Safe for Work:
Online Professionalism Instruction in the Disciplinary Context

Christina L. Wissinger and Carmen Cole[*]

Introduction

"NSFW" (not safe for work) is an abbreviation used to indicate language or imagery in electronic communications that is deemed inappropriate for viewing or distribution in most professional environments.[1] Conversely, "SFW" (safe for work) denotes electronic or print material appropriate for viewing or distribution in most workplace environments. As students navigate the complicated and stressful process of finding employment, professionalism challenges stemming from a poorly managed digital reputation should not be a barrier to success. Academic librarians play a crucial role in helping students hone their information literacy skills. However, the library profession has been slow to incorporate SFW practices into information literacy instruction. Providing students with guidance on how to critically reflect upon their online content creation and distribution may easily be integrated into library instruction no matter the disciplinary context.

The medical profession has been researching elements of online professionalism or "e-professionalism," a term coined by Jeff Cain and Frank Romanelli, since 2009. Cain and Romanelli proposed that online professionalism was more than e-mail etiquette.[2] They suggested online professionalism included an awareness of how information shared online could impact an individual's professional reputation, both positively and negatively. As the medical field began to place an emphasis on the importance of crafting an online identity, the discussion moved away from why online professionalism was important to how to teach medical students the skills necessary to create a positive personal brand online. In 2015, Kleppinger and Cain found that focusing on only the negative elements of sharing information online can lead to students deleting all of their social media accounts.[3] Moreover, Kleppinger and Cain found that the absence of a social media profile was as harmful to a student's online reputation as having a poorly managed or badly crafted online image.[4] Often, the lack of a social media presence was viewed as the student having something to hide.

Librarians at the George Washington University Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library maintain a LibGuide on e-Professionalism specifically targeted to health professionals.[5] Content on the LibGuide includes links to articles on developing and maintaining a professional online presence, as well as information on several social media platforms and features. The guide includes links to social media guidelines and policies for a variety of medical organizations and centers. The Metaliteracy Learning Collaborative, comprised of librarians and disciplinary faculty members from the State University of New York's (SUNY) Empire State College and University at Albany locations, designed a series of digital badges in which learners complete work in four badges towards earning the final "Metaliteracy" badge.[6] One of the four badges is a "Digital Citizen" badge, and contains information and exercises on online personas, personal brands, privacy poli-

* Christina L. Wissinger, Health Sciences Librarian, Penn State University Libraries, clw68@psu.edu; Carmen Cole, Sally W. Kalin Librarian for Learning Innovations, Information Sciences and Business Liaison Librarian, Penn State University Libraries, ccc143@psu.edu

cies, and privacy ethics. Regardless of discipline, LibGuides and digital badges may be used to support online professionalism instruction.

Online professionalism education has taken several forms. Bernadette John, Amandeep Cheema, and David Byrne developed a module for medical students at the King's College London School of Medicine containing several case-based scenarios illustrating the consequences of poor online behavior, and guidelines, recommendations, and resources on how to maintain a digital profile.[7] Désirée Lie et al. embedded a required, two-hour intervention on "Online Social Media and Professionalism" into a medical professionalism course.[8] The intervention included a 30-minute lecture on maintaining a professional online presence, small group discussions with provided prompts, and a written reflection. Dawn Edminston, a professor of marketing and management, instructed her students in brand marketing concepts applied to establishing an online professional presence.[9] Stephanie Kelly, Scott Christen, and Lisa Gueldenzoph Snyder created an activity that required students to assess each other's online presence and provide feedback on improvements (or developments) for professional branding.[10] Brett Cooper and Mary Kate Naatus combined instruction on branding, market research, sales, and business communication fundamentals with training and exercises on how to best utilize LinkedIn for online professional identity development.[11] Targeting instruction to the student's discipline serves to contextualize the familiarization with online professionalism concepts and provides students with reflective practices when establishing a professional online identity.

