

HEADS UP

UPDATES AND ISSUES

DIVERSITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS



Dallas L. Holmes, EdD. , USU Cooperative Extension, Diversity and Civil Rights Specialist (435) 770-0744

Vol. 7 Issue 1 January 2012

Tweets, Blogs, Posts and Emails in a Diverse World

The use of social media as an ever-changing tool among the arrows in our communications quiver brings with it some modern day concerns! More than ever before, social media, whether in the form of tweets, blogs, emails or posts, provides Extension with instantaneous connections to stakeholders, family, friends and others. It can provide timely responses to requested resources having an enormous economic, social and political impact. We have recently witnessed on television, the web and other social media sites the ability to save lives of those stranded on the high mountains and the ability to bring dictators and despots to their knees. The use of the valued tool of social media may have unintended consequences for the user, however. The number of successful equal opportunity and harassment complaints stemming from inappropriate electronic behavior is climbing, according to John M. Robinson, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. State Department. The increasingly complex digital connections between stakeholders, Extension experts and employees can have significant consequences and may become the basis for discrimination and harassment allegations.

In this era of social media, Extension faculty and staff alike must be mindful of what they blog, post, email or tweet to avoid contributing to potential harassment or civil law suits. The privacy settings established on social media sites do not allow you to say or post things without fear of repercussion, either. You still have to contend with the "friend factor", that is a "friend" who shares your posts, blogs or tweets with others to whom they were not intended. This "friend" who passes social media communications on to others may lead to potential disciplinary actions for you if civil rights policies are violated. What you do or fail to do when employing social media could have serious ramifications for you, Extension or Utah State University.

Social media is expanding the definition of the traditional workplace. Indeed through social media the world becomes the workplace. Great care and thought should be exercised when posting pictures, diagrams, making contextual derogatory comments, using expletives, importing music or other copyrighted resources that are shared via social media sites. Social media tools are wonderful arrows in the Extension quiver. Be careful that what you send using social media is not something you will regret seeing again, because you just might!

"Utah State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution."