Policy Style Guide

Policy Guidance for Developing University Policies at North Central University

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Using This Document

Policy owners and authors have a responsibility to establishing polices that adhere to North Central University's policy framework principles:

- The university policy process is well defined, reasonable, comprehensible, transparent, and easy to navigate.
- The policy development process sets out and follows a timeline for each policy.
- University stakeholder and community input and feedback are broadly sought, valued, and appropriately used.
- Policy owners are responsible for working within university policy framework to develop new policies and for reviewing, updating, and retiring policies as needed or minimally every four years.
- Stakeholders are responsible for understanding, implementing, and enforcing university policies and governing documents.

The university has prepared this Policy Style Guide as an authoritative guidance document to ensure that policy writers develop policies that comply with the university's policy framework. The university policy framework includes an official university policy template, official definitions for common policy items, official policy development processes, official policy maintenance processes, and an official promulgation process.

For more information or assistance in policy creation, please feel free to contact policy@northcentral.edu.

What is a university policy?

A University policy is an official directive that:

- Has broad application throughout the university.
- Enhances the university's mission, sets behavioral expectations, promotes ethical standards and integrity, promotes operational efficiencies, or manages institutional risk.
- Helps achieve compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Has been reviewed and approved by the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and the President's Council (PC).
- Provides procedures for implementation.

General Policy Standards

General Policy Writing Requirements and Philosophy

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and any informal authoring committee addresses many of these requirements during the policy development process. However, it is best to keep these requirements in mind when authoring new policies or making changes to existing policies.

- The best-written policies are written with the reader in mind.
- When possible, always write in an active voice.
- Use lists rather than a long narrative whenever possible and when it makes sense, but always use an introductory sentence or paragraph first.
- North Central University utilizes the Oxford comma.
- Policies and policy related documents utilized the ISO 8601 standard for date format (i.e. YYYY-MM-DD)
- "University" is lower case except as in North Central University.
- When job titles are standing alone or in a directory listing, capitalize them. Otherwise, capitalize them only before the name and not after.
- Capitalize department names.
- Use hyphens only as required (i.e. compound adjectives): university-wide, state-owned, etc.
- http:// is deleted from web addresses except when needed for a direct link

Policy Language

Language matters. Whenever possible, policy language must be definitive and directive.
Words like "should" and "may" imply a choice and can undermine the intent university policies.

- Use simple, specific, concise, and precise terminology. Avoid industry, technical, legal, and departmental jargon. Make every effort to write a policy that is well understood by everyone in the community, including non-subject matter experts.
- All policy documents are written in the third person using specific titles and not pronouns. For example, "If the request is approved, the vice president for business and finance will work with the unit...."
- Do not use "shall" in any policy related document. "Shall" is an imprecise and unacceptable alternative for "must."
- Instead of using "shall", use:
    - "Must" for an obligation
    - "Must not" for a prohibition
    - "May" for a discretionary action
    - "Should" for a recommendation
- Avoid conditional words like "should" and "may" unless the conditions to apply the situation under consideration are documented in the policy.
- In addition to using words like "must," other strong action words like "forbids" are also appropriate.
- Having an unenforceable policy is worse than not having a policy at all. Therefore, when possible, do not use the word "ensure," because the university generally cannot ensure actions of its community members (trying to do so would be a compliance and monitoring nightmare). The words "to achieve" are useful in these instances.

- More information: https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/write/legal-docs/clear-writing.html

Policy Formatting

All policies must be drafted utilizing the official simplified template.

The PAC and PAC Chair will be responsible for the editorial and formatting aspects and ensure all parts of the official templates are completed as required. Therefore, please follow these rules when using the simplified policy template to compose policies.

- Do not rename files that are distributed by the PAC.
- Do not worry too much about formatting. The policy in the official template is shared in a protected document format so that (1) the policy writer can focus on the content instead of formatting, (2) the PAC can tell what changes were made and where, and (3) the text styles and formatting of the document are preserved.
- Do not change headings or sections in the policy document, such as "Responsibilities" or "Procedures."
- Do not rearrange any part of the policy document or policy template.

Using the University Policy Template

Sometimes, policy developers will be given a Microsoft Word version of the official policy template to mark up (with security applied to track changes). The PAC is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the policy document and template, and keeping track of all versions of the draft policy. Therefore, please follow these rules when using the policy template to compose policies.

- Do not rename files that are distributed by the PAC.
- Do not worry too much about formatting. The policy in the official template is shared in a protected document format so that (1) the policy writer can focus on the content instead of formatting, (2) the PAC can tell what changes were made and where, and (3) the text styles and formatting of the document are preserved.
- Do not change headings or sections in the policy document, such as "Responsibilities" or "Procedures."
- Do not rearrange any part of the policy document or policy template.

