

The Career Development Office (CDO) recognizes that students may use social media tools personally and professionally. Increasingly, social media has become woven into the fabric of society, including law students' lives and the legal profession generally. Social media can help you to engage with potential employers and the broader legal community, showcase your experience, and obtain employment. Still, we encourage you to take care when using it.

Networking contacts and prospective legal employers routinely conduct due diligence about you, including a search of social media sites for information. Using your social media presence, they will make determinations about how professional you are and whether you would be a good "fit" for their organization. Despite your best efforts to "separate" your personal social media pages from your professional online identity, your personal online activity can impact your professional reputation. It also is increasingly impractical to accomplish true separation. We acknowledge that social media is an outlet for both personal self-expression and professional networking. In view of the evolving relationship between social media and the legal profession, the following best practices are designed to help you avoid common missteps when using social media, now that you have embarked on your law school journey and are beginning to chart your legal career path.

Best Practices in Managing Your Accounts, Profiles, and Connections

Profile:

- Choose your profile names carefully. Avoid usernames that are misleading, immature, offensive, or unprofessional. Choose usernames that are close to your own name to make it easier for online connections to become real-life connections.
- Choose your profile photos carefully. A potential employer may "meet you" for the first time through your profile photo. Consider using your head shot from new student orientation or a similar professional photograph. Even if you restrict your privacy settings, your name and profile photos associated with your social media accounts (including LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube, and TikTok) still will be visible and searchable on most social media sites. Across

social media platforms, choose a head shot that will allow someone to recognize you and that features you in professional attire in a professional setting, without other distractions. Do not use a photo where another person clearly has been cropped out or where you are drinking alcohol. Use a high-resolution picture.

Settings:

- Choose your privacy settings to control what non-friends may see and associate with you. Even if you are cautious about the information you share, your friends' social media pages may be publicly accessible, such that material posted on their sites would be visible to potential employers.
- Some sites change their privacy settings and defaults regularly, so pay attention to updates and frequently monitor your settings.

People:

- Choose your friends, connections, and followers wisely. We recommend you use tools such as Instagram and Facebook for close personal friends, and use another social media site, such as LinkedIn, for professional contacts, including professors, professional colleagues, managers or supervisors, alumni and other attorneys. Many of your friends, in law school or in other sectors, may have professional LinkedIn profiles. These friendships, and the ensuing connections which you will maintain on LinkedIn, may one day prove invaluable.
- We encourage you to maintain a completely professional profile on LinkedIn. If you receive a connection request from someone previously unknown to you, you may want to accept the request when you have good professional connections in common. Social media is all about networking and creating and establishing online relationships. Over time, you will want to work to move online professional relationships (i.e., those cultivated through LinkedIn) to more valuable in-person relationships.

Digital Dirt:

- Research what can be found about you on the internet. Google your name and variations of your name. Set up a Google alert with your name. Search your name on multiple sites including Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Run a personal search on www.pipl.com.
- If you find negative information about yourself, contact the poster or the site owner/administrator and ask that it be removed.

- Establish a routine of checking the internet for personal information.
- Beef up your security settings to eliminate posting and tagging without your permission.
- Remove from your list of friends and connections those whom you do not know very well or whose judgment you do not trust.

Best Practices in Posting

The following are best practices for participating in social media.

- **When in doubt, do not post.** Feel free to contact the CDO for additional guidance.
- **Assume permanence.** You should assume that any posted materials will be available on the internet indefinitely because it is virtually impossible to recall or permanently delete material once posted.
- **Be polite.** Do not post derogatory, defamatory, or inflammatory content about others for any reason. Disagreeing with another person's opinions or actions is a legitimate form of expression, so we encourage you to express your disagreement in an intellectual and rational way, supported by facts and references that are free of overt or underlying negativity. Stay calm.
- **Be responsible.** As a future lawyer, take responsibility for what you write and exercise good judgment and common sense. You must take extra care with any information you offer. Do not give legal advice or form what could be perceived as attorney-client relationships when using social media.
- **Be honest.** Your online reputation will follow you in real life. Be sure that online information matches your offline resume because prospective employers may check the consistency and accuracy of both.
- **Watch your tone.** When the only information a prospective employer knows about you is in your application materials and online postings, your words take on extra importance. If you would not make the statement in person, do not make it online.
- **Post wisely.** Always think carefully about what you post and your responses to others' posts. Never post anything online that you would not want a potential employer to see. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and tone count in the development of your online presence. Nothing posted online is ever truly

anonymous. We encourage you to ask yourself if you would be comfortable in the event an interviewer, a colleague, or your supervisor saw a post, before you post it.

