistic digital strategy. To support our joint goal of elevating AU's online presence, the following steps must be taken when considering starting a new account to represent an AU division, department, team, group, campus location, or center.

- **Work with the Office of University Communications.** Email pr@aurora.edu to meet with our team and create a plan for your new account before you launch. Any new account representing an AU division, department, team, group, campus location, or center must be approved by and registered with the Office of University Communications before it is launched.
- **Assign a point person.** All AU-affiliated groups, accounts, and pages must have at least one AU employee as an administrator. Make sure you have at least one employee who can take responsibility for regularly scheduling content and monitoring activity. It may be helpful to identify two employees who can split this work between them. This will ensure that accounts are regularly monitored, comments and messages are responded to in a timely manner, and content is shared regularly. In addition, pr@aurora.edu should be listed as an admin so that AU can access your accounts in the event of your social media point person(s) leaving or in an emergency.

Emergency Situations

During an emergency on campus, the Office of University Communications team will work alongside AU leadership and Campus Public Safety to distribute information through AU's main social media channels. With the exception of these channels, all social media accounts associated with AU should refrain from posting until the emergency is over unless specifically directed otherwise by the Office of University Communications.

Community Guidelines for Audience Members

AU's core values are founded on the principles of mutual respect and open discourse. As such, we are committed to maintaining a safe and engaging environment for our community. When making decisions about how best to maintain this, our students, faculty, and staff will always be our priority. We expect that when engaging on AU groups and pages, community members adhere to the following guidelines:

- **Respect one another.** Civil discourse should be maintained at all times on pages and in groups affiliated with the University. AU will not tolerate hate speech, bullying, name-calling, or profanity on our pages or groups. Comments and posts with abusive, sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic or otherwise offensive content will be flagged and deleted, and the individual who posted will be immediately and permanently blocked from the page or group. Any comments threatening or attacking a member of our community, especially a student, will be flagged and deleted, and the individual who posted will be immediately and permanently blocked from the page or group. Threatening posts will be elevated to the appropriate authorities.
- **Respect confidentiality.** Do not share private financial, medical, or personal information about any individual in your posts or comments, regardless of whether you are sharing in a closed group or a public page. All content shared on AU channels, including visitor content, must adhere to AU, state, federal, and NCAA privacy laws and policies, and FERPA and HIPAA.

- **No promotions, spam, lobbying, or solicitations.** AU pages and groups are not to be used for lobbying or to solicit business, donations, or contact information. Spam (duplicative comments by the same user) or irrelevant posts will be flagged and deleted.
- **Stop the spread of misinformation.** Before you share a comment or post, fact check, and make sure that the content and the source are accurate. AU will not tolerate inaccurate representation of facts. If you are using the words of others in your post, make this clear, and credit all creative and intellectual property you are sharing appropriately.

Groups

Facebook and LinkedIn groups can be used to bring together a particular demographic – such as alumni, incoming students, supporters, or parents – to network, share resources, and build community. We recommend that group administrators on official AU groups utilize rules to clearly communicate community expectations. Sharing community expectations, and communicating when members breach these, promotes transparency and encourages community accountability. Rules may vary slightly depending on the purpose of the groups, but the community guidelines spelled out above should provide the framework. Any new members should be prompted to agree to abide by these rules before being admitted.

In addition, AU groups:

- Should have a clear purpose to be spelled out in the group description: for example, "A group for students, alumni, faculty, and staff of Aurora University to share news, events, and opportunities across the AU network." AU employees looking to start a new group should connect with AU's Office of University Communications at pr@aurora.edu to help chart the mission and vision of the group.
- Should only admit members from the intended demographic (for instance, only alumni should be admitted to an alumni networking group). Prospective members who are not part of the intended demographic should not be admitted, and current members who do not meet the demographic should be removed.
- Are required to have at least one AU employee as an admin, along with at least one member of the Office of University Communications

Failure to Comply

We moderate AU social media pages and groups in order to maintain a community of belonging. Failure to comply with our community guidelines may result in a warning and/or your comments being deleted or hidden, followed by a block or ban from the page or group in question. More serious offenses may result in an immediate ban. While every effort will be made to prioritize transparency, AU admins reserve the right to make decisions to restrict access to university pages and groups as deemed necessary. These steps are in place to protect our whole community and ensure that everybody feels safe on our platforms.

Decision-Making Rubric

When moderating content on AU social media pages and groups, admins will use the following questions to make informed decisions around when to mute, block, or ban a community member.

1. Does this post or comment violate local, state, or federal laws?
2. Does this post or comment harm, directly or indirectly, a member, or members, of our community?
3. Is this comment or post malicious or inaccurate?
4. Does this post or comment otherwise violate our community guidelines?

