GEORGIA SOUTHERN
U N I V E R S I T Y

STUDENT TEXTING POLICY			
Area:	Enrollment Management	Number:	
Applies to:	Campus Community	Issued:	October 22, 2020
		Revised:	
Sources:		Reviewed:	
Policy Owner	Vice President of Enrollment Management	Page(s):	3

I. Purpose

Georgia Southern University understands and values students' preferences in receiving information and messages. This includes messages to mobile devices via SMS (short message service) and MMS (multimedia messaging service) - also known as text messaging. This policy covers the use of mass texting by university offices and units to communicate valuable information to prospective and current students, including the university's responsibility for student confidentiality and privacy. For the purposes of this policy, mass text messages are defined as texts sent to a predetermined group of persons with whom the sender is not in direct, personal contact on a regular basis.

Messages and official information intended for the campus community are best communicated by Georgia Southern University email, the University website, on the MyGS portal, through regular U.S. Mail, or printed materials such as posters and postcards. This policy is for both emergency and non-emergency messaging that includes notifications and information from the authorized offices of Admissions, Financial Aid, Enrollment Services, Academic Advising, Registrar, Bursar's Office/Student Accounts, Housing/Residence Life, Dean of Students Office, and University Communications and Marketing.

II. Policy Statement

Mass text messaging can be used by authorized university officials to relay information about cancellations, closures, admissions and academic requirements or deadlines, registration information, financial aid, and other matters that are time-sensitive and related to student safety or necessary for student success.

Georgia Southern University is obligated to protect students' personally identifiable information (PII) and contact data that is not public directory information as defined under the Board of Regents policy.

All mass messaging must comply with the following:

1. Authorized text messaging officials must abide by all other policies regarding content, as well as ensure the following:
    a. Content is accurate.
    b. Wording is appropriate.

c. Tone is casual but professional and ends with a question when a response is desired.
d. List of recipients is correct.
e. Information within the message is directly related to the student and/or their studies.
f. Message clearly states the action the student needs to take or how the information impacts the student. Recommend including who to contact for additional information.
g. Number of messages received by a student should be appropriate to ensure he/she will continue to regard the text messages as important information and not opt-out because of overuse.
h. Messages are sent with adequate time for the action or activity.
i. Non-emergency messages are not initiated between 9:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. EST.
j. A response is required to messages requesting assistance.

2. 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 or paper notice, to ensure that all students, including those who have not opted-in, receive the message.

3. Current or prospective students must have the ability to opt-out of receiving future text messages from a University-level office. Once a student unsubscribes, the choice should be documented and text messages should cease immediately.

4. The first message from a texting system must include the following:
a. Name of the university ("Georgia Southern," "Georgia Southern Univ" or "Georgia Southern University").
b. Provide an opportunity to opt-out of future text messages.
c. Notify the recipient he/she may incur costs (i.e. "message and data rates may apply").

5. All non-emergency text messaging services and software must be approved by Information Technology Services.

Emergency Mass Messaging

Emergency messaging is carried out through Eagle Alert (which includes abilities to call landlines and cellular numbers, to email, or SMS).

Students will be automatically opted-in for Eagle Alert emergency text messages but have the ability to update their communication preferences to opt-out of text message notifications.

Non-Emergency Mass Messaging

Each department authorized for non-emergency mass messaging must appoint at least one authorized official who will be responsible for monitoring and approving text messaging requests on behalf of their department to ensure compliance with the following:

1. Students must opt-in to receive text messages from departments and ensure their contact information held by Georgia Southern University is current. Exceptions to this

rule are limited to the Registrar, Financial Aid, Bursar's Office, Enrollment Services, and Admissions departments, which may automatically opt-in students.

2. Non-emergency text messaging must NOT be used as or for the following:
    a. Sole method of communication.
    b. Communicating personal or confidential information.
    c. Sending general information to large populations (e.g., "Fall classes start Monday!").
    d. Personal matters (e.g., items for sale, farewell messages).
    e. Promotions to individuals or groups of students (e.g., to attend social, cultural, sporting or other non-enrollment related events, unless the student opted-in for text messages regarding these topics).
    f. Sending any messages containing social security numbers, passwords, credit card numbers or any FERPA-protected data. These are strictly prohibited.
    g. Emergency alerts.
    h. Promoting the sale of commercial (non-educational) products or services, contests, or sweepstakes.

III. Exclusions

Nothing in this policy should prohibit individual faculty, staff, coaches, advisors, or university personnel from text-messaging students individually or in groups for university or personal communication, providing the sender is in direct, personal contact on a regular basis with the student(s) and the recipient has agreed to receive texts.

IV. Procedures

When possible, tag subsequent messages with the appropriate identifier so recipients can immediately recognize who it's from. For example, open with, "Hi, it's GUS" or "From GS Bursar."

Messages should be as concise as possible (while still maintaining a conversational tone when appropriate) and should address the student directly (e.g., "Your financial aid form is due on Friday," rather than, "Financial aid forms are due on Friday."). They should include essential points and, if needed, further instructions (e.g., "Check your email for full details.").

Departments that want a message sent on their behalf must submit a request to the designated unit and receive approval before a text can be sent to students. Authorized offices do not need prior approval to send periodic messages. Authorizations are under the purview of the Vice President for Enrollment Management or designee.