

Guide for Writing University Policies

1. First determine if you need a university policy to address the topic of your policy. Some questions to help with this are
 - a. Is this something that impacts multiple departments across divisions, employees or students generally, or the entire university?
 - b. Is this something that needs to be established as a university wide rule or set university wide operational expectations?
 - c. Is this something that creates a requirement or prohibition that will need to be enforced for students and/or employees?

If none of these things are implicated, then consider having the matter addressed in a departmental policy or internal procedure.

2. Follow the policy template available on the policy website and hyperlinked in University Policy 1101. Only sections listed on the template should be indicated with capital roman numerals (you can have sub-sections under each section heading). The template also provides a summary description of each section.
3. All policies must conform to the [George Mason Editorial Style Guide](#).
4. Policies should be easy to understand and follow. Do not use overly technical language or legalese. The point of a policy is for members of the George Mason community to know and understand the rules and requirements.
5. All defined terms (see discussion of Definition section below) should be capitalized throughout the policy when they are being used to have the meaning stated in the Definition section. Do not capitalize the word if it is not being used as stated in the Definition section. For example, if the word “University” is defined to mean George Mason University, then a sentence about how George Mason contracts with other universities would be written like this: “The University shall enter into contracts with other universities by....” The first use of the word university is the defined term, so it is capitalized; the second use of university is not the defined term, so it is written normally.
6. All policies must have a Responsible Office. The Responsible Office is the department or office that is responsible for implementing and managing the subject matter discussed in the policy. The Responsible Office should be a department or office, not an individual. The Responsible Office may work with other departments on enforcement (e.g., HR, Student Conduct). In general, there should be one Responsible Office, however, in some cases there may be more than one.
7. Policies should generally be short and state the requirements or rules (i.e. the “what”). The implementation or “how” those rules and requirements will be implemented or enforced should be in a procedure document that is posted online and hyperlinked in the

policy. For example, a fictional employee dress code policy would state, “All employees must wear George Mason Colors on Fridays.” The procedure could include how employees can obtain the correct colored clothes, a process for employees to check if their clothes are the correct colors, and the process for addressing deviations from the policy.

8. In the Related Law, Policy & Guidelines section list any laws or other policies that relate to or have informed the policy. This list is informational only to notify the reader of the policy of other laws, policies and guidelines that may relate to the same topic or may inform the policy. Examples of laws or policies that should be listed include if a policy is being written to comply with a law or if a policy interacts with another university policy or external guidance document. Using our fictional dress code policy, that policy could list the Flexible Work policy as a related policy because the dress code requirement for Friday may be impacted if an employee is teleworking. It may be the case that there is nothing listed in this section.
9. The Scope section is used to specify who, what, where, or when the policy applies. The scope can be defined by the people who are covered by the policy, the activities covered by the policy, a geographical area covered by the policy, a temporal period covered by the policy, or a combination. For example, if our fictional dress code policy only applied to employees on campus on Fridays the scope would be “This policy applies to all employees who are working on George Mason Property on Fridays.” In drafting the Scope section think about:
 - a. Who at the university will be governed by the policy (e.g., employees, students, anyone who comes to campus, anyone who participates in a specific kind of university activity)?
 - b. Does the policy apply generally or only to specific activities or events (e.g., research activities, events including minors, creation of financial records)?
 - c. Does the policy have a specific time-period that it covers (e.g., only applies to events that occur during certain hours, only applies to alleged misconduct that occurred within five years of making a complaint)?
 - d. Does the policy only apply to particular places or locations (e.g. only activities that occur on George Mason owned property, only to the Residence Halls)?
10. The Policy Statement section should clearly explain what the policy does and specify what it requires and/or prohibits. It may also state what the purpose or intention of the policy is. In general, use mandatory terms (e.g., must, shall, is required to, is prohibited) and not permissive terms (e.g., may, should, are expected to, is discouraged) to describe things that are required by the policy, and which will be enforced. In general, permissive language (e.g., describing things that are discretionary) should go in the procedure. The Policy Statement is generally a short, concise statement, with the details going in other sections of the policy or the procedure. For example, the Policy Statement for the fictional dress code policy could be “In furtherance of building community and school

spirit, all George Mason employees are required to wear George Mason Colors while working on George Mason Property on Fridays.”

