



Communication Policy

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Corporate Relations and Marketing

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Against the background of the dream to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care, the council of the North-West University has adopted this policy on 28 March 2018.

This policy replaces all previous versions of media and communication related policies that were followed by the NWU or any of its components.

1 Interpretation and application

1.1 This policy must be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with the –

- 1.1.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996;
- 1.1.2 Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997,
- 1.1.3 The Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2 of 2000 (PAIA) and
- 1.1.4 Statute of the North-West University (2017).

1.2 The following documents are integral components of this policy and must be read in conjunction with one another and with the paragraphs below:

- *NWU Media Protocol (Addendum 1)*
- *Crisis Communication Plan (Addendum 2)*
- *Social Media Framework (Addendum 3)*
- *Online Publications Framework (Addendum 4)*

2 Definitions

In this policy –

“**media contact**” includes the following activities involving the popular or “mass” media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, news websites, and social media platforms:

- providing information via media releases or statements
- letters to the editor of a publication
- responding to media enquiries by telephone or email
- conducting interviews
- arranging a briefing
- disclosing and discussing information on social media platforms
- media activities related to events
- releasing reports, and
- conducting a launch,

but excludes communication with scientific or academic journals and other publications.

“**proactive media contact**” means instances in which employees or a component of the university wish to obtain media coverage of a matter of public interest; and

“**reactive media contact**” means enquiries by members of the media on a university-related matter.

3 Policy statement

3.1 Orientation of media contact

In its media contact it is the policy of the NWU that –

- the overall strategy of the university and its current positioning goals be supported;
- the optimal relationships with the media, both in South Africa and internationally be maintained;
- the branding and promotion of the university's public image must facilitate its ability to be successful in its core business, and
- the university's relations with the media be managed to enhance its public image.

3.2 Principles of media contact

This policy is based on a number of fundamental principles, namely:

- respect for freedom of expression, a plurality of diverse views, academic freedom and critical thinking;
- rejection of any form of advocacy of discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other grounds of discrimination prohibited under South African law;
- prevention of incitement to violence, to cause harm and advocacy of hatred;
- encouragement of transparent contact with the media by internal stakeholders;
- recognition of the media as an important role-player in an increasingly competitive Higher Education (HE) sector generally, and in influencing public attitudes towards and perceptions of the NWU, in particular;
- acceptance of the increasing importance of the management of the flow of information and the optimisation of media relations in the ever-changing, technology-driven and instant communication society as a challenging aspect of advancing the university;
- honest, open, timely and accurate communication;
- the building of sound, irreproachable interpersonal relationships with members of the media;
- professionally accountable facilitation of the promotion and positioning of the NWU and its achievements in the public domain;
- presentation in a consistent, accurate and professional manner of the dissemination of current, informative and engaging material

3.3 First point of referral

- The Director: Corporate Communication (*'the director'*) is the first point of referral for all enquiries from the media concerning institutional, strategic and university policy matters.
- As a general principle employees and students of the university are required to refer media enquiries about institutional, strategic and university policy matters to the office of the director.

4 Official spokespersons and approved media liaison staff

4.1 Categories of media liaison

4.1.1 The respective media liaison officials of the university are responsible for media liaison in the following categories:

- institutional/strategic/university policy matters
- university operational matters
- campus matters
- faculty matters
- academic/research/discipline-specific matters
- student matters.

4.1.2 In circumstances determined by the university management committee (UMC), the Crisis Communication Plan (Addendum 2) is implemented.

4.1.3 In the event of managing a crisis, all internal role-players must be sensitised to be mindful of broadcasting views that could be misinterpreted or sensationalised by the media.

4.2 Mandated spokespersons

Taking into account the roles and responsibilities set out in 4 below, the mandated spokespersons of the NWU are the following:

4.2.1 For institutional, strategic and university policy matters:

- The vice-chancellor (VC) is the lead media spokesperson of the university, but the VC may nominate or appoint another person to serve as spokesperson in a particular instance
- The chairperson of the council of the NWU
- The executive director: corporate relations and marketing (EDCRM)
- The director, who may nominate or appoint another person to serve as spokesperson in a particular instance

4.2.2 For operational matters, the relevant member of the UMC, who may nominate or appoint another person to serve as spokesperson in a particular instance.

