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**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**

University Executive Board

Directives on communication and expression of opinion

The Executive Board of the University of Bern,

based on Article 3 (3), Article 8 (1) and Article 39 (1) (b) and (k) of the Act of September 5, 1996 Governing the University (UniG), Article 55 of the Personnel Act (PG) of September 16, 2004, Article 58 (3) of the Ordinance of September 12, 2012 on the University (UniV), and Article 18 of the Statute of the University of Bern of June 7, 2011 (University Statute; UniSt),

has decided as follows:

1. Background

As a public-law entity of the Canton of Bern, the University of Bern performs its tasks in the service of the community at large. Pursuant to the University Act, it promotes public understanding of its academic objectives. Specifically it provides regular information on the main areas and results of its activities.

Publishing the results of research is one of the most important tasks of academic activity. Researchers normally do this in academic journals and forums. University employees can and should appear in public in the context of their research activity. If they go beyond that to express opinions, certain overall parameters need to be observed.

The following provisions govern communication by the University, its units and its members. They apply to all units and employees of the University of Bern.

2. Legal framework

Academic freedom (Article 20 of the Federal Constitution and Article 21 of the Cantonal Constitution) protects the free choice of the subject and method of academic research, the interpretation of results and their publication.

However, contributions that are not directly related to own research are covered not by academic freedom but by *freedom of opinion*.

University employees are obliged to protect the interests of the University of Bern and carry out their duties to the population and their employer in a way that is lawful, conscientious, cost efficient and innovative. This obligation flows from the duty of employee loyalty set down in Article 55 of the Personnel Act of the Canton of Bern.

The exercise of fundamental rights (specifically the right of freedom of opinion) when expressing opinions must consequently respect this duty of loyalty and, therefore, make allowance for the special public interest on which employment at the University is based.

3. Responsibilities owed to the University

The responsibilities owed to the University in the context of these directives are as follows:

- The University of Bern espouses freedom of research and teaching, which is in the fundamental interest of the University and society.
- Researchers bear responsibility for their scientific activity and the exercise of academic freedom.
- The University Executive Board is responsible for ensuring that the University's mandate is fulfilled, that its objectives are achieved and that its interests are protected as a whole.
- A key aspect of all academic activity is that it is guided by science. The University of Bern strives for diversity of perspectives and methods that are rooted in science.
- The University is a place where differing opinions and views are seen as enriching and a basis for new discoveries. It promotes innovative and original thinking and insists upon tolerance of other opinions and approaches.
- Debates, discussions and critical appraisals are to take place based on academic standards and findings, as well as on the basis of the values of the University of Bern.
- Using the means at its disposal, the University protects and supports researchers and employees who are inappropriately challenged because of their public activities.
- The University promotes and insists upon mutual respect and provides freely available assistance to its employees.

4. Keeping the public informed about the activities of the University

The University keeps the public informed about its activities. In doing so, it is guided by the basic principles set forth in Strategy 2030 of the University of Bern, such as self-image and values, and by the specifications of the communication strategy.

The University Executive Board, along with the faculties and organizational units, is responsible for general communication of focal areas and results. As a rule, the Communication and Marketing Office provides information of significance for the University as a whole.

The faculties and their institutes and other organizational units ensure that research results are made available to the public unless this conflicts with prevailing public or private interests. The faculties and other organizational units may inform members of the University and the general public about their research and teaching activities independently. Where issues of significance for the University are concerned, they must do this in collaboration with the University Executive Board.

5. Principles for communication and expression of opinion

The following applies to communication by the University, its units and its employees:

- It is important to draw a distinction between the University providing information and publishing academic work and University employees expressing their opinions on subjects outside their own area of research.
- Opinions must be expressed in a way that preserves the interests of the University and the academic fields. In particular, employees must avoid making statements that damage the institution and engaging in other activities that could have a negative impact.
- Appearances and expressions of opinion by University employees that have a public impact must not impair the exercise of their role or compromise the faith that employees, students and third parties have in the University.
- The interests of the University take priority over the particular interests of employees.
- Personal and professional matters must be kept separate.
- Personal opinions and content must be clearly stated to be such.
- Personal opinions and opinions relating to secondary employment may not be circulated in letters or emails bearing the University letterhead or on official channels of the University of Bern.
- The rights of the University of Bern and third parties – particularly with regard to protection of privacy and data protection, copyright and official secrecy – must be respected.
- University websites may display personal content and links to private websites only if they relate to the role at the University.

