COMMUNICATION POLICY

Name of policy	COMMUNICATION POLICY
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Custodian	Quality Assurance Office
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<p style="text-align: center; color: red;">**COMMUNICATION POLICY**</p>

Foreword

This policy document stipulates how the University of Kigali will handle communication between its internal and external stakeholders. It emphasizes communication between the university and its stakeholders as a two-way process—*opens communication from governance organs to its stakeholders and a system that encourages feedback.*

Addressing the concerns of our stakeholders, the University shall provide the necessary communication infrastructure to ensure that information reaches its stakeholders using the most effective means. We shall also undertake stakeholder surveys to gauge perceptions so that we project our right identities to stakeholders.

The policy puts in place a solid communication structure that will give every facet of university life adequate visibility. The structure will ensure that *academic and research activity* and community relations are anchored on different communication platforms to reach the targeted stakeholders. Communication of research from scholars and students will be prioritized as a key output of the revamped communication office.

To ensure that the University takes advantage of web-based technology which has become a new frontier of communicating, a revamped structure providing for personnel in each faculty is catered for in the policy. The personnel will ensure that our web based communication strategy is timely, focused on creating mutual understanding with our stakeholders and shall ensure that our products and services are available through different interactive forums.

The policy demonstrates that our institution is among organizations that have embraced best communication practices. It defines how communication is structured and practiced.

University of Kigali has chosen this path to realize its vision of moving towards world-class academic excellence that emphasizes the centrality of the stakeholders in its communication web. We appreciate feedback in any format as the best way of strengthening our university.

The management commits itself to the implementation of this policy and will subject it to a periodic review to ensure its relevance in line with the changing circumstances and needs of our stakeholders.

Prof. Danson Musyoki
Vice-Chancellor.

Executive Summary

In simple terms, communication is the creation and sharing of meaning through common symbols. In an institutional framework, it is the fine thread that connects together all the activities and functions both internally and externally. It is therefore critical to the effective functioning and productivity of any enterprise.

Communication can take many forms and shapes depending on the nature of who is communicating and for what one is communicating about. It can be quite complex and the rapid growth in the information communication technology has added to its complexity.

Every organization has its own nature and culture and in this regard the University of Kigali occupies a social and cultural space particular to itself in the Rwandan academic arena. Taking into consideration dimensions and complexity of communication and its effects in as far as they are put in place to add value to the proper functioning of our university, it is in order for the university community to have a common understanding in this matter.

INTRODUCTION

There have been changes in the handling of corporate communication all over the world, with an implication that if an organization has to survive and thrive, then it must communicate effectively with all its stakeholders. University of Kigali continues to generate knowledge, and it must ensure that the knowledge is appropriately transmitted to stakeholders.

Consequently, the manner in which the university communicates to its clients/possible clients and the feedback generated are powerful indicators for the university to position itself strategically as it releases its goods, products, and services to the market.

A major challenge facing the university is updating the content of information and presenting it in appropriate forms to its diverse audiences. The range of audiences makes it imperative that the university develops appropriate approaches to sharing information and to gauging feedback.

This policy was developed against this backdrop as part of the university's commitment to provide stakeholders with timely, accurate, objective and complete information. The policy will enable a smooth flow of information, create feedback mechanisms and manage communication which has been handled in an ad-hoc manner without requisite professionalism.

To this end, as part of the university's commitment to providing stakeholders with timely, accurate, objective and complete information, the policy establishes the principles, rules of engagement and procedures for communication within the university community and with the university's stakeholders.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles, guidelines, practices and processes that the university will embrace in fostering excellent internal and external communication. Implementing the policy, the university will realize its vision, mission and core values by reaching out to its stakeholders with messages that help to create a sense of ownership of the policy.

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

That there is no clear structure on how the communication function works within the university is partly attributable to a lack of a communication policy. In the circumstance, the public relations office in the Office of the Vice Chancellor partly handles some communication activities, such as media and publicity, while most departments in the university enjoy some limited degree of autonomy in carrying out key communication activities including advertisement, signage, branding, and production of documentaries.

Thus, communication activities are not properly coordinated. Best practices dictate that for purposes of sending uniform messages from and portraying a common identity of the university, the communication function should be centralized and coordinated—from a focal point.

