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# Protection, Not Barriers: Using Social Software Policies to Guide and Safeguard Students and Employees

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# Protection, Not Barriers

## *Using Social Software Policies to Guide and Safeguard Students and Employees*

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*Academic librarians have been using social software and networking sites for public services since they appeared on the Internet. While issues of privacy, identity management, and self-disclosure when using such technologies have been written about, very little critical attention has been paid to establishing policies or guidelines related to their use. This article is based on the authors' experience creating a social software policy and internal service guidelines at Georgia State University and on the results of an informal survey study that gauged academic librarians' need for and awareness of such documents. It provides both reasoning and assistance for developing social software guidelines that will protect service providers from violating the First Amendment and guide patron comment postings. Although the study was aimed at academic librarians, the findings and suggestions are relevant to any institution that offers services via social software.*

Over the years, academic librarians have developed policies and guidelines to ensure the efficient, equitable, and ethical provision of services and to guide the behavior of their users. While these services have traditionally been delivered in the brick-and-mortar setting of the physical library, more and more libraries are expanding their outreach to include online spaces as well. One area in which librarians are providing online outreach is through the use of social software and social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace. Even most library blogs have a social feature in the form of comments. While much has been written promoting the benefits of utilizing social software and social networking sites for library outreach, little has been written regarding the need to extend basic brick-and-mortar policies to the online arena. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap by providing reasoning and assistance for developing social software guidelines that will protect library staff and guide patron comment postings without hampering service. The impetus for the article was the authors' experience providing outreach services through social software tools at Georgia State University and the development of a social software policy and internal guidelines for the provision of those services. The authors discovered that such policies are essential but need not be extensive or particularly restrictive; in most cases their primary functions are to inform librarians and patrons of their basic constitutional rights and provide legal guidelines for comment editing.

The article begins with a brief background discussion of social software

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technologies, why librarians are using them for outreach, and a literature review that explores issues relevant to social software policy formation. The authors' experience creating an external policy is then discussed, along with the problems they encountered due to their misunderstanding of First Amendment issues as they relate to publicly funded institutions. Lessons learned from this experience led the authors to conduct an informal study of social software practices at other academic institutions to determine academic librarian involvement with and awareness of social software policies, as well as the perceived and actual need for such policies. The final sections provide reasoning and assistance for developing a social software policy and internal guidelines based on the results of the study and the authors' creation of these documents.

## BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Since their introduction, websites that incorporate social software, especially social networking sites (SNS), have become immensely popular. As of April 2008, two of the more popular sites, Facebook and MySpace, attracted approximately 115 million people each month.[1] Although many of these visits were by casual or one-time users, a large segment of the population makes visits to these sites a part of their daily practice. Many of these daily users are college students, who use networking sites to communicate and stay in touch with their on- and offline friends and classmates. As evidence of the prevalence of the use of these sites by college students, a recent study by the Educause Center for Applied Research reported that 85.2 percent of college undergraduates use one or more social networking sites to connect with their on- and offline friends.[2] More than half of these students reported using social networking sites daily, while another 22.7 percent reported using them weekly or several times per week.[3] Another study, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that 94 percent of first-year students spend at least some time on social networking websites in a typical week, with 59 percent spending between one and five hours and 9 percent spending more than ten hours.[4] According to the Educause study, the daily use of social networking sites by undergraduates has increased from one-third of respondents in 2006 to almost two-thirds in 2008. The "bottom line," according to Educause, is that "SNS usage has increased, and dramatically so."[5]

Recognizing the popularity of such sites with college students, many academic libraries have started using social software and social networking sites as a way to communicate and reach out to their users. A recent study of the 123 institutions in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) reported that of the 64 libraries that completed the study, 44 (70 percent) either participate in social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace,[6] or are planning on doing so.[7] Although no recent study has been conducted of non-ARL libraries, an examination of several library related discussion groups on Facebook indicates that interest is very high. As of November 17, 2009, the group "Librarians and Facebook" had 11,357 members, the "Library 2.0 Interest Group" had 10,810 members, and "FacebookAppsForLibraries" had 4,846 members. (As a point of comparison, the "American Library Association Members" group had 7,481 members.) Although not all of the members of these groups are academic librarians, the sheer number of participants demonstrates a high level of interest in using social software technologies to connect with library users.

