

Online Discussion Guidelines at Colby College

1. Various online discussion systems are provided by the College to promote the exchange of information, questions, ideas, analyses, criticisms, and viewpoints within the diverse array of academic and social contexts at Colby.
2. The Code of Ethics for Information Technology at Colby College and other College policies apply to online discussions.
3. Access to an online discussion (membership) may be broadly inclusive or restricted, for example, to individuals enrolled in the course or members of an organization. Access to a discussion must comply with other College policies.
4. When participating in an online discussion it is important to consider the visibility of a discussion and what capabilities are provided for ongoing control of contributions to a discussion. Some discussions are conducted on password protected web sites with a limited audience while others are conducted on sites that everyone may view. Some online discussion formats permit participants to edit or delete their contributions while others do not.
5. System administrators are prohibited from inspecting the contents of any online discussion in which they are not members, except in the routine performance of their duties in maintaining the operation of the system. System administrators must preserve full confidentiality of any information about the contents of a discussion obtained in the performance of their duties.
6. Discussion moderators play an important role in managing online discussions. Ultimately, it is the moderator's responsibility to ensure that discussion participants adhere to the established parameters of the discussion and that the discussion itself does not violate any provisions of the Code of Ethics for Information Technology at Colby College or other College policies.
7. Discussion moderators should clearly state a confidentiality policy for online discussions. If, for example, the policy is that postings in an online discussion are confidential to members of the forum, it would be a violation of the code of ethics to give a copy of any of the discussion contents to someone else. One's own posting in such a discussion can be distributed elsewhere as long as the contents do not compromise the confidentiality of the forum membership and postings made by others.
8. The content of online discussions on systems provided by the College are subject to the content deletion, expiration, and removal processes in effect on those systems. Moderators and participants should consider content retention practices when choosing a system for conducting online discussions.
9. While it is anticipated that vigorous debate of ideas and opinions may occur within an online discussion, it is expected that civility in discourse will be maintained.
 - Criticizing ideas and opinions is a normal process of debate and each person should expect to have ideas challenged. However, personal attacks such as denigration of another person's character or value have no place in such discussions. Profanity is to be avoided.
 - Participants are urged to avoid responding quickly and emotionally to another person's posting. Quickly lashing out against a statement with which one strongly disagrees often results in a personal attack and divergence from the primary topic at hand. A period of contemplation followed by reasoned criticism of the viewpoint is far more effective in convincing others.
10. Moderators of online discussions have a special responsibility in the case of a serious breach of the code of ethics, civility in conduct, or discussion rules. A message and, if appropriate, responses to it

may be removed by the moderator if the originating message is deemed inappropriate. The moderator should report violations of the code of ethics or other College policies to the appropriate Vice President to determine whether disciplinary action should be initiated. Special care should be taken by the moderator in cases where the views, criticisms, or information are contrary to those of the moderator, are unpopular, or are in some way incorrect; in such cases it is usually better to debate the matter within the online discussion.

11. Moderators of online discussion are responsible for:

- stating the range of topics that the forum will cover and being active in keeping the discussion on topic,
- stating the discussion's policy regarding confidentiality of the postings to the forum,
- defining the discussion's membership
- setting the tone of discussion,
- reminding individuals as necessary of the code of ethics and importance of civility in discourse, as well as dealing with significant violations,
- responding to complaints about people's participation in the online discussion, and,
- conducting other administrative tasks as needed.

12. Complaints about postings to an online discussion should be directed to the moderator of the discussion. The moderator may seek advice, if needed, from the sponsoring organization, from the Chief Information Officer, the chair of the IT Committee, or from the appropriate Vice President.

13. This policy document will be reviewed annually by the Information Technology Committee, soliciting comment from the campus community, and posted on the Information Technology Services policy web page.

Approved by the Information Technology Committee on April 2017
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