Social media has given Williams the opportunity to engage in ongoing conversations with and strengthen the connections among current and prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, colleagues, fans, and friends about what is most important to them, extending the community found on the Williams campus to the world.

The college supports the use of social media by employees to connect with this community as part of their professional affiliation with the college. The Williams College social media guidelines serve as a guide for the campus community to better inform students, faculty, and staff of the opportunities and consequences associated with electronic social networking. These guidelines are not intended to be a comprehensive “how to” guide, nor are they meant to encourage individual offices and programs to create their own social media platforms. Rather, these guidelines are intended to help you evaluate whether doing so will help you meet your goals. Before you launch a social media presence for your department or program, consider whether the college’s main accounts can meet your needs. You should always feel free to turn to the Office of Communications for help getting the word out about research, programs, publications, events, etc.

The Williams Office of Communications currently maintains the following accounts:
Facebook: (http://www.facebook.com/williamscollege)
Twitter: (http://twitter.com/WilliamsCollege)
YouTube: (http://www.youtube.com/williamscollege)
Flickr: (http://www.flickr.com/photos/williamscollege)
Instagram: williamscollege

Why social media?
The benefits of a robust social media presence can include but are not limited to broader outreach to, immediate—and, often—measurable engagement with and feedback from members of online Williams communities.

If you decide that a social media presence for your office, department or program will expand your reach and help you connect with your audience, you should be sure to have a plan for what you hope to achieve. You should also revisit this plan periodically after you have established your social media presence.

Remember that social media can be a useful tool to add to a host of other more traditional tools. Your Facebook page, blog posts or Twitter feed shouldn’t be the only way you’re trying to reach an audience but rather an expansion of your already established efforts. Do you have a vibrant, dynamic website? Do you have content to post daily? Do you have a dedicated staff with the knowledge and time to devote to maintaining and monitoring a social media presence as well as the ability to keep up with social media practices? Keep in mind that a social media presence with old content is worse than no social media presence at all.

Especially when just getting started, don’t be afraid to be selective in the sites that you use. Consider which platform best meets the needs of your office/department/program.
It’s easier to start with one platform and master it before adding another rather than doing a little bit in a lot of different places. If and when you are ready to establish user profiles across multiple platforms, you should be consistent with your user name/handle/etc. as well as with the contact and profile information supplied in each. In addition to Facebook and Twitter, possible social media sites include, but are not limited to: LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram, Digg, StumbleUpon, Yelp, Foursquare, Google+, blogs, forums and discussion boards.

BEST PRACTICES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Be respectful.
Anything you post in your role as a member of the Williams community reflects on the institution. Be professional and respectful at all times on your social media site(s). Do not engage in personal arguments or extensive debates with naysayers on your site.

Be transparent.
Make it clear that you are blogging/Tweeting/posting to Facebook, etc. in your role as a staff member of the college. One of the great benefits of social media is that the individuals maintaining social media sites personalize the college. Use your own voice. Do not ghostwrite posts for others.

Listen.
Being a consumer of social media is essential to your ability to be a successful producer of social media content. “Listen” to online conversations on your preferred tools—whether blogs, Twitter, Facebook or anything else—to maintain a clear and current understanding of what is relevant and of interest to your community.

Be timely.
Social media is all about sharing information almost instantly with a global audience. Your audience will expect timeliness. Be prepared to move quickly in response to new developments, announcements or emergencies with relevant information on your site. A news briefing delivered at the time of need can often be more valuable than a full report delivered well after an event or concern has passed.

Be a valued community member.
Don’t just talk about your program or department—share the best information you find from trusted sources outside of the college. This will increase the value of your site and also will ensure you are a valued member of the community and are not just on social media exclusively for self-promotion.

Accept and monitor comments.
A social media site without comments isn’t very social. Be prepared to accept and respond to comments. Remember that not all comments will be positive. Respond to negative comments professionally and by providing any additional information that may help resolve the issue. Before immediately responding to a negative comment, consider whether it would be harmful to wait a bit to see if another follower responds. Often your followers will engage in a conversation amongst themselves, and negative comments may be “policed” within the community.

Comment.
As a consumer as well as a producer of social media, offer comments on interesting posts and share the good work of others using your sites. Social media is not (only) about sharing your news and success, it’s about sharing information that is of interest to your
readers and viewers.

When commenting as part of your job, be sure to indicate who you are and your affiliation with Williams. If you see a post that you think requires or would benefit from an official Williams College response, please contact the Office of Communications.

Monitor
Post a disclaimer on your site stating you reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments. Remove as soon as possible comments containing inappropriate language, those that attack any one group or individual and those that are obviously spam.

Be mindful of others’ work.
Never disclose information that is proprietary, private or commercially sensitive. Respect copyright. Don’t use images or content generated elsewhere without permission.

Separate personal from professional.
Balancing your professional and personal social media presences can be tricky, particularly if you are an avid user in both arenas. Content that is appropriate and of interest to your personal friends is most likely not appropriate or of interest to your department’s “friends.” Keep these two presences as separate as possible by keeping content about your non-work life on your personal page. Don’t use personal or professional social media profiles as a platform to disparage coworkers, supervisors or other colleges.

Remember, everything you do online can and will live forever.
Think before you post, remembering that anything you share within social media, even within a closed network, is not private. Content can and will be shared, stored and spread globally. Don’t post anything online you wouldn’t feel comfortable seeing on the front page of the newspaper or on a news website. Also be sure to check your facts and any web links you’re sharing.

When in doubt, ask.
If you aren’t sure if something is appropriate to share via social media or the best way to do so, contact the Office of Communications at 413.597.4277 or communications@williams.edu.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Effective social media content (both original and responses to others) should be informational rather than overtly promotional regardless of the platform used.

Blogs
The tone of blog posts is informal and should not be corporate or overly academic. But the tone should always be professional. Blog comments should be responded to within a reasonable period of time (preferably prior to the next blog post).

Twitter
Keep in mind that Twitter is a conversational platform not purely a broadcasting medium. Take the time to engage with followers (get in the habit of following back any followers that are not purely marketing or otherwise inappropriate). Respond to @ mentions. Retweet your followers regularly. Create hashtags (#Ephs, #iamwilliams, #claimwilliams) to track engagement of a certain event.
Facebook
Before creating your own department Facebook page, consider whether you have the
staff and enough content to make the page robust or if another page at the College can
share your news. The communications office is happy to promote your department or
event. Be in touch!

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?
Consider how you will define the success of your social media presence. There are
myriad tools for managing and analyzing your content.

Tracking Social Media
Tracking the engagement of your social media presence is crucial to evaluating your
success. Take the time to familiarize yourself with best platforms to manage your social
media accounts (Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, Sprout Social) and explore other analytics tools
that can run reports on your engagement. If you are using social media in addition to a
website presence, you may want to integrate your Google analytics into your results
reporting.

A FEW QUICK TIPS FOR CREATING RICH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT
• Post a variety of content each week. (E.g., promote community members, upcoming
events, nostalgia for your department/program, photos, polls.)
• Vary the way you post the same content to multiple platforms. (Don’t automatically
send your tweets to Facebook, for instance.)
• Broaden your reach by “tagging” followers on Facebook and @ mentioning them on
Twitter.
• Strengthen relationships by sharing content. Use the “share” button on Facebook. On
Twitter, retweet liberally. (The sincerest form of flattery is the retweet!) On Tumblr,
• On Twitter, participate in memes such as Follow Friday (#FF).
• If you maintain a blog, read and comment on other blogs.
• Promote the social media content of other campus social media accounts.
• Don’t forget: Social media is all about engagement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
There are myriad resources on the web for social media. Mashable.com is a great first
resource. From there you can get to many different sites and e-mail newsletters. Also
check out social media list servers within your department’s/program’s professional
organization. Direct all social media questions relating to college work to
communications@williams.edu.

Note: The Office Communications is working on compiling a comprehensive social media
directory of all college-related social media accounts and profiles. To be included, please
email links for all of your sites as well as contact information for your site’s content
manager to communications@williams.edu.

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