A considerable number of articles have been published during the past five years in both professional and popular literature on social software and social networking sites. Much of the early library literature focused on how and why librarians are using such technologies as outreach tools.[8] One of the first survey studies to address librarian awareness and perceptions of Facebook was conducted by Laurie Charnigo and Paula Barnett-Ellis. Their findings suggested that, while some librarians were supportive of the use of Facebook as a communication and outreach tool, the majority considered Facebook to lie outside the bounds of librarianship.[9] Overall, however, these early articles argue for library use of social software as a way to provide services by being in the same online spaces as their users.

Several authors have explored issues of self-disclosure, identity management, and privacy in relation to social software.[10] The results of a study of student use of social networking sites by Acquisti and Gross demonstrated that, while student participants considered privacy to be an important issue, most student respondents revealed at least some degree of personal information and many were not aware of the controls available to them within such sites to protect their privacy.[11] Cain discussed the potential dangers that social software sites pose to students' privacy, safety, and professional reputations if proper controls are not used,[12] while Chamberlin, writing for psychologists in training, warned that graduate student and

early-career professionals should be careful about the amount of personal or professional information that they share online.[13]

More relevant to this study are articles that examine student perceptions of faculty presence and self-disclosure, the development of library computer and software policies, and issues of campus free-speech and censorship. In regards to the first issue, Hewitt and Forte investigated student–faculty relationships in Facebook to understand how contact on Facebook influenced student perceptions of faculty.[14] Their investigation discovered, among other things, that while the majority of students were comfortable with faculty on Facebook, more than one-third had concerns about privacy and issues of identity management. A study by Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds on the effects of teacher self-disclosure on college student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate revealed that while teacher self-disclosure can have a positive influence on students, it can also have negative implications for teacher credibility.[15] An even more recent study conducted by Connell in 2009 on student perceptions of librarian use of social networking sites demonstrated that while most students would be accepting of librarian outreach efforts through such sites, a significant minority would not, due to privacy issues.[16] Connell advises that when creating Facebook profiles, librarians should exercise restraint.[17] These articles argue in favor of presenting a controlled, professional persona in social networking environments but do not comment on the need for standardized guidelines or policies as they relate to privacy and identity management issues.

Although there are at least a few articles regarding the development of library computer-use policies, there is very little literature that discusses the development of policies specifically for social software.[18] One article on drafting a social software policy by Haskell has been published, but it appears to be the only one of its kind.[19] Likewise, there is a lack of literature on the legal and ethical implications of librarians' use of social software, especially in regards to the editing of posts and other user-generated content for publicly funded institutions, which are held to different legal standards than private entities; perhaps most significantly, public institutions must comply with the First Amendment. An article by Mitrano is one of the few to address legal and educational considerations of using social software networks.[20] According to Mitrano, sites such as Facebook are clearly covered by First Amendment protections; therefore state institutions should be careful not to obstruct or censor their use on any grounds relating to free speech. Mitrano notes, however, that while student comments on Facebook are clearly protected by the First Amendment, the First Amendment does not protect students if they post information that violates copyright, is libelous, or that might invade another person's privacy.[21] While Mitrano acknowledges that most colleges and universities will not develop separate policies to cover social networking sites, she advises that institutions should at the very least educate students on the legal consequences of their use.[22]

## SOCIAL SOFTWARE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Librarians at Georgia State University began offering social software services in 2003 via blogging software. In 2006, several librarians began providing service on Facebook through their personal profile pages. By using personal profiles, librarians at Georgia State hoped to create a more significant connection with students. Attempts were made to keep the profiles professional, but no specific guidelines were set either for profile content or for comment editing. In November 2008 the library created a fan page in Facebook to establish an official library presence. The page allows librarians and fan members to post comments to the Wall feature of the group, but again, no policies were established at the time of creation to guide librarian or patron behavior. At the same time, Georgia State University Library became the focal point of a high-profile legal case related to copyright.[23] This case led to a renewed interest in legally sound service practice within the library.

After noticing that some content and student comments on the library-related public pages might be considered problematic, the virtual reference coordinator in the University Library decided to investigate the need for a policy that would help librarians maintain acceptable personas on their university-affiliated social software pages, in addition to guiding student behavior. A social software policy was borrowed from a public library, modified with permission, and taken to the university's legal department. A subsequent meeting with the legal department led to the discovery that the borrowed policy, which is currently in use by a number of government-funded libraries (both public and academic), violates the First Amendment. Upon closer inspection, it was discovered that the policy originally derived from a private company that is not held to the same laws as government-funded institutions. The First Amendment prohibits the government and governmental entities,

such as state institutions of higher learning, from restricting or interfering with freedom of speech. As noted by the Foundation of Individual Rights in Education, "A good rule of thumb is that if a state law would be declared unconstitutional for violating the First Amendment, a similar regulation at a state college or university is equally unconstitutional."[24] The guarantees of the First Amendment generally do not apply to students at private institutions because the First Amendment regulates only government conduct and not private conduct.[25]

## SOCIAL SOFTWARE STUDY: SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND METHOD

The authors' misunderstanding of First Amendment application issues in the creation of the policy at Georgia State University made them interested in learning about the social software outreach practices at other academic libraries in order to refine the policy at Georgia State and to provide advice to libraries that may want to create a policy of their own. To assess these practices, an informal anonymous survey was created and administered using Zoomerang, a Web-based software program. In addition to attempting to discover policies that other academic libraries may be using to guide social software use, particularly social networking use, the study sought to gauge practices that may not be in accord with ALA guidelines for reference and information service providers, and more importantly, that may be putting these libraries at risk for legal repercussions. Participants were solicited by posting the survey to four national and international electronic mailing lists: Library Reference Issues (LIBREF-L), Digital Reference (DIG_REF-L), the College Libraries Section discussion list of the Association of College and Research Libraries (COLLIB-L), and the Reference and User Services Association list (RUSA-L). These lists were chosen because they include discussion content that is intended for library employees that serve college-level patrons. At the time the survey was posted, LIBREF-L had 2,040 subscribers, DIG_REF-L had 2,340 subscribers, COLLIB-L had 1,984 subscribers, and RUSA-L had 1,233 subscribers. The authors are aware that data solicitation via electronic mailing lists does not provide a representative sample of respondents, however, since the aim of the study was to gather a general impression of social software use rather than a representative sample, this delivery method was chosen as appropriate.

The nineteen-question survey began with a brief series of questions intended to gather statistical and personal demographic information. Respondents were asked to provide their place of employment, length of time in the profession, and age. The survey then proceeded into a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions that gathered data on the respondents' involvement with social software, their use of social software as a public service tool, and their awareness of their institution's social software-related policies. One question asked respondents to rate their level of concern regarding potential legal problems as a result of their institutionally affiliated (personal or library-initiated) use of social software for public service. The survey concluded with an opportunity for the survey taker to share any additional comments. For the purposes of the survey, social networking software was defined as any Web application, website, or online account that allows users to either subscribe to or "friend" the library or its representatives through personal profiles and contribute comments. Examples used in the survey included, but were not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LiveJournal, Hi5, LibraryThing, Shelfari, and FriendFeed. The survey instrument is provided in appendix A.

The question list was tested prior to distribution on a convenience sample of eleven academic librarians who provide library-related social software services. Modifications to the questionnaire were made on the basis of the testers' input. Upon launch, the questionnaire was assigned a static URL for the duration of the study. The Zoomerang software allows results to be exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for tabulation, and the authors used this method to analyze the data gathered.

## SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey was viewed 288 times and completed by 73 respondents. Of those 73, 15 responses had to be discarded because the stated nature of their job duties did not meet the criteria specified in the recruitment e-mail. Responses from librarians whose libraries did not provide any form of social software public service were also excluded. Of the 58 remaining usable responses, 55 identified their institutional affiliation. Three of the 55 responding institutions had multiple respondents, resulting in a total of 51 unique institutional responses. Of the 51 unique institutions represented, 48 were four-year institutions and 3 were two-year community colleges. Of the four-year institutions, 27 were publicly funded universities with the remaining 21 being private universities or liberal arts colleges. Unless otherwise noted, duplicate institutional responses and responses in which respondents

did not identify their institutional affiliation were omitted from the data analysis.

The authors are well aware that the low response rate, when compared to the number of list subscribers, could be viewed as damaging to the credibility of the results. However, as already stated, the aim of the study was to gather a general impression of librarians' use of and attitudes toward social software policies, rather than a representative sample. While the low number of responses may be attributable to a variety of factors, including concerns with privacy and confidentiality, it is possible that the concept of creating guidelines for social software in libraries is unpopular or is judged to be an issue of little concern. This theory was evidenced by the results and by comments made by those involved in the survey test sample.

Survey participants varied by age and the number of years worked in libraries. The majority of respondents, 50 percent, had worked in libraries for more than 10 years. Of the remaining group, 16 percent had worked for 0–2 years, 19 percent for 2–5 years and 16 percent for 5–10 years. Fifty-six of the eligible 58 respondents identified their age group. Of those that did, the majority (38 percent) were older than 45 years of age. Of the remaining respondents, 30 percent were 36–45, 23 percent were 27–35, while only 9 percent were under 27.

