



51.001: Dissemination of Public Information

Responsible Executive: Vice President for University Advancement

Responsible Office: News and Media Relations

Related Policy:

Approved-On Date: September 23, 2005

Effective Date:

Revision Date:

Policy Statement

The Office of News and Media Relations has been designated by the President as the primary contact for news media issues and for coordination of dissemination of information to the public. This office is also responsible for ensuring University-wide compliance with this policy.

All due diligence must be taken to ensure that information originating from the University is accurate, complete, reflects the official position of the Norfolk State University organization and is released to the media and target publics in a timely manner.

Purpose

Norfolk State University, its faculty, and administrative components actively pursue opportunities to inform the public about all aspects of the University's programs and services outside of the areas protected by state and federal privacy laws, and other areas exempted by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This policy is designed to ensure the University's compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act regulations.

Providing information about the University is vital to our internal and external audiences and the University's ability to carry out its mission. This policy establishes the official guidelines for the dissemination of information for publication, broadcast through the mass media, or other public forums. The policy also provides specific guidelines to aid individuals speaking on behalf of the University organization. These guidelines are not intended to hinder open communication between University constituents and the public or news media. These guidelines are; however, intended to ensure a more accurate, consistent and reliable flow of information about University activities.

Definitions

Official University positions - The University's Board of Visitors and the President of the University may take a position or have an established policy toward issues facing the community or University organization. These positions are either approved by a majority of the University's Board of Visitors, President's executive cabinet or formulated by the President and

affected school, division or department head. In many cases, issues arise quickly and official University positions may not be formulated when news reporters request them.

Public dissemination of information - Providing information to the public may include the release of information regarding a specific “gift,” donation or donor, placement of advertisements in newspapers, interviews with news reporters, speeches to community groups, public service announcements for WNSB or for announcements during University sporting events, letters to the editor, guest editorials or columns in newspapers, appearances on public affairs television and radio talk shows, posting information on the University’s website, or other channels of communication.

Personal opinions - As citizens of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia, everyone has the right to form and express opinions about public issues. A distinction must be drawn; however, when an individual (employed by the University or a member of a University supported student group) is in the role of representing the University organization. As an employee speaking for the University organization employees’ comments must reflect the organization’s position on programs, services and issues. Personal opinions may not be the same as positions taken by the University organization as a whole, and they should not be used when speaking on behalf of the University.

Procedures

1. Faculty, staff, University supported student organizations and/or individual University employees who release information to the public through mass produced publications, brochures, news reporters or other mass communication channels must provide this information to the Office of News and Media Relations in advance of distribution, if practical, or as soon after the release of information as possible.
2. In the case of releasing information via news releases or other channels regarding a gift, donation or donor, the Vice President for University Advancement or designee in the University Advancement Division is responsible for ensuring that all information is correct. It is the responsibility of News and Media Relations to prepare a news release regarding the gift, donation or donor for dissemination to media outlets, after said news release has been reviewed by the Vice President or designee. After the Vice President for University Advancement or designee has approved the final news release, News and Media Relations will disseminate the information to the mass media.
- 3 Each school, division and/or department head assumes primary responsibility for any official public statements, announcements or advertisements issued through their areas of responsibility or their personnel. This responsibility may be delegated according to the needs and resources of each school, division and/or department. However, each school, division and/or department head must be informed about the release of public statements issued by school, division or department staff. Individual employees who disseminate information to a mass audience (via such means as advertisements, interviews with news reporters, etc.) must notify the school, division, and/or department director and the Office of News and Media Relations prior to such dissemination or, if that is not possible, immediately thereafter.

4. University employees should not give personal opinions as official University positions on particular issues. If asked by a news reporter to give an opinion about particular issues, services or programs, University employees should explain that giving personal opinions on behalf of the University is not appropriate or not a part of their responsibility. It is, therefore, advisable to decline comment and offer to direct the news reporter to the academic school, division and/or department director or the Office of News and Media Relations.
5. It is appropriate for University employees involved in a newsworthy event to respond to news reporters about facts surrounding an event, such as a professional conference (sponsored by the University), sporting events and student athletes, commencement exercises, or scholarship fundraising events, etc. However, the information provided to reporters should be released in coordination with the staff person in charge of the event or the person designated as the public information officer for the event.
6. Information should be limited to the facts pertaining to the particular event or the safety and welfare of University students, faculty and administration. Information that may be sensitive or have implications relating to litigation or personal privacy should not be discussed. In addition, information or speculation that deals with broader issues or policies of the University should be deferred to the President's office, department/division head or the Office of News and Media Relations.
7. All graphic elements of advertisements, brochures, fliers, invitations, annual reports, etc., should be in compliance with the University's Visual Identity: Electronic and Print Design and Style Guidelines, and approved by the Marketing Services Office.

Policy Infractions

Infractions of this policy will be determined by the appropriate supervisor or Vice President in charge of any individual school, division and/or department and University supported student organization. Hence, any disciplinary actions will follow existing University guidelines for such process.