MISSOURI SOUTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY POLICY

Policy #:	02-0007
Name of Policy:	Non-Emergency Text Messaging

Date of Last Revision:	April 2022	Initial Date of Approval:		Initial Effective Date:	
Policy Owner	Chief Information Officer – Information Technology				

Policy/Chapter Sections	Text Messaging Across the Student Lifecycle
	    Texting Prospective Students
	    Texting Current Students
	    Texting Alumni and Donors
	    Text Messaging Guidelines
	    Opt-In and Opt-Out Management and Procedures
	    Text Message Content
	Emergency vs. Non-Emergency Communications
	    Response Timeframe
	Text Messaging Approvals and Institution Policies				

Date of Next Review:	April 2025				

1.0 PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance for establishing university standards and guidelines for texting both prospective and current students. This policy outlines the responsibilities for texting leads and texting users who access and use the system.

2.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all University administration, faculty, and staff, who utilize university texting systems such as Cadence by Mongoose. All such parties are expected to abide by the procedural guidelines outlined herein.

3.0 POLICY

Messages intended for the campus community are best communicated by https://mssu.edu, regular email, and printed materials, such as flyers. Text messaging is intended to supplement the Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) communications strategy, and this policy is devoted to the texting medium. The text messaging policy applies to any Missouri Southern State University-affiliated individual granted permission to text groups of constituents regarding university-related matters.

This policy is intended for everyday, non-emergency use. Use your well-formed judgment in case of emergency and contact University Police with any questions about Missouri Southern State University's emergency guidelines at 417- 626-2222 or UPD@mssu.edu.

TEXT MESSAGING ACROSS THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

Text messaging (which includes SMS and MMS messages) can be used by authorized university officials to relay information about cancellations, closures, admissions and academic requirements or deadlines, registration information, financial aid, alumni giving, and other matters that are time sensitive and necessary for student success.

Texting Prospective Students

For prospective student communication, MSSU asks for permission to communicate via text message during the application process, whether on a request for information form, inquiry card, or on the application itself. Individuals always have the option to change their opt-in to each communication channel - text, email, phone, mail. If a student does not choose to attend the institution, an opt-out should be assumed and they should be removed from receiving future communications.

Staff in the Admissions, Financial Aid, and Athletics departments will typically be responsible for texting with prospective students.

The types of text messages that can be sent to prospective students include:
  a. Application status – submitted, incomplete, missing documents, etc.
  b. Financial Aid status – submitted, incomplete, missing documents, etc.
  c. Campus Visit/Tour/Orientation Information – confirmations, reminders, survey, etc.
  d. Admission Status – congratulations on acceptance, enrollment next steps, advisor introductions, housing, etc.
  e. Athletics – recruiting, official visit, letter of intent, etc.
  f. Academic and Special Departments - recruiting

Texting Current Students

When a student enrolls at the institution, it is appropriate to ask them to update their communication preferences in case they have changed. Remind them of the types of messages they will receive through text and ask that they opt in to receiving text messages from each department individually. Do not assume that a student wants to receive text messages from every department on campus.

Staff in the Academic Advising, Student Services, Residence Life, Financial Aid, Registrar, Athletics, Student Life, Career Services, and Commencement offices will typically be responsible for texting with current students.

The types of text messages that can be sent to current students include:
  a. Academics – add/drop deadline, major selection, transfer credits, etc.
  b. Class Registration – advisor meeting, class registration deadline, etc.
  c. Housing – housing application/deposit, meal plan payment, RA introduction, etc.
  d. Financial Aid status – FAFSA deadline, submitted, missing documents, scholarships, work study, etc.
  e. Events – on-campus events, sports, fundraisers, volunteer opportunities, etc.
  f. Career Services – career fairs, resume review, internship placement, etc.
  g. Graduation Preparation – application for graduation, purchase of cap and gown, commencement details, etc.
  h. Bursar – outstanding payments, refunds, balance information, etc.

     i.   Bookstore/Library – book return dates, overdue books, etc.

Texting Alumni and Donors

Prepare for alumni engagement before the student graduates from the institution and take the opportunity to update communication preferences once again. <u>Ask upcoming graduates how they would like to stay in touch</u> with the university (email, phone, text), and what types of information they would like to receive. Staff in the Advancement, University Foundation, and Alumni Relations departments will typically be responsible for texting with alumni and donors.

    The types of text messages that can be sent to alumni and donors include:
a. Giving Request – Giving Day information, initiative-specific gifts, stewardship, etc.
b. Donor Recognition – acknowledge past donations, share how gifts support the institution, special initiatives, etc.
c. Alumni Engagement – networking events, regional events, homecoming celebrations, mentoring students, etc.

