



SOUTH EASTERN KENYA UNIVERSITY

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Approved for submission to the University Council

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Date

Our Vision

To be a globally competitive centre of excellence in teaching, research and innovation and service.

Our Mission

To provide quality education through teaching, research, extension, innovation and entrepreneurship with emphasis on dryland agriculture natural resources and environmental management

Our Core Values

Professionalism
Innovation
Integrity
Freedom of Thought
Teamwork

Our Philosophy

Transforming lives through teaching, research, innovation and community service

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Communication Policy Statement

South Eastern Kenya University (SEKU) values open and proactive communication that guarantees easy exchange of information between the University and all its stakeholders, taking into account their views and concerns in the planning, management and evaluation of programmes, services and initiatives. This Communication Policy is intended to serve as an important component of SEKU's continued efforts to build and retain global trust as a corporate brand. It provides guidelines for how communication should be conducted to ensure that the same fits within the wider strategic interest of the University. The Policy, therefore, provides guidelines on how the University managers and the general staff will act in their day to day interaction with internal and external parties.

Definition of Key Terms

Corporate communication: Activities undertaken by SEKU to reach out to and exchange information with its stakeholders, with a view to cultivating, maintaining and improving SEKU's corporate culture, identity and image.

Crisis: An emergency situation of adverse nature, which is not within the immediate control of the University, and which threatens the well-being of the University in specific or general terms.

Internal communication: Exchange of information between or among employees across all levels of the University

External communication: Exchange of information between the University and other organisations, groups or individuals outside of the SEKU's formal structure.

Spokesperson: Someone designated to speak on behalf of the University

Stakeholder: A person, a group or an organisation with specific or general interest in the University.

Customer: Someone who consumes or receives services or products of SEKU.

Media: Various channels used by the University to communicate with its stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

(1) Aim

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that communication from South Eastern Kenya University to its employees, customers, partners, and other stakeholders are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of its entire stakeholder base in a way that supports the aspirations and mandate of the University.

(2) Scope

The Policy applies to members of SEKU Senate, Management, staff and students. It sets out the principles that the University has adopted for effective management of all communication programmes and processes.

(3) Guiding principles

The University undertakes to provide its stakeholders with timely, accurate, clear objective and complete information about its policies, programmes, services and initiatives. To realise its communication goals and objectives, in line with its vision, mission and core values, this Policy espouses the following principles:

(a) Efficiency and effectiveness

The University shall ensure that communication is effective and relevant to its recipients through use of appropriate channels and tools. The University shall convey information and respond to enquiries and requests by its stakeholders without undue delay.

(b) Clarity

The University undertakes to transmit clear, unambiguous, uniform and easy-to-understand information that does not leave room for misinterpretation.

(c) Openness and accountability

The University shall endeavour at all times to uphold an open-door policy in its dealings. It shall be ready to openly dialogues with stakeholders on all matter pertaining to its management. Where information cannot be disclosed, the reason for such non-disclosure shall be given to the concerned parties through an appropriate channel.

(d) Timeliness

The University shall ensure that all information reaches the intended recipients at the time when it is needed.

(e) Equity

The University upholds equity as a key value in all its operations. All enquiries are addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner throughout the communication process.

(f) Confidentiality

The University encourages open door policy in all its operations in general and in its communication processes in particular. However, the University shall, where necessary, observe strict confidentiality to protect its name and reputation or of staff, students, partner organisations or a stakeholder.

(g) Continual Improvement

The communication programmes and processes shall be reviewed periodically with a view to enhancing efficient delivery and effective outcomes.

(4) Channels of communication

(a) The University shall conduct its communication in the English language. The grammar for written communication shall be in the Standard English only. For spelling, either the Standard English version or the American version of the English language is accepted. Use of both versions in the same document is, however, not acceptable.

(b) Kiswahili is the other official and national language in accordance with the Constitution of Kenya and is recognised as such by this Policy. Only the Standard version of the language (Kiswahili *sanifu*) shall be used in written documents.

(c) Other languages, including ethnic languages, may be used if such use is deemed desirable to facilitate or enhance communication, or is the only means by which to communicate, with a specific customer or stakeholder or stakeholder group, provided that such use is not intended to preclude others in a manner that is discriminatory or prejudicial.

(e) The University will use the Kenyan sign language in functions where this is desirable.

(f) Braille and other communication formats and technologies shall be made available and accessible to students and members of staff in need of them.

2. METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

(1) Written communication

(a) The University shall use letters, memos, minutes, circulars, notices and other approved forms of written communication to reach its various internal and external stakeholders;

(b) All written communications should be simple and easy to read and comprehend, and shall be devoid of slang, offensive or discriminatory language. Ethnic slur, obscenity and sexist innuendos are unacceptable;

(c) A uniform format of writing documents shall be established and adhered to;

- (d) Letters, memos and other approved forms of written communication should provide complete and clear information, devoid of ambiguity;
- (e) Letters will be dispatched in good time and with due confidentiality;
- (f) Memos shall be drafted clearly and accurately and dispatched promptly, with the recipient(s) and status clearly indicated;
- (g) Appropriate language and format shall be used in writing memos to avoid communication breakdown;
- (h) A copy of an internal memo shall be filed both at the source and destination for reference;
- (i) Notices to be posted on notice boards shall be cleared by Public Relations Office and thereafter strategically posted for easy access by staff and students;
- (j) Information to be posted on the University Website, which is intended for public consumption, shall be cleared by the Public Relations Manager;
- (k) Fax messages and e-mail shall be correctly documented and delivered to the intended recipient(s) as soon as possible;

(2) Oral Communication

- (a) The University shall develop a procedure for handling in-coming and out-going calls, which shall be adhered to for both landline and mobile telephone communications;
- (b) Where necessary, mobile phone voice communications will be complemented with written communication;
- (c) Telephone messages shall be correctly documented and delivered to the recipient(s) as soon as possible;

(3) Electronic communication

- (a) Electronic communications, such as e-mail and other social media platforms, shall be guided by the University ICT Policy

(4) Meetings

The University shall use meetings as fora for involving staff in decision making and problem solving. Schools, departments and sections/units shall hold regular meetings. During meetings the following procedure shall apply:

- (a) All staff shall be accorded equal chance to make their contributions.
- (b) Meeting shall be held at a time and venue that allow and encourage input by all participants.
- (c) Except for crisis or emergency meetings, notice of meeting and the agenda items shall be circulated at least seven days prior to the meeting.
- (d) Meetings shall be managed in a manner that ensures that they remain focused on the set agenda.

(e) Information on issues arising from meetings shall be made available to all relevant staff and feedback provided through appropriate channels.

(f) Attendance registers shall be made available in all meetings and shall be signed by all persons in attendance.

(g) The chair of a meeting shall ensure that proper introduction is done at the start of the meeting.

(h) Deans, director's heads of department and heads of section shall ensure that staff are given necessary information arising from meetings.

(5) Face to face communication

(a) All University staff and students are encouraged to engage each other in discussions of various issues. This should be done with respect and decorum.

(6) Communication for and with persons with disabilities

(a) The University shall create an environment that is safe and supportive of persons with disabilities.

(b) Appropriate alternative and/or additional methods of communication shall be provided to enable effective communication with people with disabilities.

(d) Staffs are encouraged to show extra compassion when communicating with persons with disabilities.

(e) Arrangements shall be made to ensure that persons with disabilities do not encounter undue difficulties while seeking information.

(7) Non-verbal communication

(a) The University shall use non-verbal communication to reinforce, complement or substitute verbal communication as appropriate.

(b) Corporate branding shall be promoted to create and enhance corporate identity and image.

(c) Friday is designated as the corporate day and employees are encouraged to don University branded attire.

(d) Staff and students are expected to portray the University's corporate culture, which is characterised by decency and sensitivity to occasion and environment. This should at all times be reflected in their mode of dressing and self-presentation.

(e) Use of University corporate identity tools such as logo and letterhead for personal purposes is prohibited.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

(1) External Communication

- (a) The Vice-Chancellor and the Public Relations Manager are responsible for ensuring that South Eastern Kenya University communications programmes and processes are in compliance with this Policy.

(2) Spokespersons

- (a) The Vice-Chancellor is the principal spokesperson on University-wide matters. The Vice-Chancellor may, as he or she deems appropriate, delegate this role to specific senior officers on specific matters.
- (b) Media contacts shall be handled by or referred to the Public Relations Office.
- (c) Other employees are not permitted to make statements on behalf of the University; but are not prohibited from making personal statements as citizens of Kenya on issues that are unrelated to the University's functions and operations.
- (d) All enquiries on official policies or correspondence to and from foreign missions and subsequent responses shall be channeled through the Kenya Government ministry in charge of universities. The same shall apply to other ministries and international organisations.
- (e) Staff and students may not correspond directly with various arms and organs of Government on policy-related matters in the University without prior clearance by the Vice-Chancellor.