When teaching online professionalism is important to create a balanced instruction session. Two theories that highlight both the risks and benefits of using social media to create an online professional profile are The Extended Parallel Process Model and Rotman's Privacy Literacy Framework.[12] These two theories can be used alone or in combination to create and assess online professionalism information literacy sessions.
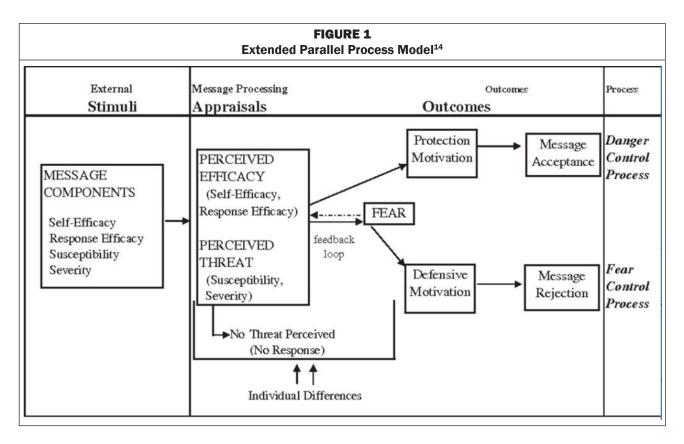
Theories for Guiding Online Professionalism Instruction

The Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), illustrated in figure 1, is a theory from the field of health communication focusing on fear appeals.[13] EPPM can be used as a guide when creating library instruction sessions focused on online professionalism. EPPM is used to facilitate behavior change, like in anti-smoking campaigns, and the model takes into account that viewers/students may reject the information they are learning. Because message rejection is included as possible outcome in the model, EPPM allows for circumstances where students could be so overwhelmed by the risks of social media, they could choose to stop using all social media outlets. The goal of online professionalism instruction is to educate students on best practices for creating an online image and have them proactively use social media sites.

The first stage of EPPM is *perceived threat*. Before the message can be received by the student, they must perceive the threat as real. The student must either acknowledge there are risks to posting information online and/or that there are benefits. This stage can be presented in an instructional session by reviewing examples of negative and positive social media posts and discussing the consequences and/or benefits of posting that information online.

After the students accepts there are risks or benefits to sharing information online they move to the second stage of EPPM: *perceived efficacy*. During the *perceived efficacy* stage students need to accept that what they are learning will help them make informed decisions about posting information online. At this point students can be presented with ways they can judge the benefits and/or risks of the online posts.

Once students understand how to use the skills they have been taught, they move to the third stage of EPPM: *danger control*. Students now implement the skills enabling them to craft appropriate online images. When teaching online professionalism, the *danger control* stage can be seen as an image control stage. To reinforce this process, students can review current online profiles and critique previous posts.

FIGURE 1
Extended Parallel Process Model[14]

External Stimuli	Message Processing Appraisals	Outcomes	Process

MESSAGE COMPONENTS

Self-Efficacy
Response Efficacy
Susceptibility
Severity

PERCEIVED EFFICACY
(Self-Efficacy, Response Efficacy)

PERCEIVED THREAT
(Susceptibility, Severity)

No Threat Perceived (No Response)

Individual Differences

FEAR

feedback loop

Protection Motivation → Message Acceptance — *Danger Control Process*

Defensive Motivation → Message Rejection — *Fear Control Process*

If students feel incapable of managing their online image, they may move into the *fear control* stage of EPPM. In this stage, students may feel unable to apply the information they have learned and powerless to develop control over their online image. If students experience *fear control*, they may move to the *maladaptive behavior* stage. In the *maladaptive behavior* stage, students may believe only negative consequences come from posting online and then may choose to delete their social media accounts. The *maladaptive behavior* stage is extremely important to keep in mind when creating instruction sessions. Students must be shown the positive benefits of posting information online to create a professional image so they do not feel the need to remove all their online profiles. A delicate balance between risks and benefits must be maintained in every instructional session to prevent students from reaching the *maladaptive behavior* stage.

Rotman's Privacy Literacy Framework is a theory from the field of library and information science, and is composed of five areas: *understanding, recognizing, realizing, evaluating,* and *deciding*.[15] The first area of *understanding* focuses on comprehending the different types of information that are shared online: identifiable, private, personal, and professional. *Recognizing* addresses places where personal information is shared/distributed online. *Realizing* focuses on the consequence of sharing personal information online. *Evaluating* centers on the risks or benefits of sharing information online. Finally, *deciding* covers when to make the choice to share information online.

