



OP 91.305 DOMESTIC TRAVEL BY STUDENTS

PURPOSE:

To promote the safety and well-being of Mississippi State University (MSU) undergraduate, graduate, and professional students by providing guidelines for student domestic travel to ensure an understanding of the standardized procedures student organizations should take before traveling domestically and the procedures MSU employees should take prior to requiring, sponsoring, or organizing domestic trips for students.

DEFINITIONS:

Student Travel – Student Travel is travel undertaken by one or more students currently enrolled at MSU to reach an activity or event organized and/or sponsored by MSU or to represent the University at an event or activity. By way of example only, the following is a non-exhaustive list of domestic travel that would fall under this policy as Student Travel:

- Travel partially or fully funded by MSU
- Travel required by a course or curriculum
- Travel organized by a University faculty or staff member within the scope of their University employment
- Travel in which a student uses a vehicle owned or leased by the University for transportation
- Travel to an academic or professional conference paid for with University funds
- Travel to conduct research which is organized by a University faculty or staff member within the scope of their University employment
- Travel for recreational sports club trips
- Travel to meetings of academic or professional organizations where a student is representing the University
- Travel to activities required or organized by a University recognized student organization

Domestic Travel – Travel that occurs entirely within the continental United States. Additional guidelines and procedures will apply to any travel occurring outside the continental United States and can be found by visiting <http://international.msstate.edu> and <http://travel.msstate.edu/international-travel>.

Event/Activity organized by MSU – An event/activity organized by MSU is one that is initiated, planned and organized by a University faculty or staff member or by a recognized student organization and approved in accordance with applicable University requirements by an appropriate administrator.

Event/Activity sponsored by MSU – An event/activity sponsored by MSU is one that the University sponsors by providing funding or sending students to represent the University.

Enrolled Student – An Enrolled Student is one who has been admitted to and is attending classes at the University. An Enrolled Student for purposes of this policy does not include Graduate Assistants, Graduate Teaching Assistants, or student workers when they are performing duties as part of their employment obligations.

Appropriate Administrator – An Appropriate Administrator is a dean, department chair, or director of an administrative unit, or their designee, who has the authority to approve an event or activity.

Representing the University – A student is representing the University when he/she is acting on behalf of or being a spokesperson for the University at an event or activity. Merely attending a conference or activity while a student does not rise to the level of representing the University, there must be some action undertaken as a representative (i.e., giving a presentation, serving as an officer, etc.).

POLICY:

1. Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the entity (e.g., University department, student organization, academic program, etc.) that requires, organizes or sponsors the student travel to have a monitoring process to ensure the procedures in this policy are followed.

2. Risk Management and Safety

When planning and participating in domestic student travel, it is crucial to identify and mitigate potential risks to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. The section outlines key risk areas and provides specific requirements that must be followed, along with references for additional resources. While the following covers many significant risks, it is not exhaustive, and organizers and participants should assess and plan for unique risks for each trip.

a. Travel Planning and Budgeting

- Detailed travel itineraries, including transportation, accommodations, and activity plans, should be developed prior to travel. Travel plans and expenses may require approval before travel per applicable University or departmental policy and procedures.
- An assessment of risk should be completed for all destinations and activities.
- Develop detailed travel budgets, including all anticipated costs, and identify who will pay such costs (i.e., department, student organization, students). Ensure availability of contingency funds for unexpected costs.