Involvement in social software included those with individual accounts (26 percent), library-only accounts (33 percent), and those with both individual and library accounts (41 percent). For the sake of the survey, individual accounts were defined as personal social software profiles utilized by a librarian to provide library-related public services or outreach, while library accounts were defined as sites created by an institution to provide such services (e.g., official library group or fan sites). Reasons for utilizing social software for public services were consistent between all three groups. Of the fifty-eight eligible respondents, 35 percent indicated they use social software to promote the library and its services, 26 percent to advertise library events, 18 percent to provide reference services, and 16 percent to provide instruction. Individual comments included, "to make librarians seem friendly and approachable," "to connect with other libraries," "to be a presence for students and faculty," "to provide a way to comment on services," "to informal[ly] connect with students," and "to promote the collections" of the library.

The majority of institutions utilize social software for public services without a policy to guide librarian or student use. Of the fifty-one unique institutional responses, only 12 percent had or were in the process of creating policies guiding librarian behavior in the use of social software for public services, while 18 percent had or were in the process of creating policies guiding student behavior; 8 percent of institutions responded that the creation of a librarian policy was being discussed, while 6 percent indicated that discussions were being held to create a student policy. Of the seven institutions that had a policy, five were prompted to create one out of librarian interest, one because of poor student behavior, and one because of a lawsuit. Of the unique institutional responses, 61 percent had stated that their university had no relevant policy governing librarian behavior, while 18 percent were unsure whether or not a relevant policy existed. In regards to student behavior, 53 percent of the unique institutions stated that there was no current policy guiding student behavior, while 22 percent were unsure of the existence of a policy. Overall, 82 percent of the respondents answered that their institutions either operate social software service points with no relevant policy governing librarian or student behavior or operate these services with staff that are unaware whether a policy exists. When asked why their institution does not have a policy to govern online behavior of librarians or students, the majority of respondents either did not know (36 percent) or did not believe it to be necessary (24 percent).

The ability to add comments is a common feature on many social software and social networking sites. In answer to the question "Are friends allowed to post comments on any of your library's institutionally affiliated social software pages?"[26] 67 percent of respondents stated they allow visitor comments and 29 percent of those edit or delete comments based on their appropriateness for the forum. Of the respondents that edit or delete posts, 71 percent do not currently have or are not aware of any stated policy or criteria for that judgment. Cited reasons for editing or deleting comments included "improper" or "inappropriate language," "profanity," language that is "vulgar" or "sexual in nature," "advertisements" or "spam," and comments "unrelated to the library" or the "content of the forum." Of the ten institutions that edit comments for profane, vulgar, or sexual language, five are publicly funded, a status that could put them at risk for being accused of censorship in editing or deleting comments based on perceived offensiveness. While it can be tempting to attempt to maintain a professional public profile by deleting such comments, past court cases have found that judging offensiveness in content is virtually impossible,[27] and that government funded entities can be held responsible for censorship if they edit relevant posts solely because they contain

elements that the administrator found offensive.[28] Librarians are obliged, however, to monitor both their institutional and personal library-related profiles for libelous or intellectual property violations made by users, as these could have legal implications for the library.

The majority of individual respondents (74 percent) indicated little to no concern regarding potential legal problems as a result of libraries' use of social networking software for public service. Only 5 percent of individuals were concerned or very concerned, with the remaining individuals being neutral on the issue. Neither age, time worked in libraries, nor type of account (individual or library) affected librarians' level of concern. In addition, several survey respondents and members of the survey test sample commented that they are not convinced of the need for social software policies. But if librarians' use of social software in all its various forms continues to increase, the profession may want to adopt a "just in case" rather than an "after the fact" approach to this issue. Librarians might also reconsider this type of policy as a guide, rather than a restriction; new library hires may appreciate a document that provides them with general assistance in building new social software service points and helps them in judging and moderating comments. Finally, students may appreciate and respect a guide that sets expectations for their behavior.

## DOES YOUR INSTITUTION NEED AN EXTERNAL POLICY OR INTERNAL GUIDELINES?

If your institution is public and offers social software services, then relevant internal and external policies are necessary. If your institution is private and offers social software services, then relevant policies are advisable. These policy documents may already be provided at the institutional level; often larger-scope documents relating to student and employee computer use conduct exist and are distributed to newcomers upon arrival. If you are able to locate related policies already in effect, your only step may be to ensure that the library's social software service providers are aware of its contents, and that links to the policies are posted on pages to remind students of institutional expectations. If you find your public institution does not have applicable documents, you may want to consider drafting them for the library specifically. It is advisable that you contact your legal department, if one is available, and discuss with them your relevant plans and services. They may have ideas or concerns that you have not yet considered.