The five areas in Rotman's framework can be used as a guide when creating online professionalism sessions. Each area in the framework can be used to facilitate scenario-based assessment questions. For example, to determine if a student has successfully comprehended the *evaluating* area of the privacy literacy framework, a question related to the pros or cons of sharing a post online could be created. This assessment could be as simple as a multiple choice question or as in-depth as a reflection question requiring a written response. By using the framework's areas as a guide for constructing assessment questions, instructors can easily determine if their stu-

dents have internalized the process they should use when deciding whether posting information to their profile would create a positive or negative impact.

A potential scenario for the *evaluating* area could be: Alex is excited about a new hospital internship and wants to post a picture online to share with friends. Alex takes a photo of the nurse's lounge and captions the photo "livin' in the real world."

Question: Using the *evaluating* area of the framework what are the possible risks or benefits of Alex's post?

A. There are no risks
B. There could be risks if their workplace has a social media policy
C. This is only a benefit; it shows they are proud of their internship
D. The benefits outweigh the possible risks

This scenario could be easily changed to a written reflection question to allow for a more detailed response from students.

Reflection Question: Based on Alex's scenario and the framework's area of *evaluating*, please list what you see as possible risks or benefits to posting this content. What should Alex consider before posting this content online?

Both the stages of EPPM and the five areas of Rotman's Privacy Literacy Framework can be used to create customized sessions tailored to student and faculty needs; however, they should not replace discipline specific norms. When creating an online professionalism instructional session, it is important to consider the students' future professional field and actively collaborate with faculty teaching the course. Each discipline comes with unique professional considerations and preferred social media platforms.

Discipline Specific Instruction in Practice

Beginning in 2016, a disciplinary collaboration between a business librarian and business writing faculty member at the Pennsylvania State University originated from a request for instruction on how to best develop a professional online identity. Online professionalism considerations were not a part of the business-writing curriculum, and the business writing faculty member wanted to include the instruction as part of their professional development curriculum. Because students were developing and refining their job packet deliverables per course requirements, the inclusion of instruction on how to create and maintain a professional online presence created a holistic overview of career preparation. Framed around core business writing principles (e.g. objective-oriented), the instruction sessions provided students with positive considerations for developing and maintaining a professional online presence. Additionally, the sessions provided an opportunity for raising students' awareness around the implications of making their digital information widely available to potential employers without critical consideration.

Most students are already utilizing social media in a social context, and some may have a LinkedIn account, but students may not be utilizing those platforms in a professional context. Instructors should reassure students that it is not necessary to have a professional presence on every social media platform; rather, emphasize that it is best to develop a professional online presence on the platform that feels most intuitive for them to use. Students can be engaged by asking them what platforms they think will most benefit them or have an impact on their professional aspirations.

Students should also consider if separate social and professional online presences would be helpful or beneficial. *Tips for the professional online presence:*
- Urge students to display a professional portrait of themselves as their profile picture and professional images where appropriate. They do not have to spend an exorbitant amount of money on professional portraits; a picture of themselves dressed in suitable attire taken against a non-descript background

will suffice.[16] A self-portrait (or "selfie") is generally not acceptable. Campus career centers or departments may offer professional portrait services at little to no cost.

- Encourage students to use the same name on their professional social media profiles that they use on their application materials/resumes. Recruiters and employers should easily be able to locate them when performing searches.
- Similarly, students should perform frequent Google searches for their name to ensure that they are "searchable." Would recruiters or employers be able to mimic the same search?
- When crafting the written content for their professional social media profile(s), students may use the tone, jargon, buzzwords, etc. of the industry. The instructor should emphasize the importance of how students choose to present themselves, and that context may differ. However, students do not want to go overboard and become, to quote the business librarian's example, a "supply chain, corporate-speak, robot." Striking a balance between using their natural voice and demonstrating competency in a disciplinary field takes practice. Finding well-developed professional social media profiles from graduates working in the students' desired field, for example, is a good way to gain familiarity with appropriate content.
- An awareness and use of discipline/industry hashtags demonstrates engagement with discipline/industry content and players. For example, if a student follows a particular company or becomes familiar with companies or well-known individuals in a particular industry, they may start to see familiar hashtags.
- Finally, students *must* proofread their content before posting anything online.

