

**Final Report:  
The Ad Hoc Committee on Social Media, Pedagogy, Academic Rights and  
Responsibilities**

Submitted to the Steering Committee: January 10, 2014

**Committee Members:**

- William Donohue (Chair), Professor, Department of Communication
- Liza Potts, Assistant Professor, Department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures
- Manuel Chavez, Associate Professor, School of Journalism
- Ronald Fisher, Professor, Department of Economics
- Eric Skogsberg, Doctoral Candidate, Curriculum Instruction and Teacher Education
- Rob LaDuca, Professor, Lyman Briggs College

**Committee Charge:** The Ad Hoc Committee on Social Media, Pedagogy, Academic Rights and Responsibilities, is charged with gathering information, examining experiences at other universities, and presenting best practices as they relate to social media, teaching, and speech rights and responsibilities in the classroom. This committee will also make recommendations about how MSU might best utilize this information. It will likely meet 2-3 times, and present its results to the Steering Committee of the Academic Senate in a brief report. The Steering Committee will then decide how best to respond to the committee's recommendations.

**Introduction**

The Recent American Association of University Professors (AAUP) report on academic freedom (citation) points out that academic freedom in the context of social media is an evolving topic. As new policies are adopted or old ones revised it is essential that faculty (and perhaps students) be involved directly in that policy development. Michigan State University (MSU), like all of its peer institutions, understands the need to clarify student and faculty rights and responsibilities in the use of social media in the classroom.

In response to this need, the Steering Community of the Faculty Senate created a faculty committee to better understand how social media can be used responsibly in the classroom. Communications and Brand Strategy at MSU recently passed a social media use policy that focuses on how all members of the MSU community can use social media responsibly and effectively (<http://cabs.msu.edu/web/index.html>). However, this policy does not focus on student and faculty rights and responsibilities regarding social media in the classroom setting. Thus, it is vital that faculty and students examine social media use in this context as its use continues to expand in the academic setting.

This report will be organized into four sections. In the first section we review current social media policies among peer institutions to determine if they include language that might relate to social media use in the classroom. The second section will summarize MSU policies associated with social media use in the classroom context to set the foundation for our exploration of this issue. The third section will provide sample syllabus language that faculty may wish to use to clarify rights and responsibilities for social media use. The fourth section concludes our report with a set of recommendations for continuing the social media dialogue among faculty and students going forward.

### **Section 1: Peer Institution Social Media Policy Review**

Our first step in exploring the issue of social media rights and responsibilities in the classroom was aimed at exploring how peer institutions across the nation address this issue. To gather this information we first conducted an online search university-based social media classroom policies. We also accessed a CIC (Committee on Institutional Cooperation) network of administrators at the thirteen major institutions of which MSU is a member and inquired about their social media policies.

These inquiries produced the results listed in Table 1. They reveal that among the 17 institutions listed in this table, 11 of which are CIC members, a total of nine reported not having a social media use policy of any kind while the remaining eight indicated that they have a policy of some kind on this issue. For those eight institutions that have a policy, none of the policies specifically listed student and faculty rights and responsibilities for social media use in the classroom. The policies of these eight institutions are similar to MSU’s policy (citation). Specifically, they generally provide guidelines for how all users, whether faculty, administrators, or students can use social media effectively safely and effectively. They are more “how to” policies and do not differentiate among any types of users.

**Table 1: Social Media Policies by Institution**

Institution	No Policy Currently in Use	Policy Currently in Use	Rights and Responsibilities Addressed
University of Illinois, Urbana	X		
Indiana University		X	
Rutgers University		X	
Northwestern University	X		
University of Michigan	X		
University of Iowa	X		
University of Nebraska	X		
Pennsylvania State University		X	

University of Maryland	X		
Purdue University		X	
University of Minnesota	X		
University of Chicago	X		
University of Wisconsin, Madison	X		
Xavier University		X	
Seattle University		X	
Ball State University		X	
Oregon State University		X	

## Section 2: Summary of Laws and University Policies

The committee thought it would be useful to list the MSU policies and the state and federal laws that are relevant to the use of social media in the classroom. This list is not meant to be comprehensive; rather, it reflects source materials that the committee found useful in guiding how and when social media can be viewed as protected free speech.

(1) Faculty are responsible for course content and procedures.

*The right, as teachers, to discuss in the classroom any material which has a significant relationship to the subject matter as defined in the approved course description;*

*The right to determine course content, grading, and classroom procedures in the courses they teach; (Faculty Handbook).*

*Instructors shall be responsible for ensuring that the content of the courses they teach is consistent with the course descriptions approved by the University Committee on Curriculum and the University Council (Code of Teaching Responsibility).*

*The responsibility, as teachers, to refrain from introducing matters which are not consistent with their teaching duties and professional competence and which have no significant bearing on the subject matter of the course as approved under University procedures; (Faculty Handbook).*

*Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject (Faculty Handbook, quoting AAUP).*

(2) Except for special circumstances, the faculty retain ownership of course materials.

*MSU follows standard academic practice in disclaiming ownership of ... traditional academic works ... unless one or more "Special Circumstances" exist (Faculty Handbook).*

*All testing questions (whether on quizzes, tests, or mid-semester or final examinations) are an integral part of course materials, and the decision whether to allow students to retain them is left to the discretion of the instructor (Academic Programs).*

*The University prohibits students from commercializing their notes of lectures and University-provided class materials without the written consent of the instructor. Instructors may allow commercialization by including permission in the course syllabus or other written statement distributed to all students in the class (Academic Programs).*

(3) Students retain ownership of materials or works created for classes.

