Text Messaging SMS Policy

No. ####

Policy Effective Date:
xx/xx/xxxx

Last Revision Date:
xx/xx/xxxx

Policy Owner:

Policy Author:
(Contact Person)

Affected Parties:
Undergraduate
Graduate
Faculty
Staff
Other

1.0   Purpose

This Text Messaging SMS Policy outlines the guidelines and expectations for the use of text messaging services within the university to ensure effective communication with students. This policy applies to all university employees, students, or Virginia Tech-affiliated organizations/department who use text messaging for official university purpose. This includes messages sent from a university-owned device, account, or office; messages sent through third-party services on behalf of any unit of the university; and messages from any authorized university employee or agent acting in their official capacity.

2.0   Policy

University entities or individuals may, as needed, use text messaging tools to communicate with university constituents on matters of official University business. The message content must clearly state that the message is from Virginia Tech so recipients can immediately understand the message origination.

2.1 Text Messaging Guiding Principles

Text messaging will be used as an additional channel for critical communications as noted in section 2.3. Text messaging will be used minimally to prevent oversaturation of student receipts and leading to opting out. All text messages must be directly related to student safety or academic achievement, must be mission related and be relevant.

All text messages must comply with Policy 1025, Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault, FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), and Policy 7000, Acceptable Use and Administration of Computer and Communication Systems.

2.2 Categories of Messages

Texting is reserved for information considered critical and/or time sensitive. The following are the categories of mass text messages permitted under this policy:

- Crisis and/or emergency, or significant disruptions to university operations, including activities which pose a threat to public safety, as determined by the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer or designee

- Information critical to student academic success, limited to critical academic calendar dates, course-related texts from instructors, and academic advising and success notifications

- Individual appointment confirmations where individuals are able to opt-in/out
- Other critical messages as determined by the President, Executive Vice President and Provost, Vice President of Student Affairs or designee

Text messages should not be used for:

- General information to large populations
- Repeat reminders of text messages already circulated
- Personal matters (e.g. items for sale, farewell messages, etc.)
- Solicitation/Advertising purposes not related to the university's mission

Text messaging must not be used as the sole means of communicating an essential message or announcement. The text message must be supplemented by some other means of communication (e.g. electronic, paper notice) to ensure all students receive the information.

2.3 Official emergency or urgent need for messaging

Emergency or urgent need is defined by the Clery Act as "an event of occurrence that constitutes an ongoing or continuing serious threat to the university community." This would involve any circumstances under which the Responsible University Authority reasonably believes that notification of the university community, or a substantial subset, communicated over the space of several hours, will reduce the risk of personal harm, property damage, or severe negative impact on university operations.

3.0   Procedures

3.1 Opt-in and Opt-out

Students must initially opt-in prior to receiving any text message. Accessible, clear opt-in and opt-out processes must be in place for each tool/entity so that students, staff, and faculty have the opportunity to opt in or out on an ongoing basis. Only those who opted-in should receive non-emergency text messages.

3.2 Standards

University entities may send non-emergency messages that are closely related to Virginia Tech's mission, provided the recipient has previously given express consent when they gave their telephone number to Virginia Tech with their explicit understanding and agreement that they would receive non-emergency messages. These messages may include information about upcoming general university activities, within the following parameters.

Non-emergency messages must, at a minimum, comply with the following:
- Be sent only to individuals who have opted-in;
- Messages should be no longer than 160 characters
- Comply with applicable laws and regulations
- Adhere to university branding and other guidelines as set forth by University Relations
- Allow subscribers to opt-out of receiving non-emergency messages at any time and honor those requests promptly; and
- Communicate that standard data and text messaging rates may apply
- All messages must be tagged with the appropriate identifier e.g., school, administrative office so that the recipients of the text can see immediately where it originated
- All text messaging services or software must be approved by the Procurement Office

Text messaging must not be used to communicate:

- Repeat reminders of messages already communicated
- Personal topics e.g., items for sale, farewell messages, etc.
- Advertising for organizations or other commercial solicitations or
- Personally identifiable information (pii) or FERPA protected information, including but not limited to social security numbers, VT ID numbers, financial information, or grades

The following groups, departments or units have developed respective standards and guidelines on accumulating opt-in numbers, preparing and configuring messages, storing and securing associated data, and data retention.

[Links to department standards and guidelines]

4.0 Definitions

Mass Text Messaging – Texts sent to predetermined group of people with whom the sender is not in direct, personal contact on a regular basis.

5.0 References

Policy 1025, Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault
https://policies.vt.edu/assets/1025.pdf

Policy 5615, University Safety and Security Policy
https://policies.vt.edu/assets/5615.pdf

Policy 7000, Acceptable Use and Administration of Computer and Communication Systems
https://policies.vt.edu/assets/7000.pdf

Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003 ("CAN-SPAM Act"), 15 U.S.C. 7701-7713
https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/can-spam-rule

The Clery Act https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2014-10-20/pdf/2014-24284.pdf#page=33

6.0 Approval and Revisions