Text Messaging Guidelines

Each department must appoint at least one authorized official to be responsible for monitoring and approving text messaging requests on behalf of their department to ensure compliance. Request for Texting Access Forms will be submitted to the Texting Engagement Coordinator for final approval. The Texting Engagement Coordinator will ensure proper training has been provided to the authorized users.

Opt-In and Opt-Out Management and Procedures

Students must opt in (provide name and mobile number) to receive text messages from non-essential departments and ensure their contact information held by Missouri Southern State University is current. This can be done through a form on the website, email, or paper form. They should have the ability to opt out at any time. Exceptions to this rule are limited to the Registrar and Financial Aid departments, which may auto opt-in students.

If a student chooses to opt out of receiving text communications from a specific department, they are not automatically opted out from other departments. Students should have the ability to text 'STOP' or 'OPT OUT' at any time to opt out of messages. It is a best practice for the administrator of the institution's texting platform to run regular reporting and update their system of record to manage contact texting preferences.

Students can also be notified of these modified preferences and asked whether they would like to receive university communications through another channel - email, phone, mail – or if they'd like to opt out of all types of communication.

Text Message Content

Messages should be as concise as possible (while still maintaining a conversational tone) and should address the student directly by name or with "you/your." They should include essential points and, if needed, further instruction (e.g., Check your email for full details).

Authorized text messaging officials must abide by all policies and ensure the following:

    a. Content is accurate.
    b. Wording is appropriate and fits the institution's voice and brand.
    c. Tone is casual but professional and ends with a question when a response is desired.
    d. List of recipients is correct and relevant to the message being sent.
    e. Information within the message is directly related to the student and/or their studies.
    f. Message clearly states the action that the student needs to take or how the information impacts the student, and who to contact for additional information.
    g. All messages must be tagged with the appropriate identifiers so the recipients can immediately recognize who it's from.
        ➢ For example, if an authorized official is sending an initial text message, open with "Hi Becky, it's John Smith from Admissions". On all subsequent communications, authorized officials can sign off at the end of a text message: "– John Smith, Admissions".
    h. The number of messages received by a student is appropriate to ensure they will continue to regard the text messages as important information and does not choose to opt out of future communication.
    i. Messages are sent with adequate time for a response, action, or activity.
    j. Abbreviations and text messaging lingo are not used.
    k. Emojis approved for use by the institution are used appropriately, with no more than one emoji per message. Not every text message should include an emoji.
    l. Use hyperlinks sparingly, and instead, use text messaging to encourage a student to check their email or your website for more information. **When you do use links, it should be the full website URL and not shortened through a service like bitly.**

EMERGENCY VS. NON-EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS:

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, such as an email, phone call, or paper notice, to ensure that all students, including those who have not opted in, receive the message.

Non-emergency text messaging must NOT be used for the following:

    a. Sole method of communication – to ensure that students that have opted out still receive this information.
    b. Communicating personal or confidential information (e.g., GPA, academic standing)
    c. Sending general information to large populations (e.g., "Fall classes start Monday!")
    d. Personal matters (e.g., items for sale, farewell messages)
    e. Appeals on behalf of individuals or groups of students (e.g., to attend social, cultural, or sporting events, unless the student opted in for these text messages)
    f. Sending any messages containing social security numbers, passwords, credit card numbers, or any FERPA-protected data.
    g. Emergency alerts.

For any emergency-related communication, please consult University Police for the emergency communication policy at 417-626-2222 or upd@mssu.edu.

Response Timeframe:
As a best practice, text messages should only be sent during designated business hours (e.g., between 8:00am and 5:00pm Monday-Friday) to be respectful of a student's time and your team's availability to respond.

Any incoming replies to messages should be reviewed and responded to in a timely manner (preferably 24 hours), to provide optimal student support and prevent future messages from being ignored or a student opting out.

If a staff member is out of the office for an extended period, they are required to create an "Out of Office" away message with information about how a student can receive assistance in their absence, such as another staff member's contact information.

TEXT MESSAGING APPROVALS AND INSTITUTION POLICIES

Individuals wanting access to the text messaging software must complete a Request for Texting Access Form and receive approval as well as training before being given access to the Mongoose Texting platform. Unauthorized individuals who would like a message sent on their behalf must complete the Online Text Request Form and receive approval before a text can be sent to students. Authorized officials do not need prior approval to send periodic messages.

Text messages containing images or video must be reviewed and approved in advance by the Marketing department to ensure proper logo usage, branding, colors, fonts, voice, etc.

All non-emergency text messaging services and software must be approved by the department of Information Technology.

Failure to comply with the above policy may result in the revoking of texting permissions.

4.0 HISTORY

This policy may be revised, edited, changed or removed at any time with or without notice to applicable individuals.

February 2024 – updated to new format, minor grammatical corrections.

5.0 RELATED DOCUMENTS

None