CURRENT STATUS

Communication at the University is currently handled by the Director of Communication and Public Relations working hand in hand with the Director of Marketing and the Director of University Relations & Partnerships.

All university business is conducted using the English medium as the official language of instruction at University of Kigali

The Director of Communication and Public Relations outsources:

- Photographers
- Documentary producers,
- Media liaison and mobilization staff,
- Writers and Editors, and
- Advertising liaison officers (jointly handled with media houses).

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KIGALI

Information reach

The assumption is that the usual modes of communication (such as emails, memos, and circulars) send important information to everyone who needs to know and that everyone will receive this information. It is possible however that information does not reach people who do not use some of those methods of communication (such as email) may not always be read by shop floor workers.

Flow of information

Information may not get to employees when and where they need it. Without vital information at the right time and in the right place, the decision-making process is hampered. This delay impacts negatively on project completion and outcomes.

Clarity of expectations

The existing structures that are designed to establish effective information sharing and ownership have not yet produced the desired impact with respect to harmonizing expectations. The structures have not been utilized optimally to benefit the wider membership among management, staff and students.

Sharing of trust and information

Some employees are not freely sharing information with one another. This failure has a bearing on trust, which is an integral element of our institutional core values: a lack of trust has the impact of allowing unhealthy intra-institutional competition, which undermines productivity of teams, departments or units, and the organization.

Sequencing and systematizing of information

Every organization must solve the problem of what pattern and content of communication shall be created, and what information shall be directed to which offices. There are limits to the amount and nature of information that can be received, processed and effectively handled by any one unit.

The apparent absence of clear communication policy guidelines results in unduly large amounts of information being channeled to units at once, resulting in information overload.

Uptake of communication technologies

University of Kigali currently uses a number of different communication technologies such as data-based reporting systems, e-mail, social media, bulletin boards, Online Television and websites.

They are cost-effective in eliminating distance barriers and providing information to large numbers of people quickly.

In spite of the robust ICT infrastructure in place, the uptake in use of these technologies by many members of the university community has not been impressive. The low uptake could be explained by people's preference for more personalized modes of communication.

FRAGMENTED COMMUNICATION

Communication within the university tends to be fragmented in that it is perceived only as a tool rather than a thread within a system. At the same time, communication takes place in disparate and isolated ways rather than in a collaborative and well-coordinated way as a concerted effort geared towards achieving the overall goals of communication in the university.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Firstly, the broad objectives of the University of Kigali Communication Policy are to:

a) Provide efficient and effective communication mechanisms among management, staff, students and other stakeholders,

b) Promote the coherence and consistency of information flow, internally and externally,

c) Minimize communication breakdown and delays including overseeing a customer feedback programme,

d) Promote the use of appropriate channels of communication

Secondly, the specific objectives of the University of Kigali Communication Policy are to:

a) Interpret information emanating from the university and present it in a useful and sustainable manner to enhance relations with stakeholders,

b) Correct lapses in the flow of information between the groups both that make up the constituency of the university and which constitute opposition to and competition with the university,

c) Facilitate the role of the university in taking up its place in society as a gesture of cooperation in civil, educational and charitable situations, and

d) Facilitate the role of the university in articulating its interests and to direct attention to its activities through the development of a visible, long term community relations and outreach programme for research uptake.

JUSTIFICATION

This policy emphasizes professionalism in communication and serves as a guide to members of the university community with respect to their responsibility in serving the interests of the university.

It therefore outlines the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance based on mutually satisfactory communication.

There is a need to gain public goodwill and acceptance as well as to sustain and expand the market for university products and services. Cultivating and enhancing confidence in dealer and distributor relations has the critical impact of protecting the reputation and integrity of the university.

COMMUNICATION POLICY

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

The University endeavors to provide its stakeholders with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programs, services, and initiatives. Consequently, to realize the university's communication goal, this policy outlines core principles of good communication practice as a guide to its stakeholder. It is appropriate to adapt these principles to suit the working environment;

Effectiveness

University of Kigali shall ensure that all communication is effective and appropriate and shall convey information and respond to requests by stakeholders through appropriate communication channels.

Clarity

The university undertakes to transmit clear, uniform and easily understood information, using as appropriate the university logo, corporate colours, publications and approved internet channels to reinforce, clarify or authenticate communication.