One of the most popular online platforms is LinkedIn.[17] Specifically geared towards professional networking, profile pages act as online resumes. If a student's LinkedIn page is public, recruiters, potential employers, and others in their profession will be able to discover the profile.

Employers and recruiters may examine LinkedIn profiles for evidence of professional skills, length of professional tenure, and specific hard skills. Hard skills are able to be quantified. Examples of hard skills include fluency in a spoken language or familiarity with a particular software program. Perhaps these skills are listed on a resume, but if not, a LinkedIn profile acts an excellent supplement. Recruiters and employers may also search online for indication of cultural fit, to see if students engage with whatever industry they are interested in, and for additional evidence of professional experience. Social media profiles would need to be public in order for recruiters and employers to view the content. Soft skills, generally not quantifiable (e.g. the ability to work well in teams or communicate well), may be better evidenced on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Students may be familiar with the terms (hard and soft skills); however, in the case of the instruction sessions at Penn State, students were generally not familiar with the terms.

Tips for LinkedIn

- Provide students with a copy or link to the LinkedIn Checklist for Students.[18]
- Just as in resume or cover letter writing, students should not overinflate responsibilities in the workplace, volunteering, or educational accomplishments. Perspective employers are easily able to verify claims, and will typically be skimming profiles. When listing competencies, encourage students to list the top 2-3 skills they gained/learned that they think will be the most impactful to potential employers.
- As with creating content for a professional social media presence, students must understand the language of their perspective field/industry. Viewing LinkedIn profiles of prominent people working for entities in their desired field/industry, reading current articles, and developing an understanding of the tone and jargon often utilized will help students gain familiarity with the kind of content they should be crafting for their own profile.

- A student employed as a peer educator for the business library volunteered their LinkedIn profile as an example to demonstrate for the instruction session. Partner with your career center or liaison college/department to see if example student LinkedIn profiles are available for use in the classroom.

Students may choose to separate their professional and social online presences because they do not want their social online presences to be searchable by current or potential employers. A part of the instruction session focused on the distinct differences between social and professional online presences, as well as some best practices to keep social online presences private (if that is what students prefer):

Tips for the social online presence:

- Students may choose to list their social online profiles under variations of their name: Using one of the author's names as an example, a social profile listed under the name C Cole, Carm C, or CC could serve as option. Using a fake name generally violates most social media platforms' terms of service, so make sure to inform students of those policies.

- Instruct students to ensure their social online presence is "locked down." Students must pay close attention to the privacy settings on different social media platforms, and frequently check to make sure the platform providers have not changed the policies or settings. In each instruction session performed by the business librarian, she performed a Google search for her Facebook profile, accessed her Facebook profile, and did a live explanation and demonstration of how to utilize the various privacy settings within Facebook. Although librarians may not want to access their personal social media accounts in front of a classroom of students, the lesson was impactful. Anecdotal feedback received after each instruction session indicated that many students were not aware that some of the privacy settings in Facebook existed.

- Social profile pictures are generally visible regardless of whether all other information has been hidden from public view. If students are concerned with whether or not their social profile picture could be deemed inappropriate by their employer, they may choose a "safe for work" picture (like their professional portrait or a picture of a pet, for example).

Companies and organizations may have social media policies that employees, interns, and volunteers are required to sign when hired. When students sign their paperwork during the hiring process, they need to read everything: there may be a social media policy in their paperwork that was not mentioned by the hiring representative. For example, students may have to agree to not post disparaging remarks about their company or post pictures taken anywhere inside the company building. Or, there may not be a social media policy at all—in that case, students should always use good judgement when posting on social media platforms, in either a professional or social capacity. Just because they have been hired for a permanent, post-college position or internship does not mean they should stop practicing good online professionalism.