*Term papers and other comparable projects are the property of students who prepare them (Academic Programs).*

*Students who author or create copyrighted works which are submitted to meet course requirements own the copyrights in such works, even if they have been created using University facilities. Neither the course instructor nor the University may utilize or distribute student-owned copyrighted works for purposes beyond those of the course in which they are submitted without obtaining the written permission of the student. Students also own the copyrights in their theses and dissertations (Faculty Handbook).*

(4) Students are assured of personal privacy.

*The student has a right to protection against improper disclosure of his/her education records [4] and personal information such as values, beliefs, organizational affiliations, and health (Academic Freedom for Students).*

(5) Both faculty and students are expected to behave in a professional, civil, and respectful manner.

*The right of faculty members to conduct classes, and of students to participate in those classes, without interference or disruption (Faculty Handbook).*

*The responsibility to encourage students and colleagues to engage in free discussion and inquiry; and to evaluate student and colleague performance on a scholarly basis;*

*The responsibility to work in a collegial manner with appropriate individuals and bodies to encourage the free search for knowledge; its free exposition, and the University's continuing quest for excellence; (Faculty Handbook).*

*The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned (Academic Freedom for Students).*

### **Section 3: Sample Syllabus Language**

The committee felt that it would be useful to provide faculty with language they may wish to include in their syllabi regarding social media rights and responsibilities. We will provide our rationale for each section in italics to help faculty decide whether or not they wish to use it. The committee is not recommending that faculty should be required to include any or all of this language in a syllabus. The committee simply thought language would be useful in the event that the faculty member wanted to be clear with students about this issue.

**Syllabus Section 1, Course Coverage:** The goal of this section is to set the context for a classroom policy related to the content of lectures/discussions. Much of this language is founded in the university policy language outlined in Section 2 of this report.

*This classroom is a designated learning space for the purpose of exchanging ideas between the students enrolled in the class and the instructor. Students and faculty are responsible for creating and maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to the teaching and learning process.*

*The University's commitment to academic freedom provides faculty members the right to discuss in the classroom any materials that have a significant relationship to the subject matter as defined in the approved course description. Faculty are expected to refrain from introducing matters which are not consistent with their teaching duties and professional competence and which have no significant bearing on the subject matter of the course. Students are free to take reasoned exception to information and views offered in the instructional context, and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, without fear of penalty or reprisal.*

**Syllabus Section 2, Course Materials:** The purpose of this section is to specify what students may or may not do with the course materials and lectures that are given in class. It is important to note that faculty set the rules in their classrooms. Specifically, in the first condition of use below the faculty member may choose not to allow students to record lectures. Thus, the optional language of "may or may not" is listed below.

*As members of a learning community, students are expected to respect the intellectual property of course instructors. All course materials presented to students are the copyrighted property of the course instructor and are subject to the following conditions of use:*

- 1. Students may (may not) record lectures or any other classroom activities and use the recordings only for their own course-related purposes.*
- 2. Students may (may not) share the recordings with other students enrolled in the class, provided that they also use the recordings only for their own course-related purposes.*
- 3. Students may (may not) not post the recordings or other course materials online or distribute them to anyone not enrolled in the class without the advance written permission of the course instructor and, if applicable, any students whose voice or image is included in the recordings.*
- 4. Any student violating the conditions described above may face academic disciplinary sanctions, including receiving a failing grade in the course.*

**Syllabus Section 3, Student Materials:** This section focuses on student rights related to course materials and what to do in the event that the student believes that his or her rights have been violated.

*Students who author copyrighted works that are submitted to meet course requirements own the copyrights in such works. The course instructor may not distribute student-owned copyrighted works for purposes beyond those of the course in which they are submitted without obtaining the student's written permission.*

*Any student who believes his/her academic rights have been violated should contact the University Ombudsperson or may file an academic grievance pursuant to the AFR ("Academic Freedom for Students at Michigan State University"). That process is outlined at <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/academic-freedom-for-students-at-michigan-state-university>.*

**Syllabus Section 4, Electronic Communication:** This section focuses on electronic devices in class and treatment of class discussion.

*Students may (may not) use electronic devices (laptop computers, tablets, phones) during class lecture or class discussion.*

OR

*Students may use electronic devices (laptop computers, tablets, phones) during class lecture or class discussion as long as that use is related only to the class.*

*Interaction and discussion among students and with the instructor is beneficial to all. Mutual respect and civility are expected involving discussions and behavior in the classroom and in communication among students and with the instructors.*

#### **Section 4: Committee Recommendations**

1. Faculty may consider including language in their syllabi related to recording classroom activities/materials and posting them on some website. It is the committee's view that being upfront and clear about faculty and student rights and responsibilities provides a better foundation for the instructional process.
2. The section in *Spartan Life* (the MSU Student Handbook) entitled: "Academic Freedom for Students at Michigan State University," should include language about recording, using, distributing, and posting class lectures and materials. Even if faculty members include language related to these issues in their syllabi, it would be useful to make it clear in *Spartan Life* what freedoms students have related to this issue.
3. The Steering Committee should develop and implement a communication plan for the information in this report so faculty and students understand this social media issue and are clear about how it should be addressed in the classroom. The committee believes that this issue is important and that it is in the interest of the university community that this information is widely disseminated and perhaps discussed in an open forum.
4. MSU-sponsored social media sites should be monitored to insure that MSU's reputation and brand is managed as effectively as possible. MSU should be responsive to its university-sponsored communities.
5. MSU's social media policies should be reviewed by the University Committee on Faculty Affairs and the University Committee on Student Affairs periodically to insure that it remains current and effective.
6. MSU should consider offering an inter-college course in Digital Literacy and Presentation course for all incoming students to insure that they are prepared to use and participate in their professional digital communities in an effective and responsible manner. The topic might be included also in the orientation for new faculty.