As evidenced by our informal survey responses (and perhaps by the low response rate), librarians may be unconvinced of the need for a social software policy and internal guidelines. Some may appreciate the guidance if they have an interest in social software but are unsure how to market themselves or handle potentially inflammatory posts, but some might feel that you are trying to limit their usage of the medium or that policies are too cumbersome for digital services.[29] It is important to note that these documents need not limit staffers more than any other employee handbook or reference "best practices" guide; rather, they can serve as a guideline for both students and librarians. On the other hand, the documents can be used to limit behaviors if content is being inappropriately deleted, posted, or approved for posting by library employees. What follows are suggestions for constructing thorough and legally sound external policies and internal guidelines that will allow for flexibility, realization of the media's full potential, and legally sound service practice.

## PARTS OF THE EXTERNAL POLICY

Almost all extant library policies have similar elements. Georgia State University Library's policy is included in appendix B.

- A Statement of Purpose: This statement will inform readers of the policy's purpose and of the groups who are affected.
- A Definition of Social Software: This definition does not need to be a comprehensive listing of all the social software programs being used (especially since they change frequently), but consider including a couple of particular program names or headings as a guide, so that readers will understand what the policy covers.
- A Tie-in to the Library's Goals: Consider how the software supports your library's goals, and include that information. Are you expanding outreach or targeting a particular population that has been shown to use social software regularly? This section can help raise awareness of your library's mission and help disinterested librarians understand why the service is relevant.
- A Policy on Librarian to Patron Contact: This is the section that can house information on any librarian behaviors that your patrons might be interested in knowing. Will the librarians e-mail patrons indiscriminately? Will they only contact patrons who have already expressed an interest, either through "friending" or previous contact? This issue has caused unease for

librarians in the past; some service providers are concerned that marketing to individuals who have not expressed an interest will seem invasive,[30] while others think that waiting for patrons to initiate contact is not an effective way to offer services.[31] This statement can provide loose or rigid guidelines for librarians, and those guidelines may help staffers to feel more comfortable with their role and marketing methods. This section can also be shored up or replaced by a lengthier internal document that details best practices and guidelines for service providers. Georgia State University's internal document is included in appendix C.

- A Policy on Comments/Posts: Accepting participant comments or posts can create additional work for library staff, but those comments are integral to the concept of social software and social networking. This section can identify what types of comments are acceptable and outline the criteria for the deletion of comments. Before setting rules for the removal of offensive comments, be sure that your guidelines are in alignment with constitutional law; as of this writing, there are several active policies (that were adapted from a for-profit, private business site) that are not in accordance.[32] As mentioned previously, according to the First Amendment, publicly funded institutions may not judge what content is offensive or racist, and while they do have the right to delete "fighting words"[33] and obscenity, determining whether those things have occurred can be next to impossible. Potential fighting words and threatening language should be withheld for removal after review from a legal advisor. Administrators may find this lack of control disconcerting, but there are ways to reduce the potential for problem comments. If stated in a public policy, administrators may remove comments that are off topic, and all libraries have the right to edit or remove comments or posts that infringe on copyright, trademark right, or other intellectual property rights. Some libraries also include guidance statements that precede comment areas. For example, all Georgia State University Library social software comment areas include this disclaimer: "We welcome your feedback and comments, but request that they be polite and library-related. Views expressed here are not necessarily the views of Georgia State University Library." You may also choose to protect yourself by setting up a "purge schedule" that creates dates on which all public comments are deleted. This schedule can ensure that problem comments, even if they cannot be removed on a case-by-case basis, can be removed periodically.
- The Legal Jargon: This section allows the library to avoid legal issues and may also be used as an additional forum for description of what postings are not appropriate. In most extant policies, this section states that the library is not responsible for any inflammatory postings that appear and reserves the right to ban users. According to research conducted by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, your institution cannot be held legally responsible for comments posted to your blogs or other pages by third parties.[34] As stated previously, consult a legal representative when drafting this section, as state funded institutions do not have the legal right to edit or censor content unless it violates very specific criteria, and knowledge of what is appropriate to block or edit is essential.
- Contact Information: In this section, include links to individuals who will answer comments and complaints.
- Credit for Adaptation: If your policy was adapted from someone else's, get permission to borrow content before you publish it, and include a permission statement on your final document.
- Creative Commons License Information: Many libraries include this information as a courtesy to others. It allows them to modify and use the content as long as the usage meets certain preset parameters.[35]

