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Communication Regulation



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March 2023

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Communication Regulation

Type of document:	Regulation
Purpose:	This Regulation aims to lay the foundation for a range of Stellenbosch University (SU) communication-related management documents; to guide communication-related conduct by SU staff and students in the public domain, to regulate institutional communication on behalf of SU and entities linked to SU; and to establish the interdependence between this Regulation and relevant governance and management mechanisms.
Approved by:	Rectorate
Date of approval:	22 March 2023
Date of implementation:	1 April 2023
Date of next revision/frequency of revision:	This Regulation will be reviewed at least once in the five-year review cycle.
Previous versions:	None - new regulation
Regulation owner ¹ :	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs
Regulation curator ² :	A designated member of staff from the Corporate Communication and Marketing Division (CCMD)
Keywords:	academic or professional communication; Institutional Communication and Marketing Committee; communication-related conduct; crisis and issues communication; communication-related management documents (supporting documents); institutional communication (on behalf of SU); personal opinion; RC-specific communication; reputational damage; social media channels; SU spokesperson
Validity:	The English version of this regulation is the operative version, and the Afrikaans version is the translation.

¹ Rules Owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the rules functions.

² Rules Curator: Administrative head of the division responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the rules

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1. Introduction

In the Stellenbosch University (SU) context, institutional communication aims to inform and share information with stakeholders; protect and promote our institutional reputation and brand image; to position the institution favourably; and to illuminate the outstanding achievements of our academic, professional and technical staff.

While SU promotes the right to academic and intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression as enshrined in the South African Constitution (particularly the right to privacy; freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and other media; academic freedom; freedom of scientific research and artistic creativity; and the freedom to receive or impart information or ideas), these rights do have to be exercised responsibly and with public accountability, taking cognisance of the inherent risks for both the individual and the institution.

This Regulation applies to all staff and students as regards context-specific situations as outlined in the document.

2. Purpose

In alignment with [Code 2040: SU's Integrated Ethics Code](#), which seeks to guide and govern the conduct of staff and students, the purpose of the Regulation is to:

- 2.1 provide an overarching structure and mechanism that will enable the institution to develop related management documents that, in turn, will facilitate the practical implementation of the Regulation;
- 2.2 guide communication-related conduct of staff and students in the public domain;
- 2.3 regulate institutional communication on behalf of SU and the various entities linked to SU³; and
- 2.4 establish the interdependence between the Regulation and other governance and management mechanisms in defining communication-related misconduct and related sanctions.

3. Principles

This Regulation functions according to the following principles:

- 3.1 is aligned with the [SA Constitution](#), the [SU Statute](#), the [SU vision, mission and institutional strategic objectives](#) and [Code 2040: SU's Integrated Ethics Code](#);
- 3.2 incorporates SU's commitment to creating an inclusive campus community by means of communication that is sensitive to people living with disabilities; that is cognisant of racial, gender, religious and cultural diversity; and that strives to be just, impartial and fair; and

³These entities include, but are not limited to, governance structures, faculties, PASS (professional and administrative support services) divisions, schools, centres, institutes, Maties Sport, Woordfees, SU Choir, student structures, residences, clusters, private wards and societies, and commercial entities wholly owned by SU, such as Neelsie Student Centre and the SU Botanical Garden.

- 3.3 facilitates appropriate action in instances of communication-related misconduct, as determined by other relevant institutional governance and management mechanisms, such as the [SU Disciplinary Code for Students](#), the *SU Conditions of Service*⁴, the [Disciplinary Code: Rules regarding Disciplinary Action against Staff Members](#); the [Policy on Unfair Discrimination and Harassment](#) and the [Student Constitution of Stellenbosch University](#).

4. Aims

The Communication Regulation seeks to establish a basis for:

- 4.1 differentiation between statements made on behalf of SU (or an entity linked to the institution); statements or comments based on academic disciplines or fields of expertise; and personal views on general affairs and topical issues;
- 4.2 understanding the implications of the communicator unavoidably being associated with the institution, even when speaking in a personal capacity;
- 4.3 creating awareness of potential operational or reputational risks (or both), legal repercussions and potential unintended consequences of making public statements or comments;
- 4.4 the mandates, roles and responsibilities of official SU spokespersons;
- 4.5 the various supporting documents (protocols, rules and guidelines) that are aligned with the Regulation and facilitate its implementation;
- 4.6 ensuring consistent and coordinated communication from a centralised source during crises or incidents requiring focused issues management;
- 4.7 other related institutional governance and management mechanisms or documents that define related inappropriate conduct and that specify sanctions for noncompliance; and
- 4.8 ensuring institutional alignment and providing communication-related training and support mechanisms for individuals mandated to communicate on behalf of SU.

