

**Dalhousie School of Social Work**  
**Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy<sup>1</sup>**

**Approved by the Committee of the School March 2018**

**Purpose**

This policy establishes a framework for social media use and electronic communication for all members of the Dalhousie School of Social Work community (students, staff, faculty, and field supervisors) that ensures the privacy, safety, and confidentiality of those members, and is consistent with the core values and principles of the profession as outlined by the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW).

This policy meets the requirements of CASWE-ACFTS Standard 2.4.6.

**Background**

The widespread use of electronic communications and social media as a forum for participation in knowledge exchange and community building provides many opportunities in teaching, learning, and practice of social work. The Dalhousie School of Social Work values both academic freedom and freedom of inquiry and affirms these as pillars of a university education whether expressed in oral communication, print, and/or via electronic means.

Moreover, the School of Social Work is committed to providing an environment supportive of psychological and physical safety, excellence in teaching, scholarship and research, and the fair, respectful, and professional treatment of all members of the School and University community. The basis for interaction among all members of the School of Social Work is mutual respect and cooperation. This extends to all online platforms, including formal online learning spaces, social media sites, both formally associated with the School and otherwise, and all forms of electronic communication.

To this end, the School of Social Work requires all community members (students, staff, faculty, and field supervisors) to engage online knowledgeably, accurately, and respectfully, and to exercise professionalism, congruent with the CASW Code of Ethics, at all times.

For reference in review of this policy, the CASW Codes of Ethics outline the core Social Work values as:

- Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons
- Pursuit of Social Justice
- Service to Humanity
- Integrity of Professional Practice
- Confidentiality of Professional Practice
- Competence of Professional Practice

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<sup>1</sup> This policy draws on similar policy developed by the School of Social Work & Human Services at the University of Fraser Valley

Relevant CASWE-ACFTS Policy:

**Standard 2.4.6** | The academic unit has a policy regarding ethical use of all form of social media to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the academic unit and its field practicum community and demonstrates how the policy and procedures are consistent with the relevant human right legislation, with the mission of CASWE-ACFTS, and with the mission of the academic unit concerned.

## Policy

### 1. Professional and Respectful Online Engagement

- a. The content of electronic communications and social media postings must adhere to the values and principles outlined in the CASW/NCSW Code of Ethics.
- b. All community members are personally responsible and accountable for their actions and statements in emails and shared via social media.
- c. All community members are expected to maintain a high level of integrity and adhere to all university policies and regulations when using social media. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Code of Student Conduct
  - Personal Harassment Policy
  - Sexual Harassment Policy
  - Prohibited Discrimination Statement
  - Intellectual Honesty Policy
  - Acceptable Use Policy
  - Scholarly Misconduct Policy
- d. Students registered in the School's distance BSW and MSW programs are required to engage in online discussions respectfully and constructively. Personal attacks, and defamatory comments about any person, group, organization or belief will not be tolerated and will be removed.
- e. All community members are expected to remain respectful and constructive amidst differences in opinion. Harassment of any kind violates fundamental rights, personal worth, and human dignity. Demeaning, belittling, offensive, defamatory, and libelous language may be cause to pursue action under existing Dalhousie policies, provincial, or federal law.

### 2. On-line Representation of the Dalhousie School of Social Work

- a. Prior to the public circulation of any information pertaining to or identifying the School of Social Work (via email and/or social media platforms), community members are required to speak to the Director and/or, if applicable, Field Placement supervisor.

- b. Unless given permission in writing by the School of Social Work, community members are not authorized to speak on behalf of either the School of Social Work or field placement agency.
- c. Any use of social media that mentions/identifies the School of Social Work, the Field Education setting, their employees, or client groups, must state that the views expressed are those of the writer and are not the views of the School of Social Work members as a whole, and/or the Field Education setting using the following text: "This [name of online group or platform] is not affiliated with Dalhousie University. It is run solely by the student community. No information is reviewed, confirmed, or denied by any Dalhousie staff or faculty member. Please have this in mind when viewing information or posting in this network system."
- d. In developing a site, group, or writing a blog that will mention the School of Social Work, field placement settings and/or their employees or clients, as a courtesy to the School and/or agency, please let the School of Social Work and/or field placement in advance, clearly stating the purpose and the content of the messaging, as well as the ways in which confidentiality will be safe-guarded.

### 3. On-line Interactions with Field Placement Clients (current and past)

- a. If the field placement agency requires communication with clients by email, all communication must be of a professional nature and no involve personal discussions and/or disclosures of any kind.
  - i. Students are required to use their Dalhousie email address or email address provided to them by their field placement agency
  - ii. Students must be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your and their Internet service providers and may be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.
- b. Contact with field placement clients (current or past) on social media sites (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.), unless required, authorized, and managed by agency, is prohibited.
  - i. It is the responsibility of individual community members to become knowledgeable about the privacy controls on these networks and ensure that the general public cannot see personal details of your life you would prefer to share only with your immediate friends and family.

### 4. Confidentiality

Community members may not share information that is confidential about the School of Social Work or field placement settings, this includes information about clients, colleagues, and/or instructors.

- a. Members of the School of Social Work are prohibited from publically using/sharing client-related information and/or circumstances. At no time can sharing or exchange of any information related to a client that would in any way reveal a client's identity be permitted electronically or via social media. Confidentiality must be strictly observed as outlined in the CASW Code of Ethics.
- b. Taking and sharing photographs without consent is a breach of confidentiality.
- c. In consultation with Field Education supervisors and/or the Associate Director of the School, in cases of imminent risk of harm to self, a child, or another adult, relevant authorities may be contacted *directly* but not via electronic communication or social media.
- d. The School of Social Work recognizes that students registered in the distance BSW and MSW programs may disclose personal information about themselves in online discussions (contained with the online class site) in the service of critical reflection and online community building. Students are to respect each other's privacy, and such information is to remain confidential, and students are prohibited from sharing it with other.

### **Policy Application**

This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future Dalhousie University policies regarding academic freedom, statement of institutional ethics, the use of technology, computers, e-mail, and the internet.

It applies to all students, staff, faculty, and the field practicum community of the School of Social Work, in all aspects of the BSW and MSW programs, including when participating in field placement, in the classroom, and undertaking research.

This policy includes electronic communications and social media including but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Skype, YouTube, Blogs, Brightspace platforms, online chats, text, and email. It includes electronic means via computer, smartphones, landline telephones, and video technology.

All members of the Dalhousie School of Social Work are legally liable for anything written or presented online. Students can be disciplined by Dalhousie University for commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work and/or learning environment. You can also be sued by any individual or organization that views your commentary, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or creating a hostile work environment.

Members of the School who are in violation of this policy may be equally subject to the Dalhousie University Code of Conduct, dismissal from Field Placement where application, and termination of the program of study.