Examples of Appropriate Language in Policy Statements

General Language (Clarity)

Bad	Good
"Faculty and staff should not smoke in class" (This means they should not smoke but will be allowed if they do. The statement also does not address restrictions applicable to students.)	"North Central University prohibits smoking on university property."

Policy Brevity and Appropriateness

Bad	Good
"All University faculty and staff, under the leadership of its officers, are obligated to ensure that University funds are used only for mission related purposes." This statement implies that only those "under the leadership" are required to follow the policy. Additionally, while the university will make every attempt to enforce this policy, it is impossible for the university to ensure that the policy is always followed.	"University funds must be used for mission-related purposes." Alternatively, "The university requires all employees to use university funds for mission-related purposes."

Sections of a University Policy

A university policy is made of up of many sections. Some of these parts are required (marked "Required") and some of these parts are only required if the content and nature of the policy requires their presence in the policy for enforcement, clear communication, and completeness of the policy (marked "Required, as needed").

Policy Title (Required)

The policy title must identify the key purpose of the policy, in as few words as possible. Do not include "policy" in the title.

Bad	Good
Retention and Disposal of Publications, Statistical Data Documents and Institutional Reports	Retention of University Data
Placement and/or Redemption for English and Math	Placement Testing

The title may include verbs either to show separation from another closely titled policy, or to indicate which portion of the topic will be covered by the policy and procedures. Example titles: Student Accounts vs. Provisioning Students Accounts.

Policy Statement (Required)

In as few words as possible, the "Policy Statement" states the policy's intent, the university's position on topic, who must follow the policy, when the policy applies, and any mandated actions or constraints. Policy statements can greatly vary in length. Some topics will naturally have longer policy statements. Some policies will require much more nuanced statements. The policy statement summarizes what the people involved are required to do but does not describe procedures for conformance or implementation.

What to Include in a Policy Statement

This is the most important section of the policy. It will provide direction for the intended audience. Questions that are typically answered through the policy statement:

- Who is the primary audience? (Who needs to follow the policy?)
- In what situation(s) does this policy apply?
- What are the major conditions or restrictions? (What is expected of the university, employee, student, or other member of the university community?)
- Are there exclusions or special situations?

Rules for drafting policy statements:

- Follow the university policy language requirements outlined in this document.
- Sentences and paragraphs must be clear and understandable for the given audience.
- Acronyms may be used if spelled out completely the first time the phrase is used (e.g. personally identifiable information (PII).
- Use heading within the policies statement as needed.

What Not to Include in a Policy Statement

Policy statements must not contain background details on the policy nor should it contain procedural steps. Whenever possible, avoid using a specific label, such as the name of a software product. Generic terms are more sustaining, do not invalidate the intent of the possible, and require less maintenance. Example: use 'enterprise financial system' vs. 'Colleague Finance.'

Do not use of phrases like "as outlined in this policy", "must follow this policy," or "as stated below." This is a given, as the whole purpose of the policy is for it to be followed in its entirety, so these phrase add no value to the statement.

Finally, avoid using the policy statement section to endless define terms. Focus on the requirements of the policy. While definitions are in a separate section of the policy, they are no less binding or authoritative than the policy statement.

Reason for Policy (Required)
Usually two to six sentences in paragraph format, the "Reason for Policy" states the purpose or goal of the policy, what is driving the need for policy or why it must exist, the reason for being, and/or what the policy is supposed to accomplish. Answers the question: why are we doing this?

What to Include
Key areas that may be addressed include:
- Legal, regulatory, stewardship, or other requirements the policy aims to meet.
- Description of conflict or problem the policy will resolve recognizes the legitimate interests of all parties.
- Overall benefits.

If several specific laws are touched by topics contained within the policy, this list of references is better moved to the Related Information section of the policy.

What Not to Include
- Statements of university policy.
- Reason should not include the history as to how the policy was developed.
- Procedural steps for policy compliance and implementation.

Sample Reason for Policy Statements

Sample Reason for Policy Statement #1
The purpose of this policy is to address the public well-being of North Central University's students and employees and to comply with the requirements of applicable state and federal laws including section 485(f) of the Higher Education Act of 2008, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, the Campus SaVE Act, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. section 1681 et seq.

Sample Reason for Policy Statement #2
North Central University possesses information that is valuable and sensitive and it is important that individuals that handle and interact with this data comply with applicable laws, regulations, university policies, and procedures regarding security and preservation of information. The mishandling of information or exposure of confidential information to unauthorized individuals could cause irreparable harm to the university and could also subject the university to fines or other local, state, and federal sanctions.

Sample Reason for Policy Statement #3
The purpose of this policy is to outline the acceptable use of information technology resources at North Central University in order to:

- Comply with legal and contractual requirements.
- Protect the University against damaging legal consequences.
- Safeguard these resources.