Responsibilities for Employees with Personal Accounts

Your personal social media is just that – personal. AU values employees' rights to speak freely on their personal social media accounts. Keeping personal accounts completely separate from institutional accounts is challenging. If you hold a prominent role at AU, post content that relates closely to the university, or identify yourself as an AU staff or faculty member on your accounts, there are steps you should consider to protect yourself and ensure transparency when posting. As an employee of the university, you are personally responsible for any social media activity you conduct using an AU email address or on an AU website; and/or which can be traced back to an AU domain; and/or which uses AU's Information Systems; and/or which expressly or implicitly identifies you as an AU staff person or faculty member. Further, this section outlines the potential impact of personal social media use on your employment relationship with AU.

- **Think first, post second.** The things that can get you in trouble and subject you to discipline in "real life" with the university can do the same in the realm of the internet and social media (e.g., sexually harassing a colleague or inappropriate interactions with students). You may not use social media to post or display comments about coworkers, supervisors, or the university that are vulgar, obscene, threatening, intimidating, derogatory, bullying, defaming, or that violate the university's workplace policies against discrimination, harassment, or hostility on account of age, race, religion, sex, ethnicity, nationality, disability, or other protected class, status, or characteristic.
- **Be transparent.** Be clear about your identity: don't claim to represent an AU department, division, or team. If you identify yourself as an AU employee, it may be helpful to include a brief disclaimer to make it clear that your views are your own and that you are not formally representing AU in this capacity. (Sample language: "All views expressed are my own and do not reflect the views of Aurora University."). You are prohibited from using the Aurora University name or image to endorse an opinion, product, cause, business, or political candidate. If you choose to list your work affiliation on a social network, you should regard all communication on that network as you would in a professional network when using a company domain.
- **Respect confidentiality.** Make sure that you are not sharing confidential or personal information about a member, or members, of the AU community. As an employee of AU, you are bound by AU, state, federal, and NCAA privacy laws and policies, and FERPA and HIPAA. Only authorized institutional staff members may recruit potential student-athletes. The university may be held in violation of NCAA rules and

regulations if you use your personal social media accounts to contact potential student-athletes with whom you do not have close personal relationships in an attempt to recruit or entice them to attend AU.

- **Be thoughtful about what you post.** While you are free to use your platforms as you wish, remember that individuals are legally responsible for the content they post. Protecting AU is part of your job. Protect yourself and the institution by ensuring that the content you share will not cause you problems down the line. Remember, nothing is private on the internet: even direct messages are frequently screenshotted and shared by users, so make sure you don't say anything you may regret.
- **Do not use the AU logo to represent yourself.** The AU logo and shield and the AU Spartan Athletics logo are designed to represent our organization in its official capacity. As such, they should not be used to represent or endorse an individual. Even if you are representing yourself in a professional capacity, logos should not be used as profile pictures: this can give the impression that your personal content represents the official views of AU.
- **Remember your audience.** Be aware that a presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, current employers and colleagues, and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.
- **Report violations.** If employees observe language or behavior on unofficial sites/accounts where university issues arise, there is an obligation to report conduct that a reasonable person would find abusive, threatening, intimidating, or harassing. To be clear, there is no expectation that employees actively monitor unofficial sites. Rather, employees who observe abusive, threatening, intimidating, or harassing behavior related to a member of the AU community, need to report such observations to the university for follow-up. The university has a legal responsibility to respond to such behaviors that it knows or should have known about, and employee knowledge may constitute university knowledge. More importantly, AU has an ethical responsibility to intervene in situations where abusive, threatening, intimidating, or harassing behavior is occurring. If the issue pertains to an employee, please notify the director of human resources. If the issue involves a student, please notify the dean of students.
- **Antiracism.** When you are online, you are representing AU: our students and our values. There is no room for bigotry, prejudice, misogyny, or hatred in our institution or on our associated social media feeds. Any online violation of our nondiscrimination and/or anti-racism policy, including shared content online, may be cause for discipline up to and including termination.

Nothing in this policy restricts employees' ability to engage in protected activity under the National Labor Relations Act.

When posting about AU, staff and faculty should follow our community guidelines. Where appropriate, content related to AU that violates these guidelines (for instance, by sharing confidential information) will be elevated to AU administration.

In enforcing this policy, the university reserves the right to monitor social media activities of employees, whether or not such activities are conducted with university resources, to the extent

permitted by and in accordance with applicable law. Violations of this policy will result in a review of the incident and may include action under appropriate AU discipline processes.

Social media platforms and best practices continue to evolve and the university understands that not every situation may be represented in the above policy. For questions regarding Aurora University's social media policy, contact the Office of University Communications:
pr@aurora.edu