



OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

University Policy DRAFT

Policy # 1201

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

Responsible Oversight Executive: Vice President for Government Relations

Date of Current Revision or Creation: XX-XX-XXXX

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for communicating with appointed and elected state or federal government officials for faculty, staff, and administrators engaged in political activities. This policy seeks to balance the rights of individuals to civically engage with the University's obligations to maintain a neutral, nonpartisan environment conducive to learning and academic inquiry. This policy ensures that employees act in compliance with applicable state and federal laws, uphold the University's mission and reputation as an institution of higher education, and avoid conflicts of interest when engaging in political activity.

B. AUTHORITY

Code of Virginia Section 23.1-1301, as amended, grants authority to the Board of Visitors to make rules and policies concerning the institution. Section 7.01(a)(6) of the Board of Visitors Bylaws grants authority to the President to implement the policies and procedures of the Board relating to University operations.

Code of Virginia Section 2.2-2902.1, codifies the right of any state employee to express opinions to state or local elected officials on matters of public concern.

C. DEFINITIONS

Political Activity- Refers to actions in support or opposition of a political party, candidate for partisan office, or organization that engages in the political process. Key activities defined for the purpose of this policy include volunteering for political campaigns or candidates, endorsements, soliciting or making political contributions, advocating for or against the priorities of a member or specialty organization, lobbying, and influencing funding from state or federal officials.

Government Relations - Staff members authorized by the Vice President for Government Relations to represent ODU with state and federal officials in an effort to inform, educate, and advise on matters of importance to the University.

Official University Position - A written or oral statement that represents the opinion, stance or intentions of the University as an entity, as directed by the Board of Visitors and President.

Spokesperson - Staff member authorized by the President to represent or issue public comments that represent an official University position on behalf of Old Dominion University.

Logo - A graphic mark or emblem commonly used to aid and promote instant public recognition. Logos are either purely graphic (symbols/icons) or are composed of the name of the organization (a logotype or word mark).

D. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees. Employees include all staff, administrators, faculty, full- or part-time, and classified or non-classified persons who are paid by the University.

E. POLICY STATEMENT

The Office of Government Relations manages all University engagement, communications and coordination with local, state, and federal government officials. The Vice President for Government Relations serves as the official University spokesperson and conveys the official University position on all legislative and budgetary matters at the state and federal level. For matters related to Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University ("Virginia Health Sciences"), the Vice President of Government Relations shall additionally coordinate with the Executive Vice President for Health Sciences and the Communications Officer of Virginia Health Sciences.

The University recognizes and supports the rights of individuals to express personal and political views as protected by state and federal law subject to the guidelines set forth in this policy. The University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the institution. The University maintains a position of nonpartisan neutrality and supports inclusive and respectful political discourse.

Political or personal position statements should not explicitly or inferentially be attributed to any department, school, or program within the University, or the institution at large. Employees may comment on issues of public interest as private citizens without identifying affiliation with the University. Employees should indicate that they are not speaking on behalf of, or representing, the institution in written and oral remarks unless otherwise directed by the Office of the President.

Notwithstanding University Policy 2010, this policy further states that employees should not use, wear, or otherwise display the University logo when participating in personal political activities unless they are appointed by the University to a position on behalf of the institution, or as permitted by the President. Additional consideration should be afforded to activities that occur on University property, utilize University resources, or occur during the University's hours of operation. These engagement and advocacy activities should be done on personal time or defer to the employees paid time off or leave policy.

As both citizens and educational officers of the University, faculty members should afford special consideration to their civic engagement and political activity with respect to their academic duties and professional obligations. In accordance with the rules and regulations of University Policy 2001, this policy does not negate University support for faculty to communicate with the media regarding their research, scholarship, teaching and professional expertise. When engaging in activities to influence or obtain state or federal funds, faculty, staff, and administrators must consult with the Office of Government Relations prior to outreach or engagement with elected officials and agency representatives. This policy does

not prohibit the chair of the Faculty Senate from commenting on academic matters and the professional affairs of the faculty.

Any employee who is unsure whether a particular political activity is permissible under this policy is encouraged to seek guidance from the Office of Government Relations prior to engaging in such activity. Should the activities adversely affect the faculty members' integrity or capacity to complete the duties and responsibilities of their role, corrective or disciplinary action may be taken.

This policy is not intended to restrict or interfere with appropriate, authorized job activities, such as researchers' routine communications with federal agencies relating to ongoing grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, or future solicitations.

F. PROCEDURES

This guidance is intended to assist employees participating in certain political activities when assessing what is permissible and/or appropriate given the nature of their role at the University.

- **Personal and professional contact with government officials and staff**, whether by letter, email, telephone, social media, in person, or virtual setting, must be done in the name of the individual or on behalf of a professional association and not on behalf of the University.
- Employees should not use the University letterhead, branded materials such as folders or handouts, or **display the University logo** on their person via attire, buttons, hats, etc. when engaging in political activity. For representatives of Virginia Health Sciences, **white coats absent the University logo** should be used when participating in political activity including advocacy, lobbying, testifying, etc.
- Inquiries from a professional organization or association for the University's position on a budgetary, regulatory, or legislative matter, must be sent to the Office of Government Relations.
- Employees should **not use their ODU email account** to communicate personal opinions or political positions to prevent affiliating their position with that of the University.
- Employees are responsible for informing the Office of Government Relations, who will inform the Office of the President, if they intend to offer **written/ oral testimony or public comment**, prior to the activity. Employees must note that their comments **represent personal opinions** and are not affiliated with the University. For example, testimony should be introduced by saying *"My name is Jane Doe, PhD and I'm speaking on behalf of myself/ as a subject matter expert"*.
- The **pursuit of state funding or federal appropriations** shall be coordinated through and reviewed by the Office of Government Relations. The Vice President of Government Relations shall work with the President, Chief Financial Officer, Provost, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and other University officials to ensure that institutional priorities are considered in requests for public funds.
- Reference to the University, in oral or written communications including but not limited to those listed above, should only be made as an aid to identification or credential.
- Communication and activities with federal agencies relating to grants, contracts, cooperative agreements are excluded from these procedures.

G. RECORDS RETENTION

Applicable records must be retained and then destroyed in accordance with the [Commonwealth's Records Retention Schedules](#).

H. RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Associate Vice President of Federal Relations and Assistant Vice President for State Relations and Health Policy.

I. RELATED INFORMATION

[Commonwealth's Department of Human Resource Management Policy 1.75 - Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media](#)

[Board of Visitors Policy 1003 – The University's Name and Identification](#)

[Board of Visitors Policy 1011 – Freedom of Expression](#)

[Board of Visitors Policy 1301 – University Governance](#)

[Board of Visitors Policy 1210 – Authority to Act on Behalf of the University](#)

[University Policy 1700- University Demonstrations Policy](#)

POLICY HISTORY

Policy Formulation Committee (PFC) & Responsible Officer Approval to Proceed:

Responsible Officer

Date

Policy Review Committee (PRC) Approval to Proceed:

Chair, Policy Review Committee (PRC)

Date

Executive Policy Review Committee (EPRC) Approval to Proceed:

Responsible Oversight Executive

Date

University Counsel Approval to Proceed:

University Counsel

Date

Presidential Approval:

Date

Policy Revision Dates:

Scheduled Review Date: