

Using Social Media/Internet Searches During the Hiring Process

Social media is a term used where Internet sites are used by people to connect with others for social interaction. Some of the most popular are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr. These sites, along with general Internet content, have become increasingly popular resources for some employers as part of the interview and hiring process.

In order to lower the risk of accessing information that is not relevant to employment decisions, please note the following:

1) **Avoid accessing personal social media sites – even if the applicant invites you to do so.**

At Northern Michigan University, we have a strong commitment to Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. It would be hard for a member of the search committee to review what is disclosed in the social media of a candidate and not learn of a protected class or activity, such as race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, if there is a disability, pregnancy status and genetic information. All of these demographic statuses are protected by federal law and NMU cannot use this information to discriminate or disqualify someone from being hired.

In addition, Michigan law prohibits accessing personal media sites until after in person interviews have taken place. If you must consider a person's social media as part of a job relevant search process, you cannot ask for an applicant's password or access to his/her social media sites and you must be consistent with your use of social media for all applicants.

<http://www.millercanfield.com/resources-alerts-814.html>

The only information that can be viewed is information that is available to the public. Most importantly, to avoid the appearance of discrimination because a member of the search committee looked into an applicant's social media, it is highly recommended that you have a neutral party view it for you – such as the EO Officer or a process guide from the Human Resources Department. The neutral party can give you information that pertains to the work related criteria by filtering out the protected demographic information.

2) **Do not access research publications on an applicant's personal website or social media site.**

Publications should be accessed directly through the relevant journal's website – and many of these journals are available without cost through our library system. If this is not possible for some reason, have applicants provide direct web links to their publications.

In cases where artwork/design samples are housed on a personal site that cannot be otherwise easily accessed, the search committee member should inform applicants to remove any content that is not job relevant prior to accessing the site. Notes should be kept regarding the name of the site and the date it was looked at as well as what information was gathered.

3) **Do not conduct general Internet searches on applicants.**

Simply “googling” an applicant puts a search committee member at risk of accessing/viewing content that is not relevant to the job, including the protected class/activity data noted above. In addition, the Internet is full of data that may or may not be accurate, and it is not appropriate to use this information as the basis for an employment decision.

A third party vendor conducts background checks for NMU and only job relevant detail is provided to search committee members.

4) If you are concerned about whether and how to access applicant data using the Internet, please contact your process guide **before** you conduct an Internet search.