b. Transportation Safety

- Vehicles (Personal, University, or Rented)
 - i. All drivers who drive vehicles while engaged in travel covered by this policy must possess a valid U.S. driver's license and be trained and experienced with driving the vehicle.
 - ii. Personal vehicles utilized for travel covered by this policy must be insured and meet the minimum insurance requirements for the state of registration. Liability insurance and physical damage insurance are recommended for all rented vehicles when not driven by a University employee (employee drivers see [OP 62.01 Travel](#)).
 - iii. Drivers shall comply with all laws, regulations, and posted signs or directions regarding speed and traffic control.
 - iv. Drivers shall drive no more than four (4) continuous hours without a minimum rest stop of thirty (30) minutes. Drivers shall drive no more than ten (10) hours in any twenty-four (24) hour period. Trips requiring more than ten (10) hours of driving time shall include overnight lodging.
 - v. Drivers must not use a mobile device while transporting passengers.
 - vi. If more than one person is traveling, at least one passenger must always remain awake to assist the driver. This person's role is to maintain alertness and help with navigation and other tasks, ensuring the driver is not distracted.
 - vii. In the event of adverse weather or other factors that affect the ability to drive safely, Drivers should use good judgment and take appropriate safety measures in observance of travel warnings as issued by the highway safety authorities or weather advisory services.
 - viii. Ensure all vehicles are properly maintained and equipped with safety features.
- Utilization of University Vehicles must be in accordance with the University's Fleet Management Guidelines at <http://procurement.msstate.edu> and [OP 62.01 Travel](#).
- Personal safety requirements for drivers and passengers:
 - i. Seat Belts: Occupants of any motor vehicle shall use seat belts or other approved safety restraint devices as required by law or regulation.
 - ii. Alcohol and Illegal Substances: Motor vehicle occupants may not possess, consume, or transport alcoholic beverages or illegal substances.
 - iii. Capacity: Driver, passengers, and their luggage should not exceed the vehicle manufacturer's recommended capacity or federal or state law or regulations, whichever is lowest.
 - iv. If any passenger or driver observes concerning behaviors, they may request that travel be paused until the issue is resolved. Passengers or drivers have the right to remove themselves from situations where they feel unsafe due to the actions of others.
- Carpooling
 - i. While students may voluntarily elect to carpool utilizing personal vehicles in accordance with this policy.

- ii. Faculty or staff shall not organize student carpooling in any way, including assigning drivers or passengers.
- Charter Services
 - i. The use of chartered commercial transportation for travel is strongly encouraged due to the inherent risks of general automobile travel and the additional risks associated with transporting others in a personally owned vehicle.
 - ii. Use reputable and licensed transportation providers.
 - iii. Verify the safety record of bus charter service by checking their history via the Department of Transportation (DOT) at www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/passenger-safety/bus-safety-search
 - iv. Verify charter services have appropriate insurance.
 - v. Any charter service paid for with University funds must be contracted through Procurement Services.
 - vi. If using Air or Watercraft Charter Services, contact the Office of Compliance and Risk Management for additional guidance.
- c. Lodging
 - Select accommodations with good safety records and positive reviews.
 - Ensure lodging facilities comply with fire and safety regulations.
 - Choose accommodations that are in safe areas and provide adequate security measures.
 - When overnight accommodations are necessary, every reasonable effort should be made to respect the rights of privacy and adequate space needs of participants. Guidance on overnight accommodations and student travel is available at Mississippi State University Travel Services.
 - Faculty and staff may not share lodging with undergraduate or graduate students, and graduate students acting in their capacity as university employees (for example, as teaching assistants) may not share lodging with undergraduates they supervise or instruct. Employees may seek a waiver of these restrictions in advance of a trip by using the Lodging Waiver Form found at <https://www.travel.msstate.edu/forms/index.php>.
 - Lodging waivers will not be granted for sharing a single hotel room and will be granted only for good cause for sharing larger spaces such as rental houses. If you are uncertain whether your arrangement complies with these requirements, you should contact the Director of Federal Regulatory Compliance in the Office of Compliance and Risk Management at ocrm@msstate.edu before booking.
- d. Health and Medical Preparedness
 - Collect emergency contact details for all participants.
 - Ensure access to first aid kits and emergency medical supplies for trips traveling to remote areas or involving physical activities.
 - Identify local healthcare facilities when traveling for extended periods of time, participating in physical activities, or traveling to remote areas.