11. The Definition section should list in alphabetical order the terms that have a specific definition that are necessary for the policy. It is only necessary to define terms that have a specific meaning for purposes of the policy that are *not* the generally understood meaning of the word. Only words used in the policy need to be defined, do not include definitions of words that are not used elsewhere in the policy, the procedures can have its own separate defined terms section, if necessary. Definitions can also be used to simplify drafting by having a single word or phrase stand-in for a full concept or phrase. Definitions can also be used to specify the requirements of the policy. For example, in our fictional dress code policy, whether we define “George Mason Colors” as “any shade of green and any shade of yellow or gold” or as “George Mason Green and George Mason Gold as defined in the George Mason University Brand Guide” will impact what colors employees can wear.
12. The Responsibilities section should identify the individuals, categories of individuals, and/or departments that have specific responsibilities assigned in the policy and state what those responsibilities are. As with the Policy Statement section, these should generally be written in mandatory language and state what must be done. For example, in our fictional dress code policy, the Responsibilities section could include: (1) “The Office of University Branding is responsible for providing all employees with three articles of clothing with George Mason Colors within one week of their start date,” (2) “Supervisors are responsible for monitoring their supervisees’ compliance with this policy and reporting non-compliance to Human Resources,” and (3) “Human Resources is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.” The process by which each of those things are done can be included in the procedures.
13. The Compliance section should state any specific requirements related to compliance or enforcement of the policy. Topics that are generally found in this section include
 - a. How compliance with the policy will be monitored,
 - b. Any required training,
 - c. If failure to follow the policy could result in discipline or removal of privileges, a statement such as “Violations of this policy may result in removal of privileges and/or discipline in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures,”
 - d. If there is a requirement to report violations of the policy,
 - e. If retaliation is a concern, a statement that retaliation for reporting violations or participating in investigations related to policy is prohibited.
14. The Timetable for Review section states how often the policy will be reviewed for revisions. The default is three years, but it can be more often if it is a policy that requires more regular review.

15. The Amendments section will typically state that the policy and any amendments must be approved by the SVP/COO and EVP/Provost, unless it is a policy that requires approval from someone else (e.g., the Board of Visitors) for statutory or other reasons.
16. If you are revising an existing policy, do not remove or delete the record of prior changes and approvals. It is important that we track the different iterations of policy.
17. Drafting or revising a policy is not a solo activity. It is best to include different stakeholders and those who are involved in implementing the policy to get different perspectives. You can also reach out to the leaders of the Policy Management Group to obtain assistance with drafting or revising policies.

Here is a sample policy, using the fictional dress code policy discussed above.

Sample Policy

University Policy XXXX: Employee Dress Code Policy

Responsible Office: Human Resources

Policy Procedure: Dress Code Procedures

Related Law, Policy & Guidelines:

Policy 2202 – Flexible Work

George Mason University Brand Guide

I. Scope

This policy applies to all employees who are working on George Mason Property on Fridays.

II. Policy Statement

In furtherance of building community and school spirit, all George Mason employees are required to wear George Mason Colors while working on George Mason Property on Fridays. The George Mason Colors must be outwardly visible and must be present on at

least 10% of employees' outwardly visible clothing. Visibly wearing a George Mason branded article of clothing provided by the Office of University Branding to employees satisfies the requirements of this policy.

III. **Definitions**

Friday: Any Friday on which George Mason is open.

George Mason Colors: George Mason Green and George Mason Gold as defined in the George Mason University Brand Guide.

George Mason Property: Any property owned, leased, or controlled by George Mason.

IV. **Responsibilities:**

- A. The Office of University Branding shall provide all employees with three George Mason branded articles of clothing within one week of their start date.
- B. Human Resources is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.
- C. Supervisors are responsible for notifying their supervisees of this policy and working with Human Resources to address non-compliance with this policy.

V. **Compliance:**

- A. All employees are required to complete annual dress code training.
- B. All employees are required to report non-compliance with this policy to their supervisors and Human Resources.
- C. Non-compliance with this policy may result in loss of privileges and/or discipline in accordance with applicable disciplinary processes.

VI. **Timetable for Review**

This policy shall be reviewed every three years.

VII. **Amendments**

Amendments will be approved by the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer and the Executive Vice President and Provost.

VIII. Dates:

Approved:

Revision Approved:

Renewed:

Revision Approved: