



GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG GEORGIA UNIVERSITIES

Our Mission

We are committed to fostering an **inclusive and respectful digital environment across all campus-affiliated social media platforms**. This guideline book establishes clear expectations to ensure all online communications reflect the values of **diversity, equity, and inclusion** upheld by our institutions. By following these standards, students, faculty, and staff help create a community where every individual's identity is **acknowledged and celebrated**. These guidelines serve as a foundation for responsible and respectful digital engagement that supports the broader mission of universities, which should build a welcoming environment for all.

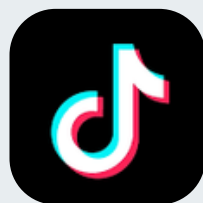


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INTRODUCTION

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping campus culture and community engagement. Colleges and universities have a responsibility to ensure that their online presence accurately and respectfully represents the diversity of their student body. These guidelines provide a framework for creating inclusive, authentic, and culturally respectful content on social media platforms.

These guidelines are intended to:

- **Promote Authentic Representation** – Ensure that diverse communities are portrayed genuinely and not as tokenized figures.
- **Encourage Respect for Culture and Traditions** – Avoid cultural appropriation and misrepresentation.
- **Use Inclusive Language and Imagery** – Craft content that is welcoming to all students, regardless of background.
- **Prevent the Spread of Stereotypes** – Highlight diversity meaningfully and positively.
- **Establish Ethical Content Creation Practices** – Secure consent and credit individuals properly when sharing their stories.
- **Provide Crisis Communication Strategies** – Equip institutions with best practices for responsibly addressing negative feedback and mistakes.

Following these guidelines helps universities foster an inclusive and supportive digital environment. As Nakayama and Martin (2020) explain, mediated communication is central to intercultural engagement, and applying a dialectical approach ensures that identity representation on social media is relational, contextual, and dynamic.

MAIN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

Authenticity

Representation should go beyond performative gestures and genuinely reflect the lived experiences of students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds. Social media content must prioritize honest, unfiltered narratives rather than presenting diversity as a marketing tool.

- Representation should be sincere and not just for appearance or marketing purposes.
- Content should reflect real student experiences and voices rather than staged diversity.
- Avoid stock images that misrepresent campus diversity; use actual student and faculty images when possible.
- Engage directly with student communities to share their stories in their own words, ensuring their voices remain at the center of the narrative

Respect for Culture and Traditions

True inclusion requires more than visibility—it demands a deep respect for the meaning and context behind cultural practices. Institutions should celebrate cultural moments in partnership with those who live them.

- Acknowledge and respect cultural holidays, heritage months, and traditions in a meaningful way.
- Collaborate with student organizations to ensure cultural representation is accurate and respectful.
- Avoid using cultural symbols, attire, or practices without proper understanding and context.
- Provide background information and education alongside cultural content to foster awareness and appreciation rather than appropriation.

MAIN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

Inclusive Language and Imagery

Language and visuals are powerful tools for either inclusion or exclusion. Social media managers must be intentional in how they communicate to reflect the diverse identities of their audience.

- Use language that is accessible and welcoming to all audiences, including students of different backgrounds, abilities, and gender identities.
- Choose visuals that represent a variety of ethnicities, abilities, and lifestyles.
- Ensure captions and hashtags do not exclude or alienate specific groups.
- Regularly review language choices to ensure they evolve with changing cultural norms and student needs.

Avoiding Stereotypes

Combatting stereotypes requires a conscious effort to present a nuanced, multifaceted view of student life and identity. Representation must go beyond surface-level inclusion to meaningful, empowering storytelling.

- Challenge common stereotypes by showcasing diverse stories in an empowering manner.
- Ensure representation is multidimensional and not confined to limited roles or narratives.
- Highlight achievements, leadership, and contributions from all communities rather than focusing solely on challenges or struggles.
- Feature a variety of perspectives and lived experiences to paint a fuller, more accurate picture of campus diversity.
- Use storytelling techniques that go beyond surface-level representation, diving into personal journeys, achievements, and impact.

