



## **OP 62.01: TRAVEL**

### **POLICY**

The expenditure of funds for travel related purposes must be closely monitored to ensure expenditures are allowable, appropriate and properly approved. The purpose of this policy is to establish definitive direction for faculty, staff, and students traveling on official University business. This policy covers all University related travel within state, out-of-state, and outside the continental United States.

### **PROCEDURE**

In keeping with State Statute (Section 25-3-41) of the MISSISSIPPI CODE of 1972, Annotated, Mississippi State University (MSU), as a State Institution, shall make reimbursement to any officer or employee who is required to travel in the discharge of official duties to the extent of actual, ordinary and necessary costs incurred within those limitations imposed by state law, contractual agreements, or the administrative policies of the University.

#### **A. Travel Authorization**

Prior approval is required when traveling out-of-state, for in-state or out-of-state group travel, or when attending any conventions, associations, conferences, workshops, seminars or clinics. Travel outside the continental United States (except to Alaska) is considered international travel and requires the signature of the President of the University.

All international travel requests will route through the International Institute for safety and security review. All prospective international travelers are required to check the Department of State Travel Warning country list prior to application for international travel. Prior to travel, faculty and staff must sign an "Assumption of Risk and Release Form" if the country of travel is an elevated-risk country as defined in the procedure. University sponsored or approved student travel to elevated-risk countries is generally prohibited. All international travel should adhere to the International Travel Procedures and Guidelines maintained by University Travel Services.

#### **B. Travel Prepayments**

All forms of prepayment (except those allowed on the procurement card) are treated as advance payments and charged to the approved traveler's receivable account and will remain the traveler's personal obligation to the University until settled. These charges should be settled through the submission of the expense voucher and will be considered past due if not received within ten (10) business days after the end of the month in which the travel was completed or immediately upon cancellation of a trip. Extensions may be granted due to

extenuating circumstances that might preclude the traveler's ability to settle on a timely basis. Travel Services is authorized, with the understanding of the traveler, to withhold from the traveler's salary any past due amounts.

1. Advances for travel must be requested in writing and approved prior to travel taking place
2. Conference registration fees may be prepaid by University check directly to the conference through Direct Pay process or by the traveler/ traveler's department via the procurement card.
3. The University's Employee Business Travel Account (EBTA) may be utilized for public carrier purchases made through the University's contracted travel agency.

#### C. Allowable Travel Costs

1. **Meals:** The reimbursable meal allowance per day is the total of actual up to the "maximum daily meal allowance" as determined by the Department of Finance and Administration. The maximum daily allowance for Alaska is limited to the domestic high cost area rate. Meals are not reimbursable for non-overnight travel as they would be deemed taxable by the IRS. Alcoholic beverages are not reimbursable under any condition(s). Meal tips should be included in the actual meal expense unless the inclusion of the tips would cause the meals to exceed the maximum daily limitations. If the daily limitation is exceeded, the traveler is allowed to record meal tips as another authorized expense up to 20% of the maximum daily meal reimbursement claimed.

Other instances where meals are allowable in travel status include:

- Meals included in conference registration fees and documented by conference officials. Meals included in the conference registration fees should be noted by an asterisk in the meal section and may exceed the daily limit.
  - The meal expense is incurred while discussing business with others. To qualify, the meal expense must be directly related to the active conduct of the University's business and the meal must be during, or directly before or after, a substantial and bona fide business discussion. A receipt and an Entertainment Form explaining the nature of the business meal must be attached to the travel voucher.
2. **Lodging:** The University shall reimburse the actual cost of lodging incurred in the discharge of official duties. Itemized receipts must be provided showing the name of the traveler, number of occupants, date of stay, and amount(s) of expenses incurred.

Lodging other than hotels/motels, such as apartments, dormitories, etc., may be used when they result in a lower cost. An itemized receipt is still required. If lodging in a

condo, an apartment or other, there should be a cost comparison with three hotels in the area to show the cost savings to the University. All applicable costs (cleaning fees, etc) should be included in the cost comparison.

In the event that two or more persons share the same room, and the additional persons are employees traveling in an official capacity, claims for reimbursement should be made on the travel form of the employee who incurred the lodging cost. The other employee's name and MSU ID or travel document number should be submitted with the reimbursement claim. If the additional persons are not authorized travelers, the employee should request that the rate for a single room be entered on the receipt by the hotel clerk, and claim reimbursement for that amount only.

3. **Transportation:** Whether by public transportation, privately-owned vehicle, State-owned vehicle, etc., reimbursement will be made for the most direct practicable route.

Private owned vehicle use in the discharge of official university business shall be reimbursed at the same mileage rate determined for federal employees for each mile actually and necessarily traveled. When determining and claiming such reimbursable expenses for out-of-state travel, the "total cost of driving" must be compared with the "total cost of flying". When two or more employees travel in one private vehicle, only one travel expense at the authorized reimbursement rate per mile shall be allowed.

Rental Vehicle travel will be reimbursed by the University provided the rental is in conjunction with a public carrier and made by the contract travel agent, the rental is necessary due to the use of a state-owned vehicle, or another similar circumstance requires the use of the rental. Otherwise, the University will reimburse travel in a rental vehicle limited to the actual rental costs not to exceed mileage calculations at the current rate for a private owned vehicle. Check with Travel Services website for current rental contracts and contract ID numbers and rates.

The University will not reimburse for rental vehicles obtained for personal use, such as sightseeing or optional travel to and from restaurants, while on official business travel.

State owned vehicle actual operating expenses incurred for official travel will be reimbursed on presentation of receipts. No mileage reimbursement will be made for State-owned vehicle use.

Public carrier travel is defined as a commercial airline, train, or interstate bus line carrier. An employee should have all travel arrangements (transportation, lodging and rental cars) handled by the contract travel agent when traveling by public carrier unless they are able to demonstrate a significant savings to the University.

The University shall reimburse the actual cost of properly authorized transportation by public carrier at the coach fare unless such space is unavailable. The employee shall certify that coach accommodations were not available in order to claim reimbursement for first-class fare, or the employee shall determine and claim only the cost of coach fare if the first-class travel was for personal convenience.

If public transportation is not used, the traveler is free to make lodging arrangements without the use of the contract travel agent.

4. **Other Travel Costs:** The University shall reimburse the actual cost of other necessary expenses incurred by the traveler in the discharge of official duties. Refer to Travel Services website for a list of required receipts.

Registration Fees/Workshop Tuition when paid by the traveler, receipts are required in the traveler's name, indicating the date, the amount paid, and that the payment was received by a meeting official. Registration fees may be processed as described in the "Travel Prepayments" section of this document. It should be noted that Membership dues are not reimbursable through Travel Services.

Business Meal reimbursement of expenses for entertaining others while in travel status will be reimbursed only when the request for reimbursement is accompanied by a receipt and an Entertainment Form (MSU Form AO-8).

- D. Business Travel Expense (BTE) Program for Non-Employees Public carrier expenses of official guests, consultants, and others not employed by the University, as well as unitary group/team travel may be arranged with the contract travel agent and charged to the University's Business Travel Account.

### **REVIEW**

The Vice President of Budget and Planning is responsible for the review of this operating policy every four years or as needed.

**Please visit Travel Services for forms and procedures:**

<http://www.travel.msstate.edu/policy/>

<http://www.travel.msstate.edu/form/>

**REVIEWED BY:**

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**APPROVED BY:**

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