## CREATING INTERNAL GUIDELINES

As you draft your external policy for patrons, you might also choose to make an internal document that helps librarians determine what would be prudent to post on social software pages that are used for patron service. Information gathered from our informal survey indicated that the majority of individual respondents (67 percent) reveal at least some level of personal information on their profiles. Most of the personal information revealed on these personal public service profiles was relatively innocuous, including lists of favorite books, movies, music, quotes, and interests, but five respondents stated that they include information, such as political and religious viewpoints, that could conceivably be cited as violating the ALA RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers. The guidelines encourage service providers to "welcome the patrons and to place them at ease," to provide "a receptive cordial, and encouraging manner," and to maintain "objectivity and . . . not interject value judgments about

subject matter or the nature of the question into the transaction."[36] The simple statement of one's political or religious beliefs will seem insignificant to a large majority of users, but including strong or opinionated political or religious comments on personal profiles utilized for the provision of library-related public services could be judged as a violation of these guidelines. While it is important to maintain a sense of personality and individuality on public service sites through the inclusion of some personal information, librarians must consider that some personal admissions may inhibit patron inquiries rather than encourage them. This is not to suggest that libraries should create or enact policies regarding librarians' nonlibrary-affiliated profiles; only that librarians should be cautious in the amount of information they reveal about themselves on the personal profiles they use to provide library-related outreach or public services. Facebook allows users to limit the amount of information available to specific types of users (only friends, friends of friends, or anyone within the network) or to groups that you determine (undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni, faculty, staff). Librarians that want to include personal information on their profiles should be encouraged to learn how to use the privacy features of the social software they are using so their information is released only to certain groups of users.

Social software is a great opportunity for outreach, and a personal touch is preferred by many librarians and students, but boundaries must be set, even if they only reflect the basic tenets set by your employee handbook and an awareness of students' First Amendment rights. Georgia State University has an institution-wide set of guidelines, and the library has a version that was tailored specifically to library services. A good source for additional information is the Facebook group "Faculty Ethics in Facebook." While tailored to teaching faculty, the group provides sound basic guidelines and a forum for discussion. It is easy for librarians to simultaneously maintain a professional image and share personal information without crossing appropriate service boundaries. An internal guide can help librarians provide the best possible service while honoring those boundaries. A sample internal document can be found in appendix C.

## CONCLUSION

Social software policies are not yet common, but as social software use in libraries continues to rise, relevant policies may take on a much more prominent role. Such policies can help protect your library from legal attack, guide students in appropriate posting, and bring confidence to your employees with regard to what behavior is acceptable (and how to deal with unacceptable behavior). This type of policy can provide important legal protection and should be seen as a benefit to library social software services rather than a barrier against their use.