6. Social media

The general principles listed above for communication also apply to the use of social media. Their aim is to ensure professional, high-quality and secure use of social media. Communication on social media must be consistent with the self-image, values and brand positioning of the University of Bern, as are set forth in Strategy 2030, the communication strategy, the mission statement and the University's corporate design manual.

Applicable in addition to the general legal parameters are the general terms and conditions of the social media channels in question. Open-source media with good data protection should be used where possible.

As a communication channel, social media are a means of disseminating content from the University, but also exchanging information and ideas with target groups. The University uses various platforms for this purpose.

University units can create their own official accounts upon request. The Communication and Marketing Office provides general information about social media.

Because of the fast pace and concise nature of posts on academic topics, social media are a special means of communication. They should be used with care and consideration.

In particular, the following applies to communication on social media:

- As a rule, a distinction should be made between accounts for personal use and those for use in a professional context. A general identification can be made in the profile.
- Facts must be kept separate from opinions, and opinions are to be labeled as such if an account is used for both professional and personal posts.
- If professors in particular post on social media, they must be aware of the fact that they are generally seen as University employees.
- Posts relating to their job should always be based on facts, meet minimum scientific standards and not be made in a way that is inappropriately brief.
- Communication should be appropriate to the medium and tailored to the recipient as far as possible.
- The author is personally responsible for all published content, irrespective of the context in which the account is used.

These principles are to be listed in the Appendix to these directives.

7. Responsibilities

The University Executive Board may issue further specifications for implementing the directives or instruct other offices, such as the Communication and Marketing Office, to carry out measures or activities.

As an oversight and disciplinary authority, the University Executive Board is responsible for any disciplinary or employment-related measures in the event of failure to comply with the directives.

8. Entry into force

These directives enter into force upon signature. They replace the guidelines on providing information and expressing opinions of February 23, 2021, the social media guidelines of October 29, 2013 and the directives on appearances and expressions of opinion by University employees that have a public impact of November 4, 2008.

Bern, June 4, 2024

On behalf of the University Executive Board
The Rector:

Prof. Dr. Christian Leumann

This document is a translation that is provided for information purposes only. It is not legally binding. In the event of a dispute about the interpretation of an article, the text of the original German version will therefore always prevail.

Appendix: Social media guidelines

1. Social media and the University of Bern

The aim of these guidelines is to ensure professional, high-quality and secure use of social media.

Social media are online communication channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, X, Mastodon, Bluesky, TikTok and YouTube, that enable information to be shared and exchanged and facilitate discussions.

The University of Bern supports an open dialog between the University and peer groups on social media, both on proprietary and on open-source platforms.

2. General principles

Specific legal parameters

Legal parameters must be complied with, specifically:

- The rights of the University of Bern, its members and third parties – particularly with regard to protection of privacy and data protection, copyright and official secrecy – must be respected.
- The general principles of the University of Bern must be complied with, particularly the following:
 - Racist, violent, sexist and pornographic content is not permitted and constitutes an abuse of IT resources.
 - Employees must avoid making statements about the University of Bern that damage the institution and engaging in other activities that could have a negative impact.
- The general terms and conditions of the social media channels in question must be observed.

Communication via social media

The following principles in particular apply to **communication** on social media:

- Responses to questions, criticism or suggestions are to be provided within a reasonable time (first response usually within one working day).
- The tone of the communication should be appropriate and polite.
- Communication should be restricted to facts.
- The Communication and Marketing Office is to be notified in the event of problematic posts and articles of any kind that could potentially develop into a crisis. The Media Relations Office (medien@unibe.ch) is to be contacted in the event of media inquiries.

The crisis management team is to be notified in crisis situations. The Communication and Marketing Office is the point of contact.

General advice and information about social media can be obtained from the Communication Office (socialmedia@unibe.ch).

Use of the University logo

University units are required to use the figurative mark (u to the power of b) as the profile picture. Faculties and institutes use the black figurative mark on a white background, and the communication channels of the umbrella brand use the white figurative mark on a red background. Centers that have their own logo/figurative mark may use it.

Only organizational units of the University of Bern are permitted to use the university logo. It may not be used for private or commercial purposes.

Media inquiries and crisis situations

Media inquiries via social media that concern the university as a whole are to be forwarded directly to the Media Relations Office of the University of Bern (medien@unibe.ch).