Pro-activity

The university shall continue to demonstrate leadership by proactively seeking and engaging external contacts in areas of mutual interest in line with its vision and mission.

Transparency

The university shall continue to be as transparent and accountable as possible, disclosing reasons for decisions made, while the management shall openly engage in dialogue as appropriate.

Efficiency

The university shall endeavor to ensure that all information duly reaches the intended recipients.

Cultural awareness

As a national institution that is international in character, the university shall continue to respect cultural diversity of all stakeholders in its communication.

Responsibility

The university shall endeavor to ensure that editorial operations and marketing of the university's products, which constitute an integral part of the institution's communication process, reflect a high level of accountability and responsibility.

Integrity

Internal and external communication, like all other university activities, shall continue to be guided by high levels of integrity.

Best practices

Best communication practices call for clarity. All our communication processes in the university must therefore be guided by the same values that characterize the best communication practices worldwide. These practices are embedded in the code of conduct and should be adhered to at all levels of university operations.

The University Spokesperson

On all matters pertaining to the university, the Vice Chancellor is the spokesperson.

From time to time as and when necessary, the Vice Chancellor may authorize the Director of Communication and Public Relations to be spokesperson. For matters concerning external and international communication, the Director of University Relations & Partnerships, will communicate on developments in the university requiring external communication or response. In this connection, Heads of Departments are expected to keep the two officials mentioned above informed on significant developments in the university.

AUDIENCES

The university has two types of audiences or publics: internal and external.

• **Internal audiences**

The internal audiences of the university are staff and students. Communication exchange (**Announcements posted within the University Premises, from outside) should get permission and approval from the office of the Director, Communication and Public Relations).**

- **External audiences**

The external audiences of the university include the Government of Rwanda, the Higher Education Council (HEC), the ministry of Education, collaborating institutions, suppliers, industry, donors, Internal development partners, parents or guardians, alumni, and the general public.

The mass media is one of the most sensitive and key audiences of the university because, if they carry clear information regarding the university, the university can better be understood.

TO THIS END, UOK COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE WILL SEEK TO:

- Provide accurate and objective information,

- Maintain an open-door policy culture,

- Package as newsworthy and current information coming from the University, and

- Monitor the media continuously.

TYPES AND METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

To maintain a good working environment for the realization of its vision and mission, the University of Kigali aims at facilitating efficient and effective internal communication to staff and students as well as to all its stakeholders.

In this respect, it will utilize, but not limited to utilizing, these three communication channels:

a) PRINT MEDIA: newspaper articles and supplements, Varsity Focus, fliers and ad-hoc publications; this written communication will remain a vital component of communication in the university.

b) BROADCAST: documentaries, podcasts, advertorials, interviews, and spots.

c) NEW MEDIA: web-based communication; controls on these will be professional at the level of content. These now include; Website, Social Media, Online TV, Blogs, etc

All communication should be done in English and should be devoid of slang, obscene, offensive or discriminatory remarks, ethnic slurs, or sexist innuendoes. At the same time, the university shall promote e-learning as an avenue for disseminating educational content.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Electronic communication

a) UoK web are the primary modes of electronic communication and constitute a key platform for external communication. The *Communication and Public Relations Office* has the overall editorial responsibility for the **university website.** The content of the university web pages should always be up-to-date, user-friendly and regulated to conform to the objectives of the organization. The content must meet the set standard for web publishing as defined in the University of Kigali ICT Policy

b) Further, every staff member is required to use UoK email address to communicate with external stakeholders. At the same time, the university shall encourage the generation of general podcasts and video clips, for marketing and enhancing its corporate image.

c) UoK will have official social media outlets including; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other blogging online avenues. The UoK Online Television will also be featured on the approved YouTube channels and its content must be well censored following the provisions dictated by this policy.

Meanwhile, access to information technology (IT) shall be made available to more staff to facilitate and easing the communication to the external stakeholders.

PUBLIC LECTURES

Public lectures are tools of delivery and engagement with external audiences. It is envisaged that the university shall continue to attract prominent personalities and international academics from within the UoK academic staff and beyond, wishing to interact and discourse with the university community. These engagements are critical to the enhancement of the image of the university.

MEETINGS

The university uses meetings—such as courtesy calls, meetings with collaborating institutions, staff meetings, and governance and management meetings—to communicate with stakeholders.