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21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 24.
23. *Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Inc. and Sage Publications, Inc. v. Carl V. Patton, Ronald Henry, Charlene Hurt and J. L. Albert*. Georgia Northern District Court. 1:2008cv01425 (Apr. 15, 2008).
24. Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, *Fire's Spotlight on Speech Codes 2009: The State of Free Speech On Our Nation's Campuses: A Report of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education* (Philadelphia: Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2009): 11, www.thefire.org/public/files/Fire_speech_codes_report_2009.pdf (accessed Mar. 30, 2009).
25. Ibid.
26. Institutionally affiliated social software was defined as any individual, group-based, or library-wide account used to provide University Library service to patrons.
27. Justice Potter Stewart of the Supreme Court of the United States once stated, with regard to the determination of obscenity, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced. . . . But I know it when I see it." *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964).
28. Gary Pavela, "Only Speech Codes Should Be Censored," *Florida Philosophical Review* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 17–21. For additional information, see Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, *Fire's Spotlight on Speech Codes 2009*, 1–21.
29. Regarding the possible drafting of a policy at their institution, one respondent noted: "Most regulation of social network software is due to blind paranoia. I'll be disgusted if we deploy a policy that interferes with providing personal service to students or that interferes with having an institutional presence on these sites."
30. See, for example, Connell, "Academic Libraries, Facebook and MySpace, and Student Outreach," 25–36.
31. Brian Mathews, "Preemptive Reference: Coming out from Behind the Desk," in *The Desk and Beyond: Next Generation Reference Services*, ed. Sarah K. Steiner and M. Leslie Madden (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2008): 91–98.
32. According to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), violation of the First Amendment by institutions of higher education is rampant. Their most recent study (2009) found that more than 74 percent of public universities surveyed have "at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech." For more reading, see the full FIRE report at www.thefire.org/Fire_speech_codes_report_2009.pdf.
33. Fighting words are "those which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace." "What is the Fighting Words Doctrine?" First Amendment Center, www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13718 (accessed Feb. 12, 2009).
34. The Electronic Frontier Foundation states that the "vast majority has held that section 230 [Communications Decency Act] precludes liability for an intermediary's [for example, a blog owner's] distribution of defamation." "Bloggers' FAQ—Online Defamation Law," Electronic Frontier Foundation, http://w2.eff.org/bloggers/lg/faq-defamation.php (accessed Feb. 12, 2009). The 1996 California Supreme Court case *Barrett v. Rosenthal* reinforced this concept when it found that "plaintiffs who contend they were defamed in an Internet posting may only seek recovery from the original source of the statement." Lawrence Savell, "Is Your Blog Exposing You to Legal Liability?" Law.com (December 22, 2006), www.law.com/jsp/llf/PubArticleLLF.jsp?id=1166695602960 (accessed Feb. 11, 2009).
35. For more information on Creative Commons, visit http://creativecommons.org.
36. David Ward, et al., "RUSA Reference Guidelines: Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers," American Library Association, 2009, www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=Home&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=26937 (accessed Feb. 11, 2009).

## APPENDIX A. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL SOFTWARE POLICY PREVALENCE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. In order to help us accurately assess the number of responding institutions, please provide the name of your college or university:

2. How long have you worked as a librarian?
   - 0–2 years
   - 2–5 years
   - 5–10 years
   - 10 years +
   - I am a student
   - I am a paraprofessional

3. What is your age?
   - Under 27 years old
   - 27–35 years old
   - 36–45 years old
   - 45 years +

4. Which statements best describe your involvement with social networking software? Choose all that apply: (For the purposes of this survey, examples of social networking software include MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LiveJournal, Hi5, LibraryThing, Shelfari and FriendFeed.)
   - I have an individual account that I use to provide library-related service
   - My library has an account that is used to provide service
   - No involvement

5. How are your institutionally affiliated social network software accounts used to connect with patrons? (An "institutionally affiliated account" would be any individual, group-based, or library-wide account that is used to provide service to patrons.) Check all that apply:
   - To promote the library and its services
   - To advertise library events
   - To provide instruction in the use of the library and its resources
   - To provide reference services
   - Do not use social network software
   - Other, please describe:

6. How do administrators of your institution's social network software accounts (individual or library-wide) approach "friend" recruitment?
   - Administrators actively search for and send out "friend" requests via the Internet
   - Administrators accept online "friend" requests initiated by patrons, but don't actively seek them out
   - Administrators do not initiate or accept "friend" requests
   - There are multiple institutional accounts, and different administrators choose to handle "friends" differently
   - Don't know
   - Other, please describe:

7. Are "friends" allowed to post comments on any of your library's institutionally affiliated social network software pages?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don't know

8. If comments are allowed on any institutionally affiliated social network software pages, are the comments ever edited or deleted?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don't know

9. If yes, then under what circumstances are comments edited or deleted?

10. If you have an individual social network software account that you use to provide service to patrons, which of the following profile elements do you post for public view? Check all that apply:
    - Activities
    - Applications (MyType, Pieces of Flair, etc.)
    - Blog postings
    - Favorite books
    - Favorite movies
    - Favorite music
    - Favorite quotes
    - Groups
    - Interests
    - Photos
    - Political views
    - Relationship status
    - Religious views
    - Sexual orientation
    - Other, please specify:

11. Does your university or library have a policy that governs your online behavior as a librarian when using social network software?
    - The university has a policy, but the library does not
    - The library has a policy, but the university does not
    - The university and the library have separate policies
    - No, but a policy is being written/drafted
    - No, but developing a policy has been discussed
    - No
    - I don't know
    - Not applicable
    - Other, please describe:

12. Does your university or library have a policy that governs student behavior when using social network software?
    - The university has a policy, but the library does not
    - The library has a policy, but the university does not
    - The university and the library have separate policies
    - No, but a policy is being written/drafted
    - No, but developing a policy has been discussed
    - No
    - Don't know
    - Not applicable
    - Other, please describe:

