

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE  
Lexington, Virginia

GENERAL ORDER)  
NUMBER 71)

15 June 2021

**Use of Social Media**

**1. Purpose**

To ensure the Institute's official presence in various social media venues is adequately coordinated and maintained and is supportive of the Institute's ability to fulfill its mission, and that personal use of social media by employees and cadets does not violate Institute policies or regulations or invade the rights of others.

**2. Applicability**

This policy applies to all VMI offices, departments, programs or other entities affiliated with VMI that maintain a social media presence in the furtherance of official duties. This includes all social media regardless of where the service is hosted. This policy applies to official and certain personal use of social media by cadets and Institute employees, as detailed herein.

**3. References**

- a. Virginia Department of Human Resources and Management Policy 1.75, Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media.
- b. General Order 13, Statement on Equity.
- c. General Order 16, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct
- d. General Order 42, Institute Identity Standards and Trademark Policy.
- e. General Order 44, Solicitation Policy.
- f. General Order 50, Acceptable Use of VMI Information Systems Policy.
- g. General Order 72, Facilities Utilization, Events, and Speech
- h. General Order 90, Retaliation Policy

**4. Definitions**

- a. "Account Manager" refers to the individual responsible for a specific social media presence.
- b. "Administrator Privileges" refers to the access documentation that allows a social media account manager to log into and manage social media.

c. “Affiliated Entity” refers to cadet organizations, the VMI Alumni Agencies, the VMI Alumni Association, the VMI Foundation, and the Keydet Club.

d. “Authorized Social Media” is any social media presence sponsored by an Institute entity or affiliated entity, including offices, departments, and extracurricular activities or clubs, that has obtained approval pursuant to this policy.

e. “Classrooms” are any areas of academic buildings used for instructional purposes. This includes traditional classrooms, laboratories, and workshop areas.

f. “Social media” refers to forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as photographs and videos. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, wikis, blogs, Twitter, Jodel, Instagram, and SnapChat.

g. “Social Media Administrator” is the person designated to coordinate Institute social media efforts and to enforce this policy.

h. “Training areas” are areas the Institute has specifically designated for the conduct of physical fitness and military training.

## **5. Authorized Social Media**

a. The Assistant Director for Marketing within the Office of Communications and Marketing ensures social media engagement by the Institute adheres to this policy. The assistant director shall have the following responsibilities:

(1) monitor known social media accounts of VMI entities and affiliated entities to determine compliance with this policy.

(2) recommend to the Director of Communications and Marketing actions to be taken regarding VMI or affiliated accounts for violations of this policy or when the director deems it to be in the best interests of the Institute to do so.

(3) on a systematic basis, survey the external social media environment.

(4) establish and chair a Social Media Council. Membership on the Council will include, but not be limited to, the designated social media administrator in the Office of Communications and Marketing and one social media account manager from each of the following entities: The Center for Leadership and Ethics, the Commandant’s Office, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, and, as appropriate, the VMI Alumni Agencies, the VMI Alumni Association, the Keydet Club, and the VMI Foundation. The mission of the Council will be (i) to ensure that authorized social media presence is coordinated and aligned to support the overall mission of the Institute, and (ii) to make recommendations concerning issues and policies affecting authorized social media.

b. Approval of Social Media.

(1) Prior to establishing a social media presence, VMI organizations and affiliated entities must request and obtain approval from the Assistant Director for Marketing in the Office of Communications and Marketing. The requesting office is responsible for securing any approvals required within its chain of command.

(2) Any social media presence of a VMI affiliated entity, including, but not limited to, the VMI Alumni Agencies, the VMI Alumni Association, the Keydet Club, and the VMI Foundation, that uses the name, mark, or logo of Virginia Military Institute must obtain approval pursuant to this policy and General Order 42, Identity and Trademark Policy.

(3) The department head, administrative supervisor, or faculty adviser of an entity requesting approval of a social media presence is responsible for designating a specific individual as the social media account manager and will ensure that the Office of Communications and Marketing is provided with the names, cell phone numbers, and email addresses of those account managers.

(4) Approved Institute social media will be enrolled in the Institute's ArchiveSocial social media monitoring and archiving account. Any social media activity sponsored by an Institute entity is subject to the requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Virginia Code § 2.2-3700 *et seq.*, and the Virginia Public Records Act, Virginia Code § 42.1-76 *et seq.* Affiliated entities are not subject to the Virginia Public Records Act or to FOIA.

c. Use and Operation of Authorized Social Media

(1) Entities authorized under this policy to operate social media are responsible for ensuring compliance with Institute policies, general orders, and guidelines issued by the Office of Communications and Marketing for social media use.