Problematic posts and articles of any kind that could potentially develop into a crisis must be monitored.

The Communication and Marketing Office is the point of contact in crisis situations.

3. Code of conduct for organizational units and administrators

Planning websites and web pages

- Accounts of University units are to be set up as business accounts.
- An editorial concept or at least a content concept must be drawn up for websites and web pages.
- Prior to launching a social media profile, the responsibilities and processes must be defined. The person responsible as well as the account are to be reported to the social media team at the Communication and Marketing Office when the account is being set up.
- Topics that are relevant to the University as a whole and have a wider target group can also be communicated via the main channels of the University of Bern. In every case, the Communication and Marketing Office is to be notified, and the channels on which such communication is to take place are to be coordinated with the office.
- The Communication and Marketing Office is on hand to provide any advice needed.

Netiquette and imprint

- Rules of "netiquette" (online etiquette) must be provided for websites or web pages, setting out how users should behave toward one another when using the portal concerned. They should also contain criteria for deleting articles or posts from fans, followers or subscribers.
- Business accounts are required to have an imprint, which usually contains at least the address, e-mail address and telephone number of the person responsible for the communication channel.
- A link to the imprint may be provided in the social media profile if the channel does not explicitly provide the ability to display an imprint.
- The provisions of the Federal Act on Unfair Competition (UWG) (Article 3 (1) (s) (1)) must be observed with regard to the content of the imprint.

Naming

University websites and web pages must be designated as such using a suitable naming system. The following principles apply to website/web page designations:

- “...University of Bern” or “Uni Bern” or “unibe” is to be added.
- “...unibern” or “...unibe” is to be added to the name of the “Uniform Resource Locator” (URL).
- When choosing a URL, it is advisable to opt for a combination of an abbreviation of the name of the institute or organizational unit concerned and the addition of “.unibe” or “.unibern”.
- Non-German names of the *Universität Bern* must be in line with the University’s language regulations (English: University of Bern, French: Université de Berne).
- It must be noted in the information section of the social media channel that the institute or organizational unit concerned is part of the University of Bern.
- On platforms with character limitations, the University of Bern is shortened to “unibern” as a rule. This applies to #unibern hashtags but not to mentions made with the respective handle (e.g. @unibern).
- Use of the name of the University of Bern for private social media channels is prohibited. This also applies to variations of the name (e.g. “unibe,” “unibern”) and use of the logo.

Monitoring

- The University’s online reputation is to be monitored using suitable tools.
- The person in charge of the profile is responsible for monitoring.

Private use

Private use of social media in the workplace is subject to the same rules as general use of the Internet for private purposes.

Use of the name of the University of Bern for private social media channels is prohibited. This also applies to variations of the name (e.g. “unibe,” “unibern”) and use of the logo.

4. Checklist/basis: social media concept for University units

- o *You are in contact with the person responsible for social media at the University of Bern*
- o *You know which channels you want to use, with the following aspects:*
 - o *You know who your target group is*
 - o *You know how often you want to use the channels*
 - o *You know which formats you intend to use and the content that you want to use for the channels*
- o *The responsibility for the channels is clearly defined (main responsibility, amount of resources)*
- o *There are rules in place for transferring responsibility for the channels in the event of staff changes*

- o *The processes for content creation are clearly defined (peer review principle, content providers, ...)*
- o *There is a clear responsibility for monitoring social media channels*
- o *Community management is clearly defined (e.g. maximum time for responding to a comment)*
- o *You have defined the scope and the KPIs most important to you for an analysis of your activities*
- o *Legal aspects:*
 - o *You are familiar with the legal aspects relating to content creation and publishing and comply with them (e.g. copyright, image rights,)*
 - o *You abide by other applicable legal regulations (official secrecy, copyright, protection of privacy and data protection)*
- o *You have obtained the necessary permissions to use material belonging to the University of Bern (e.g. the logo, figurative mark)*
- o *The name of the website or web page in question contains the suffix "... University of Bern" or "unibe"*
- o *The URL for your website or web page has "...unibern" or "...unibe" added to its name (e.g. "www.facebook.com/iop.unibe" or "www.youtube.com/ilubunibe")*
- o *In the information section, you refer to both the imprint and to the fact that the site or page is about an organizational unit of the University of Bern*
- o *You have drawn up netiquette rules, and you have created an imprint or linked to one*
- o *You do not use any logos or social media channels featuring the name of the University of Bern or any variations of that name for private purposes*