Policy Scope (Required)

A university policy must contain a scope. A policy scope identifies whom the policy affects and which actions are impacted by the policy. The scope may expressly exclude certain people, organizations, or actions from the policy requirements. The scope is used to focus the policy on only the desired targets, and avoid unintended consequences where possible.

Sample Scopes

> This policy addresses the process for the formulation, issuance, and maintenance of all North Central University policies and applies to all university departments, faculty, staff, and students.

> This policy applies to all employees, students, volunteers, employees of affiliated organizations who are paid through the University, agents, and contractors. Employees include all staff, administrators, faculty, full- or part-time, and classified or non-classified persons who are paid by the University. Students include all persons admitted to the University who have not completed a program of study for which they were enrolled; student status continues whether or not the University's programs are in session. Affiliated organizations are separate entities that exist for the benefit of the university through an operating agreement. Agents include persons authorized to represent, act on behalf of, and/or bind the university. Contractors include any persons who have entered a contractual relationship with the University for any person.

Procedures (Required)

All policies must include at least one procedure. Procedures include required information for implementation, administration, and compliance in a consistent, efficient, and effective way.

Procedures are NOT optional. Procedures are not best practices, guidance statements, or recommendations—they must be followed. Additionally, procedures are not a place for additional policy statements (these should go in the policy statement section of the policy.)

Specifically, procedures:
- Outline the required processes, step-by-step, that need to be followed to comply with the policy.
- Outline "how" to unambiguously implement or follow the policy.
- Do not include details, such as the responsible office's behind-the-scenes protocol and processes.

Required actions are listed according to the tasks themselves. Contain similar information to the Responsibilities section, which outlines required actions according to the office or job function.

Procedures should be listed in the order in which they are carried out. If there is no particular order, procedures will be listed alphabetically.

Procedure Writing
- Subheadings are used to categorize procedures. Because procedures represent tasks, these subheadings are best written in active voice, e.g., "Drafting Procedures."

- When describing a procedure, please include reference to the actual party responsible for the task (e.g., the unit head) rather than using general terms such as "you" or "the unit."
- When writing and reviewing procedures, focus on being clear and succinct. Streamline procedures whenever possible, but provide enough information so that policy users can easily follow and complete their tasks as required.

Forms/Instructions (Required, as needed)

Links to university-wide forms used in following this policy and procedure(s) are listed/linked in this section of the policy. Necessary forms that are hosted on another site, such as a federal or state website, may also be listed.

Forms/instructions are not required for all policies.

Appendices (Required, as needed)

Appendices are not required for all policies. Supplemental information provided in the policy and procedures. Common examples are:
- Examples or matrices related to the topic.
- Job aids.
- Flowcharts
- Supporting images
- Detailed process related to policy and procedures.

Additional Contacts (Required)

Each policy should have a minimum of one contact listed. This person is the subject matter expert who could answer most of the questions and direct them to additional resources as needed.

Contacts may be listed in the order of most important or most frequent, rather than an alphabetical listing.

Definitions (Required)

List unique terms that, by being defined, would add to the reader's understanding of the basic policy or procedures. Subject matter terms, if lengthy, should be included in a glossary in the Appendices. These definition are authoritative. When defining be accurate, clear, and precise.
- Define unfamiliar or technical terms
- Define terms with special meanings

The list of definitions will be arranged in alphabetical order.

Responsibilities (Required)

Summarizes the responsibilities of university offices, positions, role, or individuals who are responsible for some portion of the policy and process. Similar to the Procedures section except that it presents responsibilities according to job function/office, while Procedures presents the responsibilities in chronological order according to task. The Responsibilities section is basically a restatement of every action outline in the policy and procedure, divided up according to who is responsible for it.

The list of responsibilities will be posted in an order defined by the policy owner, typically in order by importance or level of involvement in the policy.

Related Information (Required, as needed)

List information that supports the specific policy. These documents may be internal or external to the university, such as references to state or federal laws. The list of related information will be displayed in an order defined by the policy owner, typically in order by importance or level of involvement in the policy.

Common examples are:
- Other university policies that relate to this specific policy.
- Final reports or other key background documents.
- Links to all federal, state, or local laws or regulations related to or referenced by the policy.
- Other university procedures or standards.

History (Required)

White this section of the policy is required; it is only completed or updated by the PAC. List every issue, revision, edit, or review date. For policies with a long history, this section will likely have multiple revision, edit, and review dates – they should appear in chronological order. This section includes *all* dates, listed in chronological order. It differs from both the Policy and Procedure sections, which only include the most recent issue, revision, edit, and review dates.

The PAC Chair will draft the summary of changes and update the policy library, after consulting with the policy owner or subject matter expert (as needed).