(2) The account manager is responsible for ensuring the social media presence is maintained, including reviewing and managing all content posted by the department or by outside posters and, when using any material produced by a person not employed by VMI, obtaining permission from the copyright owner to use the material. The account manager is also responsible for ensuring all postings comply with this policy and other policies of the Institute. Account managers are required to remove posts that violate the Institute's social media comment policy. Such posts should not be edited due to the possibility of altering the author's intent; rather, the entire post should be screenshotted and then removed.

(3) General Order 42, Identity and Trademark Policy, applies to all authorized social media. Use on any social media of trademarks, wordmarks, logos or other identity elements registered to the Institute is authorized only when approved in accordance with GO 42.

(4) General Order 50, Acceptable Use of VMI Information Systems, applies to all authorized social media.

(5) General Order 72, Facilities Utilization, Events, and Speech, details speech not protected by the U.S. Constitution that may also occur on social media and be subject to removal.

(6) Authorized social media must contain somewhere on the site (in the “about” section if the site has one) the following statement: “This site has been authorized by Virginia Military Institute, but it is not an official site of VMI. Views and opinions posted herein do not represent the position of the Commonwealth of Virginia or VMI and are not endorsed by VMI. We adhere to the terms of use and code of conduct on this site, and we reserve the right to remove any content that violates the Institute’s [Social Media Comment Policy](#), as well as advertisements for services, activities, and events not sponsored by Virginia Military Institute.”

d. Political and Commercial Activity. Authorized social media will not promote political or commercial interests. Social media account managers will ensure no such posts are made or are promptly removed.

e. Photographs and Video.

(1) Any individuals seeking to take photographs or videos in the barracks for use on social media must obtain prior approval from the Director of Communications and Marketing.

(2). The social media account manager is responsible for reviewing all photographs and videos posted to authorized social media to ensure any individuals pictured in uniform are wearing it properly; that standard safety measures for any activity pictured are being used (use of safety harnesses for high ropes, wear of goggles and protective clothing in labs, etc.); that the privacy rights of the individuals pictured are respected; and that no posted photograph or video constitutes obscenity, a threat of bodily harm, or conduct prohibited by Institute policies and regulations.

(3). Individuals who create content for affiliated entities’ social media may not post photographs or videos taken within Barracks, classrooms, training areas, or work areas of VMI to personal social media accounts without the express agreement of all persons pictured in an identifiable manner.

f. Fundraising. Use of authorized social media for fundraising activities by individuals for Institute-related purposes, cadet clubs, or other Institute organizations is authorized only when approved in accordance with General Order 44.

## **6. Personal Social Media Use**

a. Employees

(1) Employees must ensure that any personal social media posts do not give the impression of representing the Commonwealth of Virginia or the Institute. While employees are permitted to mention their status as VMI employees on social media, employees must also be clear that any posts are personal and do not represent the position or views of the Institute.

(2) To protect the privacy of cadets and employees, VMI employees may not post photographs or videos taken within Barracks, classrooms, training areas, or work areas of VMI without the express agreement of all persons pictured in an identifiable manner.

(3) Employees are not authorized to use VMI logos, wordmarks, or other Institute trademarks on their personal social media sites or in posts to social media.

(4) Employees may report incidents of disruption of constitutionally protected speech on social media to the Inspector General.

b. Cadets

(1) The Blue Book, Institute regulations, the general orders listed in Paragraph 3 of this policy, and all other general orders apply to posts and other activities on social media. Cadets also are reminded that the identity of persons who post to “anonymous” social media sites can be determined and that any cadets who violate Institute policies and cadet standards of conduct in the course of social media use, anonymous or not anonymous, will be sanctioned to the fullest extent appropriate. In accordance with General Order 17, cadets are subject to disciplinary standards from matriculation until graduation or other separation from the Institute regardless of their geographic location and while on leave, furlough, or otherwise absent from Post.

(2) Cyberbullying and cyberstalking by anyone, including cadets, are expressly prohibited by the Institute’s policies and standards and may constitute criminal activity. Pursuant to General Order 16, stalking, which includes cyberstalking, is defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to: (i) fear for his or her safety or the safety of others; or (ii) suffer substantial emotional distress. A "course of conduct" means two or more acts by any means, including social media use, through which an individual follows, monitors, observes, surveils, threatens, or communicates to or about any person.

(3) Posting of Photographs or Video. Cadets may not post to social media photographs or videos without the express agreement of all persons pictured in an identifiable manner.

(4) Upper class cadets may not post on social media any photographs or videos of identifiable rats regardless of whether or not the rat or rats pictured agree to such use.

(5) Due to the risk of disruption of training activities, all cadets must obtain the approval of the commandant’s staff member, ROTC staff member, or faculty member in charge of a training event prior to undertaking photography or videography in close proximity to training activities and must abide by any instructions provided by that individual.

(6) Likewise, all cadets must obtain the approval of the faculty member in charge before undertaking photography or videography in classrooms and laboratories and must abide by any instructions provided by that individual.

(7) Cadets are not authorized to use VMI logos, wordmarks, or other trademarks on their personal social media sites or in posts to any social media.