13. If your university or library has a policy on social network software use as it relates to public service, what prompted its development? Check all that apply:
    - A lawsuit
    - Fear of a lawsuit
    - Librarian interest in a document that would help direct their behavior
    - Poor student behavior on library social network software sites

- To assure students their privacy would be protected
- We don't have one
- Don't know
- Other, please describe:

14. If you have a university policy, which department on campus is responsible for administering the policy?
    - Computer systems and technology
    - Legal
    - Don't know
    - The university does not have a policy
    - Other, please explain:

15. If you have a library policy, which department within the library is responsible for administering the policy?
    - Computer systems and technology
    - Administration
    - Reference
    - Circulation
    - Don't know
    - The library does not have a policy
    - Other, please explain:

16. If you have an online university and/or library policy, please copy and paste the URL(s) below:

17. If your university and/or library does not have a policy governing online behavior, why not?
    - Hadn't thought about it
    - Do not believe it to be necessary
    - It's being created
    - Don't know
    - Other, please specify:

18. Please rate your level of concern regarding potential legal problems as a result of libraries' use of social network software for public service:

| Not at all concerned | | | | Very concerned |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

19. Please use this space for any additional comments:

## APPENDIX B. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SOCIAL SOFTWARE POLICY

This policy defines acceptable use parameters of social software for all users and administrators of the University Library.

Use of social networking sites by the University Library complements the mission of the Library by helping to ensure high quality customer service. For purposes of this Policy, social software is defined as any web application, site, or account created and maintained by Georgia State University Library which facilitates an environment for library staff and library users to share information about library related subjects/issues. Social Software includes but is not limited to Flickr, Facebook, and WordPress.

The Georgia State University Library welcomes relevant comments but reserves the right to remove postings that are off topic or that violate the intellectual property rights of any third party. Georgia State University Library is not responsible or liable for content posted by subscribers in any forum, message board, or other social networking site. No personally identifiable information about library patrons will be solicited or published by the Library.

## APPENDIX C. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL SOFTWARE

"Social Software" includes any program which allows users to subscribe to or "friend" the library or its representatives and contribute comments. Current examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, blogs (WordPress), Flickr, and YouTube.

*Mission statement:* The Library's social software services communicate University Library, discipline specific, scholarly information, and general information of interest to the Georgia State University community.

*Audience:* The audiences are the Georgia State University community and the broader scholarly community.

### Best practices for social software

- All social software accounts, profiles, and pages should support the library's mission, goals, and direction. Before posting, ask, "Will this content add value?" (e.g. does it connect with a library service or library or academic department initiatives?) Content should include supplemental library links whenever relevant (e.g. an announcement regarding Historical New York Times could include a link to the guide on using primary resources).
- All postings and content should reflect well on the University Library and Georgia State University.
- Social software pages and posts are forms of professional communication. Ensure that your content conforms to the ALA RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference Information Service Providers (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral.cfm). The guidelines encourage service providers to "welcome the patrons and to place them at ease," to communicate "a receptive cordial, and encouraging manner," and to maintain "objectivity and… not interject value judgments about subject matter or the nature of the question." In support of these Guidelines, do not post personal information that might discourage users from contacting you.
- Service providers using Facebook for outreach purposes should use the privatize options to hide any profile information that may be inappropriate.
- Do not post confidential or proprietary information (e.g. passwords).
- Before editing or deleting any comments, consult the Library Social Software Policy to ensure that the edits will meet First Amendment standards (www.library.gsu.edu/pages/pages.asp?ldID=68&guideID=282&ID=5798). Comments may only be edited if they are off topic or include illegally posted materials. If you are unsure as to whether a comment can be legally edited or deleted, please consult the virtual reference coordinator.
- To ensure the most efficient use of the library employee's professional time, at some point the service provider should undergo training (when available) and should assess the usefulness of the service (e.g. by polling their target audience).
- Titles and messages should be brief. Embed needed links instead of writing out URL addresses. Post brief original summaries of linked-to content (1-2 sentences max) and include a link to the source instead of copying and re-posting entire segments from another site.
- Do not use copyrighted photos and/or images. To post text that is copyrighted, summarize and include a link to the material.
- Prior to posting, check facts, cite sources, present balanced views, acknowledge and correct errors, and check spelling and grammar.
- Bloggers should keep their blogs current with frequent updates and supervisors should review the blogs periodically.
- Share your social software services in appropriate venues (e.g. appropriate academic departments, instructional materials, research guides, etc.).

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