Given the importance of meetings for sharing of and passing on information, the university will regulate meetings to ensure that the agenda, lists of participants, timing, and minutes or records are available, as it is appropriate to good communication practice.

Where possible and appropriate, meetings should be covered through the existing communication channels.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The university shall encourage openness in internal communication and sharing of information unless the content is deemed likely to compromise the interests of the university.

Flow of information

The university shall encourage the use of communication channels that facilitate authentic dialogue and feedback.

Crisis communication

The university shall continue to proactively prevent events that are likely to lead to loss of stakeholder confidence and to take care of events stemming from rumours, speculation and insider lack of confidence that give the university negative publicity.

In these cases, appropriate crisis communication should enable the university to respond rapidly and effectively to potentially negative situations.

GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION:

➢ Only the Vice Chancellor or any authorized person shall give information to the media.

➢ The **University Communication and Public Relations Office** shall maintain regular contact with stakeholders and give advice where issues or developments appear to cause problems.

➢ The Communication and Public Relations office shall monitor **local and international news and events** and advise the Vice Chancellor on issues or events relevant to the university.

Crisis response

When a crisis occurs, the Vice Chancellor shall develop and advise on appropriate strategies to deal with the situation and communicate appropriate information to relevant stakeholders.

Releasing information to the media

The Vice Chancellor will release relevant, appropriate and verifiable information to the media regarding any crisis. The Vice Chancellor shall institute mechanisms to continually monitor media coverage and respond to accordingly.

University Advertising

Utilizing print, electronic and support media for corporate advertising, the university shall use corporate advertising to continually promote a positive image of and ensure observance of the best advertising principles and practices in the university.

The use of the university of Kigali name and logo in advertising by collaborating or any institutions without authority from the Vice Chancellor is prohibited and shall be subject to legal action.

The production of promotional university items or material shall at all times reflect the correct institutional name and logo. Where there are uncertainties, the concerned parties shall consult with the Vice Chancellor.

Branding

As it is the case of University of Kigali, branding is a powerful identity tool for any organization and should be clear to all its stakeholders. To maintain its strong brand, the University will use the correct logo, name and staff uniforms as well as the right fonts and color at all times to reflect the true identity to its stakeholders.

Responsibility

All staff are duty bound to make known the good name of the university, and all employees have a responsibility to demonstrate the institutional standards in communication

Staff

Members of staff shall:

a) Be aware of the communication policy and demonstrate the institutional standards in communication,

b) Demonstrate the principles of good practice,

c) Be responsible for ensuring that they communicate effectively and appropriately in line with the given standards of communication,

d) Be aware of the various methods of communication and utilize them appropriately in their work,

e) Tackle incidents of poor communication in proactive and constructive ways,

f) Ensure that information is shared appropriately and in a timely manner, and

g) Consider carefully feedback in situations where stakeholders constructively raise issues relating to poor or inappropriate communication, and adjust their communication style appropriately and timely.

SUPERVISORY AND MANAGEMENT STAFF

All the supervisory and managerial staff shall ensure that:

a) All staff members are sensitized on the Communication Policy,

b) Communication systems and processes actively support the vision and mission of the university,

c) They act as role models by leading by example and demonstrating good practice in all aspects of communication,

d) Effective, timely and appropriate feedback is provided to staff and students,

e) They reflect on communication standards and practices within their respective teams and identify opportunities for improvement,

f) They take action to ensure they are resolved amicably where staff and students raise issues of poor communication,

g) There is effective communication between the staff, students and other stakeholders,

h) They support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion, transparency and involvement of all concerned parties,

i) All staff members in their areas of responsibility have an understanding of the strategic direction of the institution, faculty and service departments,

and

j) There is consistency, equity and parity in communication processes across the university.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The University Communication Office shall:

- Develop appropriate strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Policy,
- Carry out annual evaluation on the implementation of the policy, and
- Define the short-term, mid-term and long-term interventions based on the outcomes of the evaluation reports.
- Shall liaise with the Center for Modern Languages to ensure that the English language which is applied in all sections mentioned in this policy are standardized and regulated.

REVIEW

To enhance uniformity with national and international higher education aims, this policy shall be **reviewed every three years in line with emerging global trends in communication.**