CONTENT GUIDELINES

Captions and Language Use

Captions and language choices are critical in ensuring messages are welcoming, respectful, and clearly understood by all members of the campus community. Thoughtful language demonstrates cultural awareness and promotes belonging.

- Use gender-neutral and culturally inclusive language that respects all identities.
- Avoid slang, jargon, or idioms that may be misunderstood or offensive to diverse audiences.
- Credit cultural references appropriately and provide context when discussing traditions or customs.
- Keep captions concise but meaningful, ensuring they align with the message of inclusivity.

Highlighting Individuals Correctly

Spotlighting individuals on social media is a powerful way to celebrate campus diversity, but it must be done with sensitivity and intentionality to avoid reducing people to symbols of inclusion.

- Represent diverse voices authentically by showcasing real student stories and contributions.
- Avoid tokenism by ensuring that representation is ongoing, not just for specific awareness months or diversity campaigns.
- Use correct names, pronouns, and cultural identifiers to respect individual identities.
- When highlighting a student, faculty member, or organization, provide depth by including their perspectives and experiences in their own words.

CONTENT GUIDELINES

Consent and Ethical Considerations

Respecting personal boundaries and agency is a foundational principle of ethical storytelling. Content should be created with transparency, collaboration, and care.

- Obtain explicit written or verbal consent before posting images or personal content featuring individuals.
- Ensure individuals understand how their image or story will be used and have the option to decline or request edits.
- Do not exploit personal narratives for engagement; instead, approach content creation with integrity and respect.
- Give proper credit to creators, photographers, and contributors whenever sharing user-generated content.

Visual Representation

Visual content sets the tone for how inclusivity is perceived on campus. Intentional and consistent representation in photos and videos shows that diversity is not only welcomed but valued.

- Feature a broad range of ethnicities, gender identities, abilities, and cultural backgrounds in images and videos.
- Avoid using only performative diversity—make sure inclusion is woven into everyday content, not just highlighted on special occasions.
- Ensure that images of diverse individuals are not solely focused on hardships but also highlight successes, leadership, and everyday campus life.
- Use accessible design features such as image descriptions, closed captions, and alt text to make content available to all users.

SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Example 1:

- A post celebrating cultural heritage months with authentic student voices.



SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Example 2:

- Highlighting LGBTQ+ student organizations and initiatives.



The graphic is a vertical rectangle with a light orange background. At the top, there is a horizontal bar with five colored segments: blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. The main title, "Spotlight on LGBTQ+ Student Organizations", is in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below it, a subtitle in a smaller, dark blue font reads: "In celebration of Pride Month, we are showcasing the work of LGBTQ+ student organizations on" followed by a small rainbow flag icon. A large orange quote mark is to the left of a paragraph in orange text: "Our mission is to create a supportive and safe space for LGBTQ+ students to be themselves. Whether it's through educational events, social gatherings, or advocacy, we're here to uplift and empower our community." Below this, the name "Alex W., President" is in dark blue, and "Allies" is in a smaller, italicized dark blue font. At the bottom of the text area is a photograph of a smiling young Black man with short curly hair, wearing a black t-shirt and a rainbow flag draped over his shoulders. The background of the photo is a blurred outdoor path with trees. At the very bottom, there is a horizontal bar with five colored segments: red, purple, blue, green, and orange. Above this bar, the hashtags "#PrideMonth #LGBTQCommunity #Campuslife" are written in a dark blue font.

Spotlight on LGBTQ+ Student Organizations

In celebration of Pride Month, we are showcasing the work of LGBTQ+ student organizations on 🏳️‍🌈

“Our mission is to create a supportive and safe space for LGBTQ+ students to be themselves. Whether it's through educational events, social gatherings, or advocacy, we're here to uplift and empower our community.

Alex W., President
Allies

#PrideMonth #LGBTQCommunity #Campuslife

SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Example 3:

- Showcasing diverse faculty and staff contributions.

CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE FACULTY & STAFF



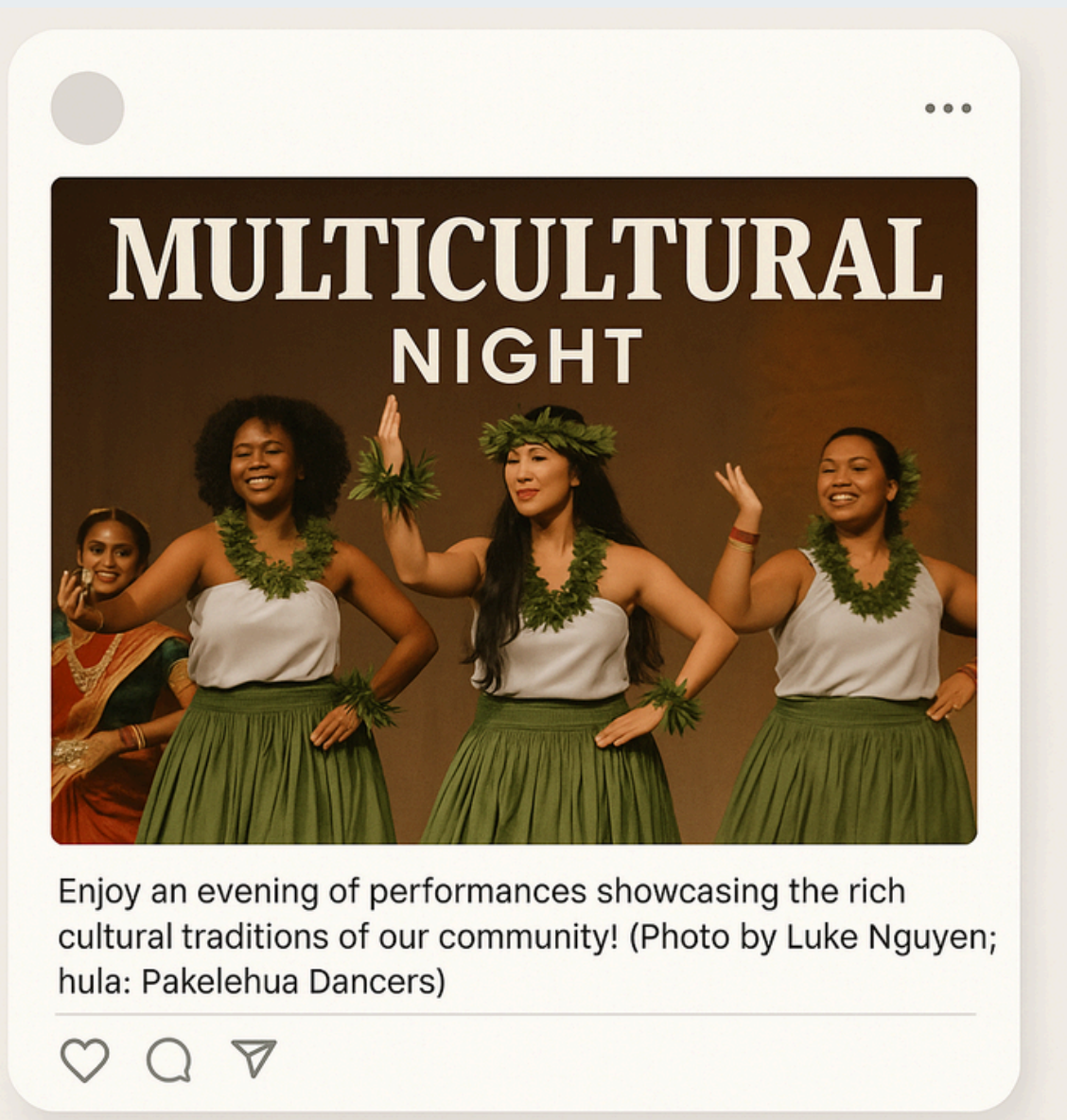
“In the classroom, I strive to honor each student’s unique perspective. Diversity challenges us to think deeper and broaden our views.”

Dr. James Mitchell
Professor, History
#InclusiveCampus

SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Example 4:

- A campus event featuring multicultural traditions with appropriate credits.



CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Responding to Negative Comments

- Establish a protocol for handling offensive or harmful responses.
- Address concerns respectfully and provide educational resources.
- Moderate comments effectively while preserving free expression.
 - **Example:** If a student comments that a post is performative rather than meaningful, acknowledge the feedback, invite them to share their perspective, and outline steps the institution is taking to improve representation.

Correcting Mistakes

- If an error is made, issue a transparent correction.
- Apologize when necessary and outline steps for improvement.
- Use missteps as learning opportunities for the institution.
 - **Example:** If a post misrepresents a cultural tradition, delete or edit the post, provide an educational follow-up post with correct information, and publicly acknowledge the mistake to build trust.

Handling Controversial Topics

- Be proactive in addressing sensitive subjects with thoughtfulness and factual accuracy.
- Engage campus experts, such as diversity officers, to help craft responses.
- Ensure responses align with institutional values and commitments to inclusivity.
 - **Example:** If a post about a cultural event receives backlash due to unintended misrepresentation, consult student organizations from that culture to craft a response that acknowledges concerns and proposes steps to do better in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

1. Research Existing Guidelines

Begin by conducting a comprehensive review of best practices from higher education institutions that demonstrate strong commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their digital communications. Analyze publicly available policies, DEI statements, and case studies. Focus on how these institutions address inclusive language, representation, and responsible engagement on social media. This foundational research will help ensure your guidelines are informed, relevant, and aligned with national standards.

2. Engage Campus Communities

Create opportunities for meaningful collaboration with student organizations, cultural centers, LGBTQ+ groups, faculty committees, and campus diversity offices. Facilitate open forums, focus groups, or surveys to gather diverse perspectives on what inclusive digital communication looks like and what needs improvement. This step ensures the guidelines reflect the lived experiences and values of the community they aim to serve.

3. Develop Internal Policies

Using research and community feedback, draft a set of formal social media protocols tailored for campus-affiliated accounts. These policies should include:

- Inclusive language guides
- Visual representation standards
- Protocols for addressing and correcting harmful content
- Expectations for user engagement and comment moderation
- Ensure these policies are practical, actionable, and clearly communicated to all social media managers and contributors.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

4. Train Staff and Students

Offer ongoing training sessions, workshops, and online modules for those managing or contributing to official university social media platforms. Topics should cover:

- Inclusive storytelling
- Bias in content creation
- Cultural awareness
- Accessibility in visual and written media
- Make participation in this training mandatory for all official account managers to ensure consistency and accountability.

5. Regularly Review and Update Guidelines

Establish a system for annual or biannual review of the guidelines to keep them responsive to evolving cultural, social, and technological landscapes. Encourage feedback through a designated reporting channel and consider forming an advisory committee of students and staff to assist with revisions. Updates should be clearly communicated and incorporated into training materials.

Institutionalizing intercultural competence involves more than individual behavior change—it requires structural transformation (Nakayama & Martin, 2020). These steps support long-term equity and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

Creating an inclusive and respectful social media presence is essential for fostering a truly welcoming and supportive campus environment. These guidelines provide a structured and intentional approach to ensuring that digital content authentically represents the diverse voices and lived experiences within the university community. They help prevent the spread of harmful stereotypes, promote ethical communication, and reinforce the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Prioritizing authenticity, cultural awareness, and inclusive language in every post enables institutions to build a digital identity that reflects their values and supports all members of the campus. This is not a one-time effort—it's a continuous process. Implementing these guidelines successfully requires regular collaboration with student groups, consistent training for content creators, and an open mindset that values feedback and growth.

While mistakes may occur, how they are addressed matters. Responding with transparency, accountability, and a willingness to improve not only demonstrates integrity but also builds lasting trust with the campus community.

By adopting and adapting these best practices, colleges and universities can create a social media landscape that does more than just inform—it empowers, celebrates, and connects. In an age where digital presence shapes perception, let's use our platforms to uplift, educate, and unite—one inclusive post at a time.

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