- **Be professional.** Consider the type of professional you want to be and act that way now, both in public and online. Posted content should not be illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, disparaging, vulgar, infringing of intellectual property rights, invasive of privacy, or otherwise injurious or offensive. Practice respect for other students, professors, potential employers, clients, competitors, lawyers, staff, and all others in any posting. Think carefully about expressing political opinions, religious views, or other items on social media, especially via LinkedIn, that you would not reflect on your resume. While you have a right to express your opinions on these subjects, such posts can result in misinterpretation or adversely affect a potential employer's opinion of you.
- **Speak for yourself.** Students may not use the name of Richmond Law to endorse or promote any product, opinion, cause or political candidate. Some employers may have the same or a similar mandate. As a general matter, you should not post any pictures, videos, or references about, or purport to speak on behalf of, a current, prospective, or future employer, job, colleague, client, etc., unless you have express permission from the entity. When expressing personal views, you should not use your school or an employer's email address, logo, or other identifier that might lead a viewer to believe you are speaking on Richmond Law or an employer's behalf. In general, we encourage you to think twice before sharing political arguments, posting potentially controversial content, or making unverified legal claims.
- **Preserve confidentiality.** Employer information should not be shared. Do not post pictures of an employer event or employer's offices without express permission. Do not share information about clients, colleagues or opposing counsel.
- **Avoid conflicts.** Be aware that conflicts of interest can result from an online comment about litigation or potential litigation made by an employee or intern/summer associate. Comply with your employer's policies, especially in the areas of privacy, confidentiality, intellectual property, and acceptable use when writing or posting any content.
- **Be ethical.** As a legal professional, you will be subject to a code of ethics. Familiarize yourself with the ethics rules on social media and digital

communication in the jurisdiction(s) in which you intend to practice because different states impose different restrictions. Bar associations and many employers regularly conduct background checks to assess your character and fitness. Bad behavior online or by email could delay or derail your opportunity to take the bar exam or earn your bar license.

- **Be private.** If you show a lack of judgment online about your personal life and opinions, an employer may presume your in-person behavior and judgment are the same.
- **Report inappropriate content.** Because unprofessional content from another member of this law school community can affect the reputation of everyone, students are encouraged to report (anonymously) questionable content on another's social media site to the CDO or to the Associate Dean for Students.

Best Practices Concerning X (formerly Twitter)

- X (formerly Twitter) is one social media platform you can use to develop your professional network, when used properly. Legal professionals and companies use X to post news and employment opportunities. You can stay up to date about the developing legal landscape and participate in meaningful dialogue with other legal professionals, by using hashtags. Before posting to X, ask yourself what your post may lead an employer to presume about your in-person behavior and judgment. It is paramount that you maintain a respectful presence and provide opinions supported by trustworthy sources.

Best Practices Concerning TikTok and Other Video Streaming Platforms

- Over the past few years, video streaming applications like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram Reels have become increasingly popular among legal professionals and law students alike. Many employers have their own policies about social media, including concerning use of an employer's name, logo or likeness.
- Some employers explicitly ban, strictly limit, or require their employees to disclose and adhere to certain rules concerning outside employment (i.e., holding additional jobs), due to concerns about conflicts of interest, unintentional formation of an attorney-client relationship, disclosure of confidential information, reputational risk, the employee's inability to practice effective time management, among other concerns. Such rules may implicate social media activities, such as social media "influencing," whether or not monetized. In law school, to the extent you maintain a presence on any video sharing platform,

ensure you maintain integrity, provide information supported by credible, factual material, and communicate with a professional tone. If you would not want an interviewer, a colleague, or your supervisor to view the content you post, do not post it.