(3) Media relations

- (a) The Public Relations Manager shall be the University's link with the media.
- (b) Information to the media shall be generated, processed and disseminated through appropriate channels and in liaison with relevant organs of the University.
- (c) All media conferences, briefings, facility visits and other events shall be organised by the Public Relations Manager in liaison with the Vice-Chancellor.
- (d) The University shall be impartial in providing information to media outlets.
- (e) The University shall maintain a culture of openness in dealing with the media.
- (f) Schools and departments shall channel and refer media enquiries to the Public Relations Manager.
- (g) Public Relations Manager shall deal with the media in an accurate, uniform, timely and objective manner.

(4) Corporate advertising

- (a) The University shall use print, electronic and other media for advertising;

- (b) All University advertising shall be coordinated by the Public Relations Manager in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor;
- (f) All advertising engagements with the media shall be executed by the Public Relations Manager, who shall ensure that they are consistent - in their design, tone and general appearance - with the University's corporate identity and corporate culture;
- (g) Use of University logo for advertising by collaborating or other organisations without express permission from the Vice-Chancellor is prohibited and may attract legal action;
- (h) Production of promotional items shall be coordinated by the Public Relations Office which shall ensure that the items bear the correct institutional name, logo and general outlook.

(5) Internal communication

The Public Relations Manager shall:

- (a) manage and maintain all the internal communication tools to facilitate communication between the Management, and staff and students;
- (b) be responsible for developing and maintaining guidelines for the University's corporate identity and graphical appearance.

(6) Communication with staff and students

The University Management shall:

- (a) encourage openness in internal communication and sharing of information;
- (b) uphold the culture of consultation with staff and students over University affairs, in a way that enhances effective communication and cultivates an open-systems management;
- (c) seek constantly to improve customer care for students in the provision of information;
- (d) monitor and evaluate student needs and views through interactions, surveys, focus groups, liaison groups and committees;
- (e) ensure all internal communications are expressed in clear, easy-to-understand English or Kiswahili;
- (f) as far as possible, ensure staff and/or students are directly informed of important University issues well before media or other external bodies.
- (g) facilitate staff training on communication, including committee chairing, personal communication skills, and customer care, organising information, and managing departmental communications;
- (h) induct new staff on good communication practices and the University's corporate culture.

(7) Corporate identity

- (1) Whereas the Public Relations Office shall be the custodian and reference point on matters relating to the University's corporate identity, it is the responsibility of all members of staff to build and maintain a correct corporate identity.
 - (a) The University shall have specific colour or colours or colour scheme known to all employees and students as the official colour or colours or colour scheme;
 - (b) The University shall have a logo approved by the Council, which shall be the only logo to be used on official documents and other communication materials;
 - (c) There shall be an official type face for the University for the purposes of correspondence;
 - (d) The University shall have its flag, which shall capture and reflect the University's colour scheme, vision, mission core values, and philosophy;
 - (e) All Divisions, Department and Units shall adhere to the logo, colours, fonts, motto of the University. Use of the University logo by individual persons, including staff and students, for branding of private and personal is prohibited;
 - (f) Generation of signage materials and branding of functions shall be done in consultation with the Public Relations Manager who shall satisfy that the signage and branding are the best representation of the University's corporate identity in terms of standards and outlook;
 - (g) A proposal to change, vary or substitute temporarily or permanently, the colours, fonts, logos, symbols, flags or tagline shall be presented to the Senate, which shall deliberate and forward its recommendations to the Council for consideration;

(8) Divisional, school and departmental heads' responsibilities

The University's divisional, school and departmental heads shall act as role models, demonstrating good practice in all aspect of communication, and:

- (a) manage communication processes at divisional/departmental levels;
- (b) work with the Public Relations Office to facilitate interdivisional/departmental communication and mass media-related communication;
- (c) work with the Public Relations Office to ensure that communication materials such as newsletters, flyers, and brochures, produced at their levels conform to the University's quality guidelines and standards, and reflect the corporate character;
- (d) ensure that communication systems and processes actively support the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the University;
- (e) ensure effective two-way communication between management and staff;
- (f) where staff and/or students raise issues of poor communication, take action to ensure the issues are dealt with satisfactorily;

- (g) ensure effective lateral communication between staff, and students and other stakeholders.
- (h) support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion and involvement in all communication processes;
- (i) ensure that communication-related issues that cannot be addressed at their level are referred as appropriate.

(9) Responsibility of all staff

The University employees shall:

- (a) strive to know and internalise the principles of good communication practices as espoused by this Policy;
- (b) ensure that they communicate effectively and appropriately;
- (c) ensure that information is shared responsibly, appropriately and in a timely manner.
- (d) in situations where stakeholders raise issues relating to poor and/or inappropriate communication, consider such feedback carefully and adjust their communication style accordingly.

