

Information Technology Options Committee
2012-2013 Committee Report

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The Information Technology Options Committee (or simply ITOC) serves to evaluate the role of social media in the Society. This includes the Society's social media presence (Facebook, Twitter), email lists and listservs, and primary website. The committee is honored to help SSSP examine its digital footprint in the ever-changing digital world. ITOC focused on three important goals this membership year: to improve the integration of technology throughout the Society, to investigate additional media strategies to serve the Society, and to maintain a list of all social media accounts connected with the Society and administrative access to these accounts.

Recommended changes to social media

This year, we revisited how the Society uses its main social media accounts. The Membership and Outreach Committee (MOC) asked ITOC to brainstorm how SSSP might better utilize social media accounts to serve the Society's needs. At heart were two primary issues: adding media to existing social media sites (such as the Society's Facebook page) and adding additional social media accounts (such a Facebook page dedicated to the annual meeting). Based on MOC's request, ITOC made several suggestions about best practices for establishing and maintaining social media accounts. Our report is included as Appendix A.

Following our recommendations, Dr. Ryon Cobb (Florida State University) began including media content on the Society's Facebook and Twitter pages. We are very pleased to report that this additional content has been a success. For example, the number of likes on our Facebook page has increased from 314 to 735 since January 1, 2013. On average, nine members interact with the page each day, resulting in an average of eight clicks per day on media posted by other members. Additionally, content is reaching beyond our membership base: almost seventy Facebook users who do not currently *like* the SSSP page see our content every day on their feed. We feel that adding additional content to our social media accounts has clearly helped spread word of the Society.

The Society also recently added an optional moderated listserv for members. This listserv provides an additional means for communicating with members. Dr. Nancy Mezey (Monmouth University) is the current moderator and will serve a two year term. The listserv presently has 195 subscribers.

Presidential Address

Under the previous chair, Dr. Sarah Hendricks (Drake University), ITOC initialized recording the presidential address at the annual meeting. ITOC thinks this is an important ongoing task for the committee as it helps preserve an important part of the Society's history. The 2012 address is available on the website at:

http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/459/locationSectionId/0/2012_Annual_Meeting .

Lisa East (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville) will be recording the 2013

presidential address and posting it to the website.

Future of ITOC

ITOC, its members, and chair would be pleased to continue serving SSSP in the coming membership year. As chair, I propose the committee focus on three points next year. First, the ITOC should continue evaluating the success of adding additional content to the Society's social media pages. Second, ITOC should renew early efforts to encourage division chairs to add Facebook and/or Twitter accounts while employing our recommended best practices. Finally, ITOC should reexamine our best practices recommendations in light of the changing nature of social media.

List of Current SSSP Social Media Accounts

Facebook SSSP Page

- Health, Health Policy, and Health Services Division Page
- Drinking and Drugs Page
- Sexual Behavior, Politics, and Community

Twitter

- SSSP Page
- Health, Health Policy, and Health Services Division Page
- Youth, Aging, and the Life Course Division Page

Other

- SSSP Optional Moderated Listserv
- SSSP Graduate Student Listserv

Information Technology Options Committee Report: Recommendations on additional SSSP social media

Committee members:

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Lisa East, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Issue 1: Adding additional media to social media pages

In evaluating the Society's current usage of social media, the committee feels that the primary SSSP Facebook page (located [here](#)) does an excellent job of disseminating important information about the Society's activities. Lisa East, the current administrator on this account, is a true asset to the Society. The current page effectively communicates Society news, including upcoming deadlines. It is also visually pleasing to the eye.

As suggested by the Membership and Outreach Committee, **we feel that one major improvement to SSSP's online presence would be the inclusion of news and media relevant to the Society's goals and interests.** Examining both ASA and SWS, the inclusion of additional media stimulates follower interest in the site and helps attract additional users.

1A: Who should be responsible?

