MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

OP 91.108 MASS TEXT MESSAGING POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Operating Policy is to outline permissible use of mass text messaging as a communication tool for sharing information with students. The policy is in support of best practices and expects to minimize overuse of texting. The University may use text messaging to complement existing forms of communication such as letters, email, social networking sites and the University's website. This policy does not apply to text messaging associated with the University's emergency notification system, Maroon Alert; nor text communications with prospective students. This policy also does not apply to text messaging associated with the Division of Alumni and Development when text messaging is not directed at students.

POLICY/PROCEDURE

Specific University entities are approved to send text messages to students in the following categories:

Online Students:
The College of Professional and Continuing Studies may send text messages to students enrolled in online programs exclusively. These messages may relate to academic reminders, student success, or other pertinent (and necessary) information. The Dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies, or designee, must approve all messages prior to dissemination.

Academic Success:
The following University entities may use text messaging to send information critical to student academic success, limited to critical academic calendar dates, academic advising notifications, academic standing notices, and financial aid notifications: University Registrar, Center for Academic Excellence, Career Center, Student Financial Aid, Academic Advising Center, Office of Academic Access & Support. The appropriate Director or Assistant/Associate Vice President for these units must approve all messages prior to dissemination. Sub-populations of students may also receive messages from these entities such as, but not limited to, all first-time in college students; first-generation college students; Pell-eligible students.

Student Life & Student Services:
Text messages pertaining to student life activities and events will be limited to those activities/events that are open to all students. Additional messages related to student health and wellbeing may be sent when appropriate such as those related to communicable diseases, food security efforts, or crisis response services. Parking & Transit Services, University Police, and University Recreation may also communicate urgent/time-sensitive

messages to groups or individuals through this platform. The Vice President for Student Affairs, or designee, must approve all messages prior to dissemination.

University Announcements:
Other university-wide announcements may be sent as determined by the Office of Public Affairs. The Vice President of Strategic Communications and Director of Office of Public Affairs, or designee, must approve all messages prior to dissemination.

Additional categories/entities may be considered for text messaging via request to the text messaging working group.

Communication Plans

All entities approved for text messaging must submit semesterly communication plans. These plans should include the proposed dates for text messages along with the proposed content of messages. For fall semester, communications must be submitted by August 1; for spring semester by January 5; and for summer by May 1. A form is available at https://www.saffairs.msstate.edu/files/text-messaging-communication-plan. Entities will be notified within 5 business days as to the approval of the submitted plans or with modifications to the submitted plans.

Communication plans should also include text campaigns that may contain multiple or prolonged student messaging with an individual or group of students. Campaigns may or may not have defined messages or timelines.

If a text messaging need arises that was not included in the original communication plans, approval can be granted by the Vice President for Student Affairs or designee.

Messaging Tools

The University facilitates all campus text messaging to current students through an ITS managed platform. All text messaging must be approved in accordance with the previously outlined procedure. Text messages must be accessible for all intended recipients (e.g., recipients with disabilities, non-English speakers).

All entities approved for text messaging will be required to participate in training on how to appropriately use the messaging technology. No user will be approved to send messages without this training. Text messaging must conform to university policies related to the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and are considered public records.

Opt-In and Opt-Out

During course registration, students will have the option to opt-in to text messages from all entities. Consent to receive text messages will include the following: *By clicking the box next to each of the following categories, I agree to receive phone calls and SMS/Text messages from Mississippi State University at the numbers I provided, including calls or texts made using automated technology or pre-recorded voice messages. This consent is not required.*

- *Messages for students enrolled in online classes/programs which may include academic reminders, student services information, and other relevant information for online students.*
- *Messages related to academic success which may include critical academic deadlines, advising notifications, financial aid information, career center announcements.*
- *Messages related to student life which may include student life activities, student wellbeing resources, and student services information.*
- *Messages with general university announcements.*

Students may opt-out of messaging at any time and will receive instructions on how to opt-out of messaging when the first message is received from the texting entity.

Best Practices for Text Messaging

- Use texting to communicate short, individually targeted messages.
- Clearly identify the originator of the message.
- Ensure that the content is appropriate, and the circulation list is correct.
- Limit the message length to 160 characters.
- Avoid "text speak" and abbreviations/acronyms as readers may not be aware of what they mean.
- Be professional and polite.
- Ensure that embedded links are short and clearly identified as connected with MSU.

Multiple Means of Communication
Texting should not be used as the only system through which a message is communicated. The message should be duplicated with email, phone, or other acceptable means of communication.

<u>REVIEW</u>

This OP will be reviewed every four years or whenever circumstances require an earlier review by the Vice President for Student Affairs.

REVIEWED:

/s/ Regina Hyatt   8/28/2023
Vice President for Student Affairs   Date

/s/ Tracey N. Baham   8/28/2023
Associate Vice President, Institutional Strategy & Effectiveness   Date

/s/ Joan Lucas   8/28/2023
General Counsel   Date

APPROVED:

/s/ Mark E. Keenum   8/28/2023
President   Date