(10) Crisis Communication

In the event of a crisis or an emergency, the following general guideline shall apply:

- (a) The Vice-Chancellor shall constitute a crisis communication team with the responsibility to collect and collate relevant information on the incident;
- (b) The Vice-Chancellor shall initiate and maintain regular and on-time communication with stakeholders through appropriate channels;
- (c) The crisis Committee shall gather details and come up with strategies for communication with internal and external stakeholders;
- (d) The Vice-Chancellor and the Public Relations Manager shall ensure that the internal publics (staff and students) are given important information pertaining to the crisis ahead of the media;
- (e) No member of staff shall submit any information to the news media without the express clearance of the Vice-Chancellor.
- (f) Upon clearance by the Vice-Chancellor, the Public Relations Manager shall release relevant, appropriate and verifiable information to news media regarding the crisis;
- (g) The Public Relations Manager shall monitor media coverage and brief the University Management and the crisis communication team, and, where appropriate, respond accordingly;
- (h) The Public Relations Manager shall, as appropriate, arrange media briefing by the Management or the crisis communication team;

- (i) The crisis communication team shall analyse and compile a report to the University Management on the crisis and integrate the lessons learnt into the University's crisis management system.

(11) Editorial Committee

There shall be an editorial committee appointed by the Vice-Chancellor and with membership from the various organs of the University, which shall, among other duties, devise appropriate ways of enhancing the visibility of the University, including through production of university-wide or division-, school- or department-specific newsletters, magazines and other publications.

4. RESTRICTIONS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

(1) General Guideline

- (a) Internal and external communications are subject to various restrictions resulting from legislation, regulations, standards and agreements relating to the prevailing operating environment, customers and terms of employment as well as business considerations. Employees are bound by certain rules of confidentiality with regard to information that is for internal use, relates to customers or competition, or could potentially be damaging to the University's reputation and/or business interests or has potential of attracting litigation. In the event of uncertainty with regard to confidentiality issues, employees should contact their immediate superiors, the Legal Officer or Public Relations Manager.

(2) Individual liberties and responsibilities

- (a) In order to cultivate and promote freedom of thought as one of the University's core values, employees are encouraged to actively participate in discussions and debates in their respective fields of expertise as a way of enhancing their own knowledge and the standing of the University as a globally competitive centre of excellence in teaching research and innovation;
- (b) Rules and procedures pertaining to contributions to technical journals, participation in meetings and related matters shall encourage and facilitate such activities while providing mechanisms to safeguard reputation of both the individual and the University.

(3) Contacts with the media

- (a) The Vice-Chancellor is the spokesperson for the University on all policy matters. He or she may, at his or her discretion, delegate this role to another senior member of staff;
- (b) Public Relations Manager has the general responsibility of fostering and maintaining good relations with the media. Media relations shall be proactive with the overriding strategy of enhancing the reputation of the University as a centre of academic excellence, research and innovation;
- (c) A member of staff who wishes to publish a commentary or an opinion piece in a newspaper, a magazine or any other print mass media outlet, or talk to or on radio or television on topical issues, is free to do so. The member of staff may identify himself or herself as an employee of South Eastern Kenya University, provided that the article bears a standard disclaimer that "the views contained in

the article represent the views of the author(s), and not necessarily those of South Eastern Kenya University;

- (d) Use of the University's name, acronym, logo or other corporate identity tools in any form of communication by employees or students in any medium in a way that has the potential to bring the University into conflict or disrepute, or otherwise portray the University in bad light, is prohibited.

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND CO-ORDINATION

In addition to the responsibilities assigned to various offices as specified above:

- (1) The Vice-Chancellor shall:

- (a) ensure the Public Relations Office has the requisite resources, with optimum levels of qualified staff, budgetary allocation, equipment and office space, to fulfill the requirements of this Policy.

- (2) The Public Relations Manager shall:

- (a) be the overall coordinator of this Policy;

- (b) establish and maintain continual information flows between the University and its stakeholders;

- (c) Devise and implement programmes, strategies and tools that support proactive communications between the University and its stakeholders;

- (d) Ensure prudent and efficient management and utilisation of resources allocated to the Public Relations Office

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- (1) The Public Relations Manager shall:

- (a) formulate strategies and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of this Policy;

- (b) undertake regular checks on implementation of the Policy;

- (c) make recommendation on review.

7. REVIEW

This Policy shall be reviewed from time to time on a need basis; but not later than four years from the date of its approval.