- e. Crime Prevention
 - Provide students with information on local crime risks and safety tips.
 - Implement buddy systems when possible to enhance personal security.
 - Encourage students to avoid risky areas and activities.
- f. Liability and Waivers
 - For trips that require participation in physical or high-risk activities, participants must sign liability waivers acknowledging the risks associated with travel. Sample liability waivers can be found at <http://legal.msstate.edu/legal/waivers.php>
- g. Insurance Coverage
 - When individuals use their own vehicles to transport themselves and/or others, they do so at their own risk. Students utilizing private vehicles are responsible for their own auto physical damage and liability insurance.
 - Students are not covered under any insurance policies while participating in domestic travel and should ensure appropriate health insurance coverage for trips.
- h. Field Research
 - Notify landowners and obtain permission before entering private property or restricted public lands.
 - Be aware of and prepared for potential wildlife encounters.
 - Carry communication devices suitable for location.
 - Develop and communicate an emergency response plan specific to the fieldwork location.
 - Ensure that all participants are trained to work safely in remote areas if applicable.

For more detailed guidance or resources, refer to the travel risk management webpage at ocrm.msstate.edu/travel

3. Billing/Finance

- a. If MSU funding is being used, students should secure funding prior to making any arrangements for travel and follow all the protocols associated with that funding source.

4. Student Conduct

- a. The Code of Student Conduct, OP 91.100, applies to all students while present on campus or at a University facility. It further applies to all student conduct that occurs in connection with a University program or activity, regardless of the location. Additionally, other federal laws and regulations, including Title IX, apply to University activities regardless of the location of those activities.

5. Emergency Response During Travel

In the event of a serious, on-going emergency, contact 9-1-1 or the nearest emergency service or law enforcement agency in the area in which you are located. When it is safe to do so, please also report the emergency to the University Police Department at 662-325-2121.

If you require other assistance from MSU during your travel, please contact the University Police Department at 662-325-2121 or email your request to studenttravel@msstate.edu. The University Police Department will be able to provide more immediate assistance to you by contacting the appropriate university official.

6. Travel Registration for Travel Outside the Local Area

To ensure that the University has the information necessary to respond in the event of a critical incident, student travel that exceeds twenty-five (25) miles from the University site where the student is currently enrolled must be registered in accordance with the guidelines provided by the university at studenttravel.msstate.edu. As part of this registration, the following information must be provided: the name and cell phone number for each student, an emergency contact name and number of each traveler, the purpose of the travel, the funding source for the travel, the name of the organization or person organizing the travel, the location or locations of the travel, the means of travel, the dates of travel, and the lodging arrangements for overnight travel.

EXCLUSIONS:

This policy does not apply to:

- Travel by NCAA athletic teams
- Travel to engage in student teaching, internships, clinical rotations, practicums, or co-ops, even if required by a course of study
- Travel to participate in observations or research, unless the research or observation is organized by a member of the faculty within the scope of their University employment

While this policy does not apply to the aforementioned types of travel, students engaged in those activities are encouraged to adhere to the Risk Management and Safety provisions and must comply with the processes and policies established by their respective departments. Furthermore, the Code of Student Conduct, Title IX, and other policies and procedures may apply to travel of this type.

REVIEW:

The Provost and Executive Vice President, the Vice President of Student Affairs and the University Risk and Compliance Office are responsible for the review of this policy every four years (or whenever circumstances require immediate review).

REVIEWED BY:

/s/ Joy Graves
Compliance & Risk Management Officer

07/10/2024
Date

/s/ David Shaw
Provost and Executive Vice President

07/11/2024
Date

/s/ Regina Hyatt
Vice President, Student Affairs

07/11/2024
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/s/ Tracey N. Baham
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07/16/2024
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/s/ Joan Lucas
General Counsel

07/16/2024
Date

APPROVED:

/s/ Mark E. Keenum
President

07/22/2024
Date