Considerations for Instruction

After collecting anecdotal feedback from seven separate instruction sessions on online professionalism, students indicated they wanted examples of poor online reputation management that resulted in consequences. The business librarian then incorporated an example of poor online professionalism that was prominently featured in the media at the time of its occurrence.

An emergency room nurse at a New York City hospital posted a photo on Instagram of a trauma room where nurses and doctors had just saved a person's life.[19] The photo was captioned "Man vs. 6 train" because the man had been struck by a subway train. In the photo, hospital debris littered the floor. No people appeared in the photo. She attached the hashtags #lifesaving, #EMS, #NYC, #ER, #Nurses, #Doctors, #nymed, #trauma, #realLife. The nurse was fired for posting the photo, not for violating HIPPA (the Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act of 1996 that protects patients' medical information and privacy), but for being "insensitive" by posting the photo.

In the instruction session, the business librarian displayed the Instagram photo, along with the caption and accompanying hashtags. Then, students were asked to consider what may have led to the nurse being fired for posting the photo. A good discussion typically ensued, and students were then asked what the nurse could have done differently (or not at all) in that situation. The example presented is one of many that could be used to generate discussion about how posting written content or images online has resulted in firings, suspensions, expulsions from school, or mass social media shaming. It is essential, however, that the examples of negative consequences be utilized as a basis for positive reflection, as well as a segue into activities engaging students in proactively managing their online profiles.

Activities

1. Students may create their own social media guidelines (if they choose to have an online presence).[20] These guidelines can be for either a social and/or professional presence:

- Personal guidelines do not have to be a list of things they *should not* do.
- Begin with 2-3 guidelines (be intentional and thoughtful—take their time).
- Guidelines may be written for their role as a student, an intern, or an employee.

The point of this activity is to get students to think about their own personal accountability. What do they want to keep in mind or think about before they post? How can they educate themselves before they create or revise a professional online profile? Do they want to continually brush up on their writing skills so that their content is professional and well-developed? Are there behaviors to avoid?

2. Have students review the Kind article before or during class.[21] Kind used the American College of Physicians and the Federation of State Medical Board's guidelines on online medical professionalism as a springboard to craft further considerations and questions that may arise as the social media landscape evolves. Although students may not be in medical school, pre-selected questions and considerations may generate lively small group conversation, individual written reflections, or classroom discussion.

3. Action Items (Students may work on action items in-class or start working on the items in relation to their own social media profiles. For students that do not have a social media presence, and do not foresee themselves crafting a professional online presence, they may spend the time enhancing their resume and cover letter):

- Students may set "appointments" for themselves to review the privacy settings on all of the social media platforms they use.
- During their "appointment" time, students should Google themselves and be thorough (search variations of their name, add their current location, and try putting quotation marks around their name).[22]
- Students should perform Google image searches of their current profile pictures for any current social media platforms being utilized, both social and professional. In addition, students should search for other pictures of themselves. Provide students with instructions on how to perform thorough Google name and image searches. Do not assume prior knowledge.
- Encourage students to set up Google alerts on their names if they have a Google account. Also provide information on how to set up a Google alert.
- Finally, urge students to reassess their personal guidelines as their life situations change. They may want to adjust their guidelines accordingly.

4. Review social media guidelines of professional organizations, college, university, or companies. A good place to start may be the Social Media Policy Database.[23] Discussion questions to ask students may include:

- What is most surprising? Least surprising?
- Are there guidelines that students could adapt for themselves?
- Did they find anything too restrictive (give examples)? Why?

Conclusion

Greyson, Kind, and Chretien, referring to the medical field, suggested that institutions play a larger role in defining and exemplifying online professionalism by "engaging in consensus-oriented dialogue."[24] The authors noted that institutional stakeholders, such as students, instructors, and administrators, share the educational impact regarding online professionalism. Professionalism education will be iterative as the social media and digital landscape evolves, but framing discussion and instruction around positive considerations for online content creation and distribution will remain essential. Already valued as experts in information literacy instruction, academic librarians are poised to become key contributors in providing online reputation guidance to students.

Notes

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