

POLICY TITLE: <i>Policy on Social Media and Digital Communication</i>	APPROVAL DATE: <i>September 4, 2025</i>
RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: <i>Office of Student Affairs</i>	APPLIES TO: <i>Students in the MD program including dual degree programs such as MD-MPH and MSTP</i>

PURPOSE AND COMMITMENT

The University of Cincinnati College of Medicine (UCCOM) affirms its commitment to free expression and academic freedom as integral to the mission of higher education. In parallel, UCCOM recognizes that students, as future physicians and professionals, assume heightened ethical and legal responsibilities in all forms of communication - including those on social media and digital platforms.

This Policy on Social Media and Digital Communication (Policy) outlines expectations, standards, and best practices for digital communication to ensure students uphold the values of professionalism, protect patient and institutional confidentiality, and maintain public trust in the medical profession. It supplements and should be considered consistently with existing University and UCCOM policies and applies to all user-generated digital content, whether disseminated on public, private, or University-managed platforms.

POLICY

Expectations

UCCOM encourages thoughtful digital engagement but expects students to adhere to the highest standards of professionalism. All digital communications - regardless of platform or privacy settings - must be consistent with the UCCOM Medical Student Honor Code, University rules, policies, UCCOM values, and applicable federal and state legal requirements.

Students are expected to:

- **Comply with Legal and Institutional Requirements**

All communications must adhere to federal and state legal requirements and University rules and policies (e.g., HIPAA, FERPA, University IT policies). This includes, but is not limited to, safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of patients, research subjects, peers, and University operations.

- **Avoid Unauthorized Representations**

Students may not speak or act on behalf of UCCOM, the University, or affiliated entities unless expressly authorized to do so. Use of official names, titles, logos, or branding in any personal communication also requires prior approval per University Rule 10-17-01, and applicable University policies.

- **Follow Site-Specific Guidelines**

Students must observe and comply with the communication and social media policies and requirements of any affiliated clinical or educational site in which they participate.

- **Refrain from Unprofessional or Harmful Conduct**

Communications that constitute unlawful discrimination or harassment, incitement to violence, true threats, or other unlawful conduct is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal in accordance with the UCCOM Medical Student Honor Code and the Performance and Academic Achievement Committee.

- **Do Not Provide Medical Advice**

Unless students are independently licensed and acting within that legal scope, they must not offer clinical advice, suggest diagnoses or treatments, or represent themselves as qualified healthcare providers in any digital space.

Professionalism in Practice

Students are required to demonstrate digital professionalism aligned with UCCOM's values and ethical standards. The following behaviors are expected:

- **Uphold Confidentiality**
Students must never disclose protected health information (PHI) or share identifiable details about patients, research subjects, cadavers, or standardized patients - whether directly or indirectly.
- **Limit Social Media Engagement with Patients**
Students should avoid interacting with patients on social media unless a prior personal relationship exists. Professional boundaries must be preserved.
- **Do Not Capture or Share Unauthorized Images or Recordings**
Photographs, video, or audio taken in clinical, research, or anatomy settings without proper authorization are strictly prohibited.
- **Maintain Accuracy and Integrity**
Digital content must be truthful, and consistent with UCCOM's professional and academic standards. Misrepresentation of academic status, training, or qualifications is prohibited.

Best Practices for Digital Communication

To help students navigate the evolving digital landscape, UCCOM recommends the following:

- **Be Intentional and Discerning**
Think before you post. Assume that all content may be viewed by peers, faculty, patients, employers, and licensing boards, regardless of privacy settings.
- **Manage Your Digital Footprint**
Regularly monitor your online presence. Remove or correct content that may be outdated, unprofessional, or inconsistent with your professional identity.
- **Seek Guidance Proactively**
If you are unsure whether a post or digital interaction aligns with this policy, contact the Office of Student Affairs for consultation before posting.
- **Report Concerns Responsibly**
If you observe digital content involving UCCOM students that may violate these standards, report it to the Office of Student Affairs for appropriate review and follow-up (see procedures below).

Important Considerations

- **No Post Is Truly Anonymous or Private**
Posts submitted anonymously or within "private" settings may still be accessible, copied, or shared. Students are deemed to be accountable for all digital content under their name or identity.
- **Disclosure Disclaimer Requirement**
When your affiliation with UCCOM is identifiable, include a disclaimer such as:
"The views expressed are my own and do not represent those of the University of Cincinnati or the College of Medicine."
- **Consequences of Digital Misconduct**
Content that violates this policy may be subject to the full range of institutional responses, including professionalism review and disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, in accordance with the UCCOM Medical Student Honor Code and the Performance and Academic Achievement Committee.

Procedures

- If you observe digital misconduct, please submit a report to the digital misconduct reporting link on MedOneStop (MOS) for appropriate review and follow-up.
- Reports are evaluated by the UCCOM Office of Student Affairs and referred to the appropriate

committee for further action.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

This policy is informed by national best practices and institutional standards, including:

- **American Medical Association** – *Professionalism in the Use of Social Media*
- **American Medical Student Association** – Social Media Guidelines
- **Association of American Medical Colleges**- [Digital Literacy Toolkit](#)

Contact

For policy questions or to report concerns, contact:

UCCOM Office of Student Affairs