**TECHNOLOGY GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERNS**

Technology brings with it many advantages as well as some hidden disadvantages. Social media, for example, allows us to easily collaborate and socialize with colleagues, friends, and family who may be in different cities, states, or countries. Yet, as social workers and future social workers, we must be cognizant of the fact that crucial elements of our profession’s standards, contained in the [*National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics*](https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English)as well as the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)’s core competencies, are challenged by technology. Confidentiality, boundaries, and privacy, for example, must be maintained in the face of complex forms of communication such as social networks, blogs, and texts.

Competency 1, “demonstrate ethical and professional behavior”, addresses these concerns in explaining that “social workers [must] understand digital technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice”. Further, practice behaviors 1 and 2 state that social workers:

* Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional code of ethics within the profession as appropriate to the context.
* Demonstrate professional behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication (CSWE, 2022).

In line with these expectations, students are asked to read and abide by the [*Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice*](https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/Standards-for-Technology-in-Social-Work-Practice)created by NASW, ASWB, CSWE and CSWA (2022).

To further assist our students in navigating these ever-changing waters, FIU’s School of Social Work has created this set of guidelines. It is vital that students understand that they are responsible for professional behavior, as defined by the School and University as well as the profession, as soon as they begin the program—whether the behavior is in person or online. Any behavior construed as unprofessional may have negative consequences for students in the School, among their colleagues and clients, and for their social work career.

Students should be aware of the following issues when they engage in online communications:

1. It is inappropriate for students to refer to or create content about any field agency, client, or client situation on their personal social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, Blog) regardless of the level of privacy settings. Students should not post any photographs or videos of clients on these sites (regardless of permission from a client or agency).

2. Students should use the highest privacy settings available on any social media pages in

order to safeguard personal information; clients, colleagues, faculty, supervisors, future employers, etc. can easily search for students. Please keep in mind that even the highest security settings are not absolute and all information posted on the internet is permanent. Students should, therefore, be cautious regarding what they post and should regularly monitor their own internet presence in order to make sure that professional and personal information online is, to the extent possible, appropriate and accurate.

3. It is not appropriate for students to search for information regarding a client. Such

searches can quickly lead to boundary violations, impacting the client’s sense of safety

and the therapeutic alliance. This also includes searching for clients on social media sites, and surfing their personal pages, viewing/reading their posts, watching their stories even if the client page is public.

4. In line with the *Code of Ethics*’ policy on conflict of interest and dual relationships,

students should not “friend” or “follow” current clients on personal or professional social

media sites. The School of School Work highly recommends that students do not “friend” or “follow” past clients on personal or professional social media sites.

5. Students should not share personal contact information, including personal

cell phone numbers, emails, address, social media handles etc., with current or previous clients. Students should not refer clients to personal businesses for services.

6. As future social workers, students are representing the social work profession in their online presence. Be mindful that posts, pictures, comments, etc. can easily be taken out of context.

7. The security of email cannot be guaranteed, therefore, students should check with their

Field Instructors regarding agency policy for email communication. Students should refrain from using client private health information via email. Students should not use personal email addresses for agency communications.

8. Interactions in texts, WhatsApp Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and other forms of instant messaging/social media with peers, colleagues, or supervisors (if allowed) should be cautiously used due to the ease of impulsive, reactive, and potentially out-of-context communications.

9. Always check the policies of the University and Field Practicum agency regarding online

communications.

Adapted from University of Michigan’s School of Social Work’s Office of Field Education’s *Social Media Guidelines* as well as Indiana University’s School of Social Work’s BSW Program’s *Use of Technology in the Field*.

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/Standards-for-Technology-in-Social-Work-Practice>

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