(8) In accordance with Virginia Code § 23.1-405(E), Institute officials, other than the VMI Police in carrying out official law enforcement duties, will not require any cadet to disclose the username or password to such cadet's personal social media accounts.

(9) Cadets may report incidents of disruption of constitutionally protected speech on social media to the Cadet Equity Association or the Inspector General.

FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT:

Jeffrey R. Boobar  
Colonel, Virginia Militia  
Interim Chief of Staff

ANNEXES:

A – Protocol for Reporting Threatening or Harassing Posts

B – Social Media Comment Policy

DIST: E

OPR: Communications and Marketing

ANNEX A to General Order 71

**Protocol for Reporting Threatening or Harassing Posts**

Any cadet, faculty member, staff member, or other individual who becomes aware of a social media post which appears to contain a threat of harm to self or to others should immediately take the following actions:

1. Report the post by calling 911 and providing as much of the following information as is known:
  - a. Social media platform on which the threat was seen.
  - b. Type of threat and to whom the threat was directed.
  - c. Time the threat was noted and any timestamp on the post.
2. If possible, a screen shot of the threatening post should be taken.

Any cadet, faculty member, staff member, or other individual who becomes aware of a social media post which appears to be harassment or other discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, religion, or other protected status or evidence of sexual misconduct as defined by General Order 16 should immediately take the following actions:

1. Report the post by calling the Office of the Inspector General at (540) 464-7072 or one of the five assistant inspectors general on Post. The following information should be provided if known:
  - a. Social media platform on which the information was seen.
  - b. Type of harassment or discrimination and to whom the information was directed.
  - c. Type of evidence suggesting sexual misconduct and any information concerning the identity of a potential victim.
  - d. Time the information was posted and any timestamp on the post.
2. If possible, a screen shot of the post should be taken.

The Office of Communications and Marketing should be made aware of problematic social media posts to allow monitoring of the platforms of concern.

ANNEX B to General Order 71

### **Social Media Comment Policy**

Virginia Military Institute maintains an official presence on seven social media sites: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr. These accounts are where cadets, parents, alumni, and others can learn about and enjoy the great happenings at the Institute. The official sites are produced, maintained, and monitored by the Institute's Office of Communications and Marketing (C&M). All users are welcome and encouraged to share content on VMI's social media pages. Remember that you are personally responsible for all content you post online. Opinions and content expressed in public comments do not reflect official positions or policies of the Virginia Military Institute.

Social media is a 24/7 medium; however, our moderation capabilities are not. The C&M Team regularly reviews content posted by other users on the official VMI social media pages listed above. All users are expected to adhere to site-specific terms of use when posting content to an official VMI social media page. Any information posted on our sites is considered public information and may be subject to monitoring, moderation or disclosure to third parties. C&M reserves the right, but is not obligated, to remove content from VMI social media sites for any reason. They also have the right to block access to anyone from posting to this page.

Stay on topic.

When commenting under an existing post, please keep comments on the topic. Comments not related to the subject of the conversation will be removed. If you have an idea for a subject, would like to provide feedback, or would like a VMI representative to follow-up with you, you may email us directly at [marketing@vmi.edu](mailto:marketing@vmi.edu).

Observe confidentiality laws at all times.

Do not post confidential information about Virginia Military Institute, cadets, colleagues, patients, donors, vendors, etc. This includes names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, etc. Follow applicable federal requirements such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as well as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) regulations. VMI employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination.

Do not post spam or advertisements.

Comments focused on selling a product or service, or comments posted for the purpose of driving traffic to a particular website for personal, political, or monetary gain will be excluded. Users who continuously post unauthorized advertisements on VMI social media pages will risk being banned from posting.

Observe fair use, copyright, and disclosure laws.

Always give people credit for their work, and make sure you have the right to use content before you post it on social media sites. Posts must not violate laws that govern the use of copyrights, trade secrets, etc.



Do not harass or bully others.

Civilized dialogue on all issues is welcome. If you disagree with another user's opinion, please keep your comments respectful. Malicious intent and/or participation not in the spirit of civil conversation will be removed. Falsehoods or ad hominem attacks on VMI cadets, employees, or guests will also be removed. VMI employees are expected to adhere to all applicable VMI policies and regulations. VMI cadets are expected to adhere to the Cadet Honor Code. VMI employees and cadets who violate these codes and policies do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination.

Refrain from using hateful speech.

Be respectful of others. Do not attack other users, especially attacks based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, disability or medical condition.

Do not use vulgar language or profanity.

VMI reserves the right to remove comments and posts including, but not limited to, those which contain profane or provocative language.

Do not post content that contains graphic violence or pornography.

Several social media sites have a strict policy against the sharing of pornographic content and impose limitations on the display of nudity and graphic violence. Refrain from posting such content on VMI social media pages.