⁴ **Conditions of Service**

- **CS0051** - [Conditions of service for research and support service staff](#)
- **CS0052** - [Conditions of service for temporary staff](#)
- **CS0053** - [Conditions of service for lecturing staff](#)

5. Provisions

5.1 General

- 5.1.1 All statements related to SU and the University community, in any capacity and on any platform, must be aligned with [Code 2040: SU's Integrated Ethics Code](#) and the institutional values of excellence, respect, equity, compassion and accountability.
- 5.1.2 When a crisis or a major operational or reputational issue occurs, all communication, including via social media, reverts to the Vice-Chancellor or mandated member of the Rectorate, supported by the Corporate Communication and Marketing Division (CCMD).
- 5.1.3 Staff, students and associates of SU and its related entities must heed confidentiality agreements and expectations, and may share content regarding University affairs on public platforms only after the University has released the information officially.
- 5.1.4 No one may abuse their association with SU to promote either their personal interests or the agendas of organisations other than those of official SU entities.
- 5.1.5 All social media users (SU-related and private) should familiarise themselves with what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate online behaviour, and the potential pitfalls and risks of indiscriminate and irresponsible use (refer to **section 3.3**).

5.2 Communication on behalf of SU or linked entities

- 5.2.1 In accordance with the SU Delegation Framework, or this Regulation, or designated individuals, only mandated staff members may issue statements on behalf of SU or its various constituent parts in the public domain. This applies to all communication channels and platforms, including social media.

5.2.1.1 Rector, Rectorate and delegated authority

Communication on behalf of SU as an institution is the primary responsibility of the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, members of the Rectorate or the chairs of the respective governance structures, supported by the CCMD. The Delegation Framework pronounces the Rector and Vice-Chancellor to be the primary institutional spokesperson, and the Rector may delegate such responsibility as they may deem necessary and appropriate. Members of the Rectorate are in turn mandated to approve statements and to function as spokespersons for the functions within their respective responsibility centres (RCs). These responsibilities may be delegated as required for a particular matter.

5.2.1.2 Governance structures

The institutional Statute mandates the chairs of SU governance structures to communicate with stakeholders and to make public statements as provided for in their respective constitutions and/or rules. This applies to

matters handled by the specific structure; institutional matters, however, are handled as per 5.2.1.1. The chairs of substructures related to such governance bodies (e.g. subcommittees) are not mandated to make public statements.

5.2.1.3 Responsibility Centre communication

The primary responsibility for operational communication specific to a Responsibility Centre (RC) or other smaller SU entities (for example, academic departments, PASS divisions, student administration, schools, centres, institutes, Innovus, Student Affairs and Maties Sport) rests with the particular head (e.g., the RC head, the dean of a faculty, departmental chair or the head of a PASS division) or the staff members designated by them. This refers to communication related to operational and general matters within the purview of a particular RC, division, department or unit.

However, it excludes communication on institutional affairs. In instances where an operational matter poses an institutional or reputational risk for the University, the related RC head and the CCMD must be informed to assist with/handle the communication on behalf of Stellenbosch University (also refer to 5.2.1.1). The related supporting documents will contain further details and guidelines for implementation.

5.2.1.4 Student structures

The chairs (or designated members) of student bodies registered under the SU Student Constitution may issue statements or act as spokesperson for the particular body which they represent – for example, the Students' Representative Council (SRC); the Tygerberg Students' Representative Council (TSRC); the Academic Affairs Council (AAC); the Prim Committee; the Senior Prim Committee; the Societies Council; student committees in faculties; residence, cluster and PSO committees; and student society committees.

5.2.2 Corporate Communication and Marketing Division

The CCMD is the primary entity for internal and external communication on institutional matters, including proactive and reactive media liaison. In providing the campus community with communication-related support, the Division is responsible for facilitating communication-related training (e.g. dealing with the media, social media best practice and website content management); for providing institutional media and social media monitoring services; and for compiling communication-related management documents (e.g. protocols, rules and guidelines that will support this Regulation). In this, the CCMD collaborates with relevant internal stakeholders and consults specifically with the Institutional Communication and Marketing Committee – a representative body for staff members who are responsible for communication- and marketing-related activities in faculties, RCs and PASS divisions – and other entities across the institution.