We recommend appointing a member of the Membership and Outreach Committee to post noteworthy articles and other media to the Society's social media accounts. This has at least two benefits. First, appointing a second person will not put additional strain on the current webmaster. Second, this would allow our Membership and Outreach Committee an opportunity to directly communicate with members and potential members. We suggest assigning a one year term to this position. A second option would be electing a student member to take on this post for one or multiple year terms. Members with an interest in media studies may also be prime candidates for this position.

1B: What should be posted?

Deciding exactly what should be posted to the account is less simple, given the many possibilities. **We feel that the appointee should have some leeway on what the appointee elects to post to the Society's social media accounts.** We do offer two general guidelines. First, material posted to any SSSP account should be relevant to the Society's goals. Examples might include news articles about social injustice that help foster discussion of social problems. Second, and turning to ASA and SWS here as examples, it would also be both appropriate and

beneficial to post articles discussing trends in the discipline. Examples might include articles exploring trends in higher education or inequalities in tenure in academia.

We have also considered other options. As an alternative to creating posting guidelines, the Southern Sociological Society is allowing *all* members access to post on the Society's Facebook page. This has mixed results. On one hand, it allows followers the chance to interact with the Society and its members. For example, student members have asked questions on the Society's page, with some of the top researchers in the discipline answering these questions. An open posting option also eliminates the need for a single individual to take the role of actively posting material. However, this means that the Society has less ability to shape its virtual image. For example, a few questionable posts from researchers promoting their own book have occurred. Open access also leaves the SSS Facebook site open to the potential for abuse if a user's account is hacked, although this has yet to be an issue. Further, the absence of an active individual posting to the page lessens the activity on the page overall. Hence, posts may be few and far between on the SSS Facebook page. Given this example, we support having a single individual assigned to this important task.

Issue 2. Adding additional social media pages beyond the primary social media accounts

The Society's social media footprint currently includes email listservs, a website, and its primary Facebook/Twitter account. The ITO Committee understands that David Fasenfest, 2013 Program Chair, intends to utilize social media accounts for the upcoming 2013 meeting. Additionally, there is discussion of creating a new Facebook page dedicated to students, and divisions are currently creating pages dedicated to their areas of interest. **The committee supports creating new pages, but notes that there are issues that must be considered in advance to prevent long-term problems.**

2A. Longevity and continuity

In creating social media accounts, the Society needs to keep longevity in mind. While using a single account for each meeting may be effective, it creates a glut of eventually unused accounts that must either be deleted or somehow maintained. Additionally, followers would need to somehow be transferred from page to page, a process that will likely lose followers over time.

We suggest considering two courses of action in lieu of creating new pages. First, offer to let the program chair, student committees, and similar groups post to the main SSSP pages. This is a common practice with the Southern Sociological Society and may be the easiest solution. Second, if the Society elects to create a new social media page for a particular event, use the same page from year to year. This allows the Society to retain followers from year to year and eliminates the need to rebuild its followers every year. Additionally, this prevents the potential for dead pages. For example, instead of having a 2013 meeting social media page, simply have a Society meeting social media page that can be reused each year. In the event the program chair

does not wish to use this page, we recommend that Lisa post a link on this page to the SSSP website so members have a source for current meeting information.

As has been noted in previous ITO Committee discussions, continuity is also a major concern with any SSSP social media accounts. **We think the best way to prevent losing access to social media accounts is to include Lisa East as a co-administrator on each account.** Thus far, this approach seems to be working very effectively.

2B. Oversaturation and Duplicate Information

In the event additional pages are created, we suggest ensuring that their areas do not significantly overlap. Expanding to multiple social media pages on the same platform (e.g., Facebook) may create conditions where members follow multiple SSSP pages at the same time. If the same (or similar) content is posted to each page, followers may begin to receive the same information repeatedly. While this may be beneficial (it behooves us all to hear about conference deadlines two or three times), it may also be off-putting to some followers. It may create conditions where followers elect to hide SSSP posts, closing the line of communication between followers and the Society. However, if the material from each SSSP page is relatively unique (barring important news posts such as conference deadlines), we predict multiple posts will create a synergy effect that enhances the Society's online presence.