5.2.3 Official social media channels

Only staff and students who have been formally authorised to manage an institutional social media platform or entity/group platform may represent themselves as such on the given platform. All SU-affiliated social media platforms – including those of registered student societies, residences and

sports codes – must be branded as specified by the SU Brand Identity Manual, be registered via the proper internal channels, and be managed actively in accordance with the SU Social Media Engagement Protocol and other relevant policies and guidelines.

5.3 Academic or professional communication or personal opinion

- 5.3.1 When commenting on any public platform, staff and students should remain cognisant of their publicly visible association with SU, their obligations and legal accountability under the SA Constitution, SA legislation, the requirements inherent to their employment or professional trust relationship with SU, confidentiality requirements, and relevant SU governance and management mechanisms.
- 5.3.2 When expressing either discipline-specific opinions based on recognised professional expertise or sharing personal views on current affairs, staff members are required to take reasonable measures to avoid confusion by clarifying (in the form of written or verbal disclosures) in what capacity they are participating in the public discourse.
- 5.3.3 When commenting on SU governance/management matters, institutional positions or decisions taken by Council or the Rectorate, commentators must:
 - 5.3.3.1 familiarise themselves with the specific topic to ensure that the content or SU's position be reflected accurately; and
 - 5.3.3.2 indicate that they are expressing a personal view that might differ from the official stance of the University.
- 5.3.4 As affiliation with SU is easily recognisable, especially on social media, staff and students should refrain from conduct which may adversely affect SU or a member of the SU community or bring the University's standing or reputation into disrepute (refer to **section 3.3**).
- 5.3.5 Any form of online bullying, verbal abuse, defamation, slander, name-calling, discriminatory misconduct or any misconduct as defined in the SA Constitution, SA legislation or the respective disciplinary codes for SU staff and students is equally unacceptable on social media platforms as it is in face-to-face or written communication, and thus is subject to the applicable sanctions.
- 5.3.6 Personal social media activities must be kept distinct from official SU communication. SU brand identity symbols may not be used on personal social media platforms and SU news may be posted on personal social media platforms only once the University has released it officially.

6. Noncompliance and resolution

The focus of this Regulation is to prevent and rectify communication-related operational and reputational damage. When such damage has occurred in the public domain, the first priority would be to minimise the impact, followed by engagement with noncompliant communicators where relevant, and instituting further action as required.

- 6.1 Staff
Noncompliance with the Regulation by staff members will be handled as per the *SU Conditions of Service*⁵ and the [Disciplinary Code: Rules regarding Disciplinary Action against Staff Members](#).
- 6.2 Students
Non-compliance by students is to be dealt with by the [SU Disciplinary Code for Students](#).

7. Governance

Roles and responsibilities

- 7.1 The owner of this Communication Regulation is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs, who is responsible for performing the functions conferred upon the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs by the other provisions of this Regulation, as well as the further functions below:
- 7.1.1 giving guidance regarding the interpretation and implementation of this Regulation;
 - 7.1.2 initiating and overseeing the review of this Regulation;
 - 7.1.3 appointing a curator for this Regulation from the Division of Corporate Communication and Marketing, and overseeing the functioning of the curator;
 - 7.1.4 releasing and communicating this Regulation and monitoring its effective implementation; and
 - 7.1.5 overseeing the functioning of the Institutional Communication and Marketing Committee, if appointed.
- 7.2. The curator of this Regulation is responsible for:
- 7.2.1 chairing and managing the Institutional Communication and Marketing Committee, if appointed;
 - 7.2.2 coordinating, overseeing, and monitoring the University's communication and marketing planning and management processes;
 - 7.2.3 raising awareness regarding the Regulation; and
 - 7.2.4 convening the task team(s) for reviewing this Regulation, when such a review process is initiated.
- 7.3 The Institutional Communication and Marketing Committee (if appointed) will be responsible for the governance of communication- and marketing-related matters at the University, including the implementation of this Regulation.

⁵ **Conditions of Service**

- **CS0051** - [Conditions of service for research and support service staff](#)
- **CS0052** - [Conditions of service for temporary staff](#)
- **CS0053** - [Conditions of service for lecturing staff](#)

8. Review

This Regulation will be reviewed as per the five-year governance cycle. Should Council approve a Communication Policy, this Regulation would be replaced or aligned with the Policy.

9. Disclosure

A copy of the Communication Regulation will be available on the SU website.

10. Communication-related management documents

Communication-related management documents (supporting documents) include protocols, rules, guidelines, guides and manuals that support the implementation of the Communication Regulation. Such supporting documents will be developed by the Corporate Communication and Marketing Division in collaboration and consultation with the relevant stakeholder groups.