4.2.3 For campus specific matters, the campus deputy vice-chancellor operations (CDVC) concerned.

4.2.4 For faculty matters, the executive dean concerned.

4.2.5 For academic and discipline-specific matters, the relevant expert topic-specific academic employee.

4.2.6 For general or institutional enquiries on student matters, the executive director: student life, who may nominate or appoint another person to serve as spokesperson in a particular instance.

For specific student matters, the SRC chairperson or the appointed SRC spokesperson.

5 Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Chairperson of the council

The chairperson of the council is the official spokesperson of the NWU on all council-related matters, but in the event of the chairperson's absence or incapacity, or at the request of the chairperson, the vice-chancellor may perform this function.

5.2 VC and members of the UMC

5.2.1 In all but council-related matters the VC is the primary spokesperson of the NWU, but in the event of the VC's absence or incapacity the director may perform this function.

5.2.2 Members of the UMC form a second tier of respondents to engage with the media on matters related to their respective portfolios.

5.3 Director: Corporate Communication

5.3.1 The director is responsible for implementing the NWU media strategy under the guidance of the Executive Director: Corporate Relations and Marketing.

5.3.2 The director must channel media enquiries to the appropriate spokesperson and monitor whether the matter receives the required attention.

5.3.3 The director is responsible for media monitoring across the university.

5.4 Campus DVC's Operations

A CDVC is the official spokesperson on campus specific matters.

5.5 Academic experts

5.5.1 The academic employees of the university must be encouraged to engage in public debate and to provide expert commentary on matters falling within their area of expertise.

5.5.2 The director must capture the details of academic employees in a list of experts, which may be provided to the media who wish to promote their media exposure.

5.5.3 For the purposes of ensuring effective coverage and the limitation of possible negative publicity, the director must provide advice to academic employees regarding the release of controversial information that may reflect on the university

5.6 Complaints to the Press Ombudsman

Only the EDCRM may, after consultation with the office of the vice-chancellor and the university's legal services department, lodge a complaint with the Press Ombudsman on behalf of the university.

6 Scope of application

- 6.1 This policy applies to official interaction with the media by all components, employees and students of the university.
- 6.2 Instances of disclosures (or “whistle-blowing”) protected by legislation are not subject to this policy.

NWU Media Protocol

1 Individual interaction with the media

- 1.1 The university does not constrain employees and students to hold, share, impart or receive any particular views, beliefs, thoughts, opinions or information.
- 1.2 Academic employees of the university must be encouraged to freely comment on their respective fields of expertise and to share relevant information with the media.
- 1.3 Information provided to the media by employees or students may not undermine the professional trust relationship between them and the university or breach any confidentiality agreements that might harm the university or negatively impact on the functioning or brand of the university.
- 1.4 When employees and students put forward information in any form to the public media, they must make it clear whether they do so in an official capacity as spokesperson of any component of the university, as a discipline-specific academic expert, or in their private capacity.
- 1.5 In the event of any crisis only individuals authorised to do so in accordance with the Crisis Communication Plan (Addendum 2) may communicate with the media

2 Communication on sensitive matters

Employees and students of the university must bring any sensitive emerging issue of potential media or public interest related to the university to the attention of the director, who must then in consultation with the vice-chancellor, develop a media response.

3 Media training

- 3.1 The director must provide assistance to employees and students of the university related to interaction with and management of the media, including assistance with preparation for media interviews through briefings, guidance and support in attending to enquiries from the media, and the drafting of media releases.
- 3.2 The director must annually arrange media training opportunities for all topic-specific experts of the university aimed at developing skills in this area.

4 Media engagement

When an issue of public interest relating to the university arises, the director must assess the potential level of public interest and journalistic value (“newsworthiness”) of the matter, and if it is found that pro-active media engagement is required, the following must be taken into consideration:

- 4.1 The media is fully entitled to information and dealing with the media warrants the same level of professional courtesy and respect as interaction with any other stakeholder of the university.
- 4.2 Media representatives are usually operating under time pressure requiring quick response times.
- 4.3 All information that is provided to the media must be truthful, accurate, unambiguous, clear and factual, avoiding subjective contributions.
- 4.4 When commenting on matters of public interest concerning the university, disparaging comments on other organisations, groups or individuals may not be made.
- 4.5 Expert comment and research-based findings of employees and students of the university may involve comments on the positions taken by and findings of other organisations, groups or individuals.
- 4.6 The director must log all media enquiries and the university’s responses thereto.

5 Media monitoring

- 5.1 The director is responsible for ensuring that a media monitoring service is in place to monitor the news coverage relating to the university and to assist in managing the reputation of the university.
- 5.2 When employees and students have direct interaction with the media, the director must be informed thereof in order facilitate keeping track of the outcome and its correctness.

6 Confidentiality

- 6.1 Except for the official spokespersons of the university, the personal and contact details of council members, functionaries, employees and students of the university may not be provided to the media without explicit prior consent granted by the person concerned.
- 6.2 The release of any information regarding the employees of the university must be managed consistently with the university's policies on 'people and culture' and confidentiality.

7 Discretion

Proper consideration must always be given to the sensitivities and potential for causing offence when discussing the topics of religion, politics or any other controversial issues that may provoke a charged, emotional response.

8 Guidelines for publishing and commenting on media platforms

- 8.1 Employees and students are entitled to the support and protection of the director when engaging with the media as expert commentators.
- 8.2 Anyone approached by a journalist for a quotation must, where possible, obtain the request in writing, provide the response in writing, and ask to be given the opportunity to review the quotation prior to its publication.
- 8.3 In their engagement with the media, employees and students must take care not to comment on anything that is designed to bring the university into disrepute.

9 Guidelines for engaging with the media

When engaging in media interviews or making media statements, spokespersons, employees and students must refrain from:

- 9.1 using profane or offensive language or content;
- 9.2 engaging in a topic that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other grounds protected under South African equal opportunity legislation;
- 9.3 constructing content or drafting a posting or using material that is, or might be construed as threatening, defamatory, harassing, bullying or discriminatory towards any stakeholder of the university;
- 9.4 accepting or making solicitations of commerce;
- 9.5 engaging in conduct or encouragement of any illegal activity;
- 9.6 submitting information that might compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- 9.7 using content that violates a legal ownership interest of any person, including breach of copyright or intellectual property rights;
- 9.8 disclosing any confidential or personal information obtained in their capacity as an employee of the university;
- 9.9 use the name of the university, crest or logo without first obtaining prior approval from the Director: Marketing and Student Recruitment, and
- 9.10 using content that is either misleading or deceptive.

10 Guidelines for seeking media coverage

- 10.1 The director must assist employees and students who wish to obtain publicity or media exposure for their scholarly work, including the drafting a media release, pitching coverage of particular events and arranging news conferences.
- 10.2 Any component of the university that wishes to make a media release is entitled to obtain the assistance of the director for the editing of the release.
- 10.3 Media statements must be prepared in the following standard format:
 - the corporate NWU logo
 - date of release
 - heading (or title of the statement)
 - release instructions – for immediate publication or embargoed (in which instance, the date and time when it can be made known to the public is stipulated)
 - the contents of the release (if possible, a maximum of 800 words)
 - further enquiries – stating the name and contact detail of the media liaison person and/or expert that can assist with more information

11 Guidelines for visiting journalists, photographers and film crews

- 11.1 Although the university welcomes visits by journalists, news photographers, videographers and broadcasters, permission to shoot in both interior spaces and outdoor university facilities is required for all types of photography (stills, video and film).
- 11.2 In the event that a member of the media requests permission to interview staff or students, take photographs or to film inside the university's facilities/business units for the sake of obtaining news content or for compiling a documentary, the request must be referred to the director for authorisation, and if granted, Protection Services must be informed.
- 11.3 The authorisation contemplated in 11.2 to photograph or film may be considered by the director based on the submission of a letter of intent, indicating the relevant information, for instance the requested location, dates, times, duration and number of people and vehicles to be involved in the proposed project, a list of university-related materials that will be utilised, as well as a description of the project and its intended use.
- 11.4 Anyone who wishes to use the name of the university, nicknames, building or unit names when filming, videotaping or photographing the university's campuses for commercial or entertainment purposes may only do so with the prior written approval of the director.
- 11.5 Should a journalist, reporter or camera crew show up unannounced at any facility of the university or during a newsworthy crisis situation, the director must be informed without any delay to assist in managing the situation in accordance with the guidelines in 11.6.
- 11.6 The following guidelines apply when journalists, television camera crews or print photographers show up unannounced at any facility of the university or during a newsworthy crisis situation:
 - While the media cannot be prevented from interviewing any individual, photographing or filming the exterior of the university's facilities, the applicable news room or editors must be contacted for clarification of the purpose of their visit.
 - The media may not enter any facility to photograph or film without permission.
 - The media may not block the entrance to any facility of the university or prevent people from entering such facility or conducting university business as usual and the university may inform the media if any stakeholder of the university should complain about the inconvenience caused by the activities of the media

Crisis Communication Plan

1 Principles of crisis communication

In the event of an occurrence that causes significant disturbance in the university's activities which has the potential of causing long-term reputational damage, crisis communication in accordance with the following principles is required:

- 1.1 Whenever possible, crisis communication must be undertaken pre-emptively in order to prevent or minimise a crisis.
- 1.2 Crisis communication must be open, accountable and accessible to all audiences, keeping in mind all legal and privacy concerns.
- 1.3 Speedy, pro-active and regular communication of crisis information must be maintained as circumstances change.
- 1.4 Relevant crisis information concerning all affected components of the university must be made available to all concerned.
- 1.5 In view of the importance of the media in times of crisis due to their role in informing the general public, effective relationships with media must be maintained.
- 1.6 Taking into account that different media are relevant for different stakeholders, all the different traditional and new media channels must be used to communicate with stakeholders.

2 The nature of crises

2.1 Crises contemplated in this plan include:

- fires;
- health issues/medical crises/pandemics;
- bomb threats;
- natural disasters, e.g. floods, earthquakes, etc.;
- major crimes;
- chemical explosions;
- toxic leaks;
- terrorist attacks;
- extreme weather;
- energy blackouts;
- road crash/plane crash involving students/staff;
- occupation of buildings;
- hostage-taking/kidnapping, and
- protest or unrest related incidents.

2.2 The arising of controversial issues such as police investigations involving the university or other situations that demand a response may also constitute a crisis.

2.3 For the purposes of this plan, crises are placed in the following categories:

- **Sudden, immediate or unforeseen crises** such as a large fire or flood, riot, or meningitis outbreak.
- **Foreseeable or smouldering crises**, being an ongoing, festering crisis that begins small and grows larger as more information becomes known, such as ongoing racial conflict, sexual harassment or lawsuits, and
- **bizarre crises**, being unusual, unexpected crises that do not fit into the above categories, such as incidents caused by a serial killer or rapist.

3 Crisis communication teams

3.1 The university's core crisis communication team (CCCT) is managed by the vice-chancellor and is composed of the –

- chairperson of the council

- vice-chancellor
- executive director: corporate relations and marketing(CRM)
- director: protection services
- executive director: student life (if the crisis involves students)

3.2 When necessary the following additional members may be added to the CCCT to form an extended crisis communication task team (ECCTT) to formulate responses to a crisis:

- the director
- the relevant communication officials
- officials from other departments

3.3 Every campus' core crisis communication team is managed by the campus deputy vice-chancellor (CDVC) and is composed of the –

- CDVC
- head of protection services
- director
- director of student life (if the crisis involves students)

3.4 When necessary the following additional members may be added to a campus CCCT to form a campus ECCTT to formulate responses to a crisis:

- the relevant communication officials
- officials from other departments

3.5 The responsibilities of a CCCT are to identify and assess a crisis, to decide on the activation of this crisis communication plan, and to devise a strategy to address the crisis.

3.6 The responsibilities of an ECCTT are to formulate a response based on the strategy devised by the relevant CCCT and to distribute the response to the relevant stakeholder groups.

4 Considerations relating to the implementation of this plan

4.1 The primary consideration is to ensure the safety of all the employees and students of the university and to protect the integrity and reputation of the university in any crisis.

4.2 This plan must be implemented in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the university and does not substitute that decision-making process.

4.3 This plan must be used in conjunction with the university's disaster management plans and other operational crisis response plans managed by other components of the university.

4.4 All crises must be reported to the CCCT.

4.5 When the CCCT activates this plan, the entire university community must be aware of the plan and of the roles everyone plays in its execution.

The campus CCCT's must, with the assistance of the director, immediately inform one another as soon as a crisis arises.

5 Procedure for the management of crisis communication

The following steps must be taken to effectively manage crisis communication by the university:

STEP 1. Anticipate and prepare for a crisis before it happens

STEP 2. Identify, assess and report a crisis

STEP 3. Respond to a crisis

STEP 4. Take action

STEP 5. After crisis evaluation

5.1 Step 1: Anticipate and prepare for a crisis before it happens

University officials must periodically assess crisis risks and anticipate the possible crises that may occur, taking into account the risk assessment register of the NWU, anticipating worst case scenarios of all possible crises, and be prepared for the possible reaction of stakeholders to news of a crisis.

The following points for the preparation for a crisis must be considered:

5.1.1 Prepare checklists for the university community

Provide students and staff with preparation checklists as a precautionary tool. As an example, an evacuation plan could assist the NWU community during a crisis.

5.1.2 Maintain regular contact, open discussion and good working relationships

CRM should maintain regular contact and good working relationships with management, employees of the university and students, advising the appropriate persons when internal issues or developments appear likely to lead to public relations problems. Similarly, employees, students and other stakeholders should regularly notify CRM of internal developments that may escalate into crises.

5.1.3 Monitor the media

CRM must monitor all media channels with regard to local, provincial and national news coverage of higher education, advising the appropriate person(s) of issues and/or trends that might lead to negative stories.

5.1.4 Keep an up-to-date media list

5.1.5 Compile a Crisis Kit

5.2 Step 2: Identify, assess and report a crisis

5.2.1 If any employee or student believes a crisis is pending or is under way, it must immediately be reported to the relevant CCCT, upon which the relevant official must collect as much accurate information as possible, gathered from appropriate and credible sources.

5.2.2 Based on a proper assessment of the nature and scope of the situation, the CCCT concerned must make a decision regarding the severity of the situation and make one of two choices:

- devise and implement a strategy to deflate the situation or
- immediately convene the relevant ECCTT and confer with them regarding the nature and severity of the crisis.

5.3 Step 3: Respond to a crisis

5.3.1 In the case of a **smouldering crisis** the CCCT concerned must devise a simple strategy to forestall the crisis, and if needed, the CCCT must, upon approval by the vice-chancellor or CDVC concerned, implement the strategy forthwith.

5.3.2 If the nature of the crisis concerns issues and events require input from several components of the university, or if a simple strategy is not likely to be effective, the ECCTT concerned must convene.

5.3.3 If the CCCT concerned is of the opinion that a potential crisis or controversy is **not an immediate emergency**, it must prepare a communications strategy as part of a coordinated university response.

5.3.4 In the case of an **immediate and unforeseen crisis**:

- The CCCT concerned must, after assessing the seriousness of the situation, officially declare a state of emergency and develop a communication strategy, typically involving a short and simple first statement –
 - acknowledging the crisis
 - stating facts surrounding the crisis, and
 - providing contact details for further enquiries
- The first statement must be disseminated to university management, employees, students as well as other stakeholders such as the media via all available media channels, as soon as possible.
- In an emergency, the first communication to key university audiences should ideally happen within 30 minutes of notification of the event, with regular updates afterwards.
- If the nature of the emergency or crisis is such that it is not possible for the CCCT concerned to convene or make timeous decisions, the executive director: CRM may, in consultation with the vice-chancellor, begin taking action pending decisions of the CCCT regarding the approval or adjustment of such action.
- Additional, off-site venues should be identified in advance to provide for circumstances where members of the CCCT or the ECCTT concerned cannot operate from their usual working environment,

and such venues must have all possible facilities and resources necessary to allow members of the different teams to conduct their work uninterrupted, offline and away from their usual offices.

5.4 Step 4: Take action

In the event of a sudden crisis, the CCCT concerned must be convened within two hours, and if all its members cannot attend immediately, the available members may proceed with actions designed to use the available time optimally. The **following actions must be taken**:

5.4.1 **Firstly the safety** of students, employees and nearby residents must be ensured immediately and the activation of all applicable safety plans and safety measures should be carried out immediately.

5.4.2 **Once the CCCT has devised a strategy and way forward, the relevant ECCTT must be informed to take action.**

5.4.3 Designate a spokesperson

- As far as possible only one spokesperson must be designated so that the university provides a unified, consistent message to the public.
- In cases of a significant crisis, the vice-chancellor or CDVC concerned, or the highest ranking university official available must take the lead in conveying the university's response to the crisis, and otherwise the director must perform this function.
- The spokesperson must work closely with the official that has the most direct knowledge of the crisis, for example the director: protection services.
- The spokesperson must be kept informed of the latest developments and must be assigned one or more communication officers to provide assistance.
- The spokesperson and assistants must be kept abreast of the most current and critical information and developments, and they must therefore connect with information providers on the ground, such as emergency personnel, police, provincial officials and campus administrators, and maintain contact and good relations with them for the duration of the crisis.

5.4.4 Identify key NWU stakeholders/target audiences

Determine which of the university's internal and external stakeholders need to be informed of the situation and in what order.

The internal stakeholders are:

- Students and their parents
- Employees
- Members of the council

The external stakeholders include:

- The media
- Alumni
- Community leaders
- Government departments concerned
- Relevant business interests
- Sponsors
- Funders
- Local law enforcement
- The local communities
- The municipality concerned

5.4.5 **Assign people to each target audience to take responsibility** for directing the right messages to a specific audience and for the dissemination of statements and press releases to the stakeholders concerned. Messages must be delivered repeatedly and clearly and by one voice and the channels used to communicate with each audience may be different, so each team member must develop detailed plans and checklists to reach the designated audience, including –

- handling phone calls, using a script developed from the key messages and facts the ECCTT concerned may provide;
- reaching out to other components of the university that handle multiple calls during a crisis, such as the switchboard operators and student administration;
- monitoring and updating the recorded message on the university's hotline(s), and managing it with a scheduled update timetable;
- identifying and dispelling rumours while keeping abreast with the prevalence of false rumours in order to be able to forward information to spokespersons to dispel the rumours publicly;

- maintaining a separate log to record all calls and interview requests from members of the media, ensuring that all calls are returned by the relevant people.
- 5.4.6 **Write press releases** for different audiences and media and submit it for approval to the executive director: CRM.
- 5.4.7 **Identify which mediums are available** to communicate the message to each audience in accordance with a list of all stakeholder and proposed channels for each provided by the director.
- 5.4.8 **Coordinate the communication with the legal advisors of the university** in order to allow for the release of as much information as possible without jeopardising any possible investigations or potential litigation.
- 5.4.9 **Allocate tasks** to perform the following functions:
- maintaining meeting notes, to-do lists, information files on the ongoing crisis and other items by a secretary;
 - web coordination to oversee all web changes and regular updates in consultation with the Information Technology Department;
 - media monitoring to study all media coverage and anticipate any problems in the way information is flowing to the news media, providing daily summaries of relevant media coverage to the UMC and the CCCT.
- 5.4.10 **Establish and communicate a clear line of communication**
- The CCCT or ECCTT concerned must, as a first priority, disseminate a notice to all employees and students identifying the lines of communication with internal and external target audiences, clearly indicating –
- who are authorised to gather and verify information
 - where new and critical information must be forwarded to
 - who are authorised to release information
 - where media enquiries must be directed
 - where public enquiries must be directed
 - the People and Culture contact for employee enquiries
 - the Student Life contact details for student enquiries
- 5.4.11 **Gather as many details as possible surrounding the crisis.**
- 5.4.12 **Develop and maintaining a fact sheet highlighting all known detail surrounding the crisis.**
- 5.4.13 **Develop several key messages for each of the NWU stakeholders.** Messages must –
- be clear and simple for its stakeholders and the media
 - demonstrate concern about what is happening and for the people involved
 - explain what the university is doing to solve the problem
 - evolve as circumstances change but must always aim to restore and maintain confidence and calm, balancing a sense of concern with resolve and action.
- 5.4.14 **Draft follow-up statements** as more significant information becomes available after discussion of the situation, anticipation of outcomes and exploring the university's view on the potential crisis in order to remain proactive and dispel the development of rumours and speculation.
- 5.4.15 **Follow-up statements must be used in response to media enquiries.**
- 5.4.16 **Prepare standby statements** according to the unfolding of events, and prepare background information for the media. Statements must be factual, not be speculative and would typically include:
- facts surrounding the crisis
 - the university's stand in response to the crisis
 - what the university recommends the audience to do or not to do
 - confirmation of who the official spokesperson is
 - contact details for media enquiries.
- 5.4.17 **The statement must be disseminated as soon as possible** to university management, employees, students and other stakeholders via various communication channels, and follow-up statements must be sent out to university stakeholders by the ECCTT concerned once they are in operation. An ECCTT must keep the following in mind:
- **Control the flow of information**

The ECCTT should control the flow of information by holding a series of press briefings for the media – weekly, daily or hourly, depending on the nature of the crisis to enable the university to operate in a proactive manner, while providing the media with a timetable for when they can expect an update.

- **Control the message**

The university should stick to the facts and to its main messages, thus controlling what information is disseminated. This information should be completely truthful and forthcoming. All "bad" news should be told up-front and all at once in order to prevent it to trickle out slowly leading to protracted negative media coverage.

- **Release information first internally**

Whenever practical, the ECCTT concerned should attempt to inform employees and students of crises before details are released externally. If needed, a public forum should be scheduled to communicate details of the incident and events to all interested members of the university community. The timeliness of this meeting is critical and every effort should be made to see that it occurs within three workdays from the occurrence of the crisis.

- **Respond to the media quickly and fairly**

The media provides a way for the university to get its message to the public. The media will also shape public opinion about how the university is responding to the crisis, and it is therefore important to cooperate with the media, to be sensitive to media deadlines and to provide all reporters with the same, not exclusive, information.

- **Determine whether a news conference is an appropriate means of conveying information to employees, students, the media, public and other stakeholders. If so, it may become necessary to schedule periodic news briefings.**
- **Distribute press releases and statements to the news media as rapidly as possible.**

5.4.18 **Recommend strategies for internal and external communication.** Final approval of the recommendations by the team will rest with the vice-chancellor or relevant CDVC.

5.4.19 **Activate the crisis hotline number.** The ECCTT must activate a crisis hotline number that can be updated to include a specific message or to take calls from concerned stakeholders, such as parents and students. This number should also be publicised in the event of a crisis.

5.4.20 **Develop a plan to assist those who have been affected** by considering what the university can do to help with for instance grief counselling, mental health services, support groups, memorial services, safety seminars, distribution of safety tips, and hotline numbers that provide information to family members.

5.4.21 **Provide guidance to the public.** If the crisis involves a health risk, university officials should research the risk and offer guidance to the public about symptoms, treatments and encourage them to contact physicians. If the crisis involves a possible evacuation, university officials should in conjunction with local authorities, inform the public about areas to be evacuated and time lines for the evacuations. The university should also direct the public on where to go for more information - hot line numbers, web sites etc.

5.4.22 **Implement, evaluate its effectiveness and update the plan continuously.**

5.5 Step 5: After crisis evaluation

5.5.1 The CCCT concerned must determine when a crisis has ended and routine communications processes may be resumed.

5.5.2 The decision to declare the end of a crisis triggers a review of the manner in which the crisis was handled and how crisis communication may be improved.

5.5.3 The following steps must be included in the evaluation:

- **Secure loose ends:** the resolution of the crisis must be communicated appropriately to the audiences concerned. If changed, voice mail and web site must be updated and all media contacts must be double-checked for completed interaction.
- **People and Culture must determine the needs of employees and students** who may have been personally affected by the crisis such as assistance of victims and provision of or referral to available support services. Following any crisis, appropriate action must take place to ensure that members of the university community receive needed information and assistance to help bring closure to the crisis as well as relief from the effects of the event. The possibility of helping the community recover, to return to normal and, if needed, to regain faith in the university after the crisis is over must be considered.

- **Recognising the heroes.** The CCCT must work with employees to determine the best and most appropriate means of recognising the 'heroes' involved in the situation.
- **Evaluate.** The CCCT must meet within 10 days following a crisis and review all actions taken as a result of the crisis to determine effectiveness and efficiency of operations and make any necessary changes to this plan.
- **View or read media coverage.** The media coverage of the crisis must be reviewed to determine how each of the university's actions was covered by the press in order to improve media strategies. Assigned role players who documented and monitored the news coverage surrounding a crisis, including internet publicity, newspaper articles, radio and television broadcasts and social media must supply the CCCT with a summary of news coverage, and the CCCT must note:
 - overall success or failure of the crisis communication effort
 - problems to be avoided in the future
 - appropriate follow-up measures
- **Thank parties involved.** Depending upon the nature of the crisis, services and assistance may have been rendered by agencies, companies or individuals from outside the university, and the director must ensure that applicable follow-up information and letters of appreciation are forwarded to the persons and institutions concerned.

6 Availability and review of this plan

- 6.1 This plan must be made available to internal and external stakeholders.
- 6.2 This plan must be tested, evaluated and updated at least once a year by the director to ensure understanding of and commitment by all role-players to their responsibilities

Social Media Framework

1 Framework Statement

- 1.1 The NWU recognises the importance and benefits of communicating through social media as a powerful vehicle for the communication of relevant news to the university community, to listen to the voices of students and employees, to connect with its audience online, as an important tool for branding and promoting the public image of the university, and to build goodwill.
- 1.2 The university encourages the use of social media by its students and employees while accepting the responsibility to limit and avoid the significant risks involved to the privacy, security and reputation of NWU, its entities, employees and students wherever possible.
- 1.3 The university's communication through social media must comply with its duty to protect and advance the values of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and its own values of human dignity, equality, freedom, integrity, tolerance, respect, commitment to excellence, scholarly engagement, academic freedom, freedom of scientific research and freedom of expression and justice.
- 1.4 This framework as part of the communication policy contains the minimum standards and guidelines that must be followed by NWU entities, employees and students participating on approved social media platforms on behalf of the university and on private or individual social media accounts in communications implicating the university.

2 Definitions

In this framework -

“NWU entity” is a faculty, department, school, centre, division, group, unit, office, service, centre, or other organisational entity of the university or an official grouping of employees or students.

“Official NWU Social Media Accounts” means alloficial NWU social media accounts, accounts purporting to represent the university or any NWU entity, and accounts bearing the brand identity of NWU.

“Social Media” is any facility for online publication and commentary, including, without limitation, blogs, wikis and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and any other form of communication that may now or in the future be classified or generally regarded as social media.

“The Digital Media Forum” (DMF) means a forum established to assist employees and students with matters related to social media interaction relevant to the university, including assistance with account set-up, best practices guidance and support in attending to enquiries.

3 Rules of official NWU Social Media Engagement

3.1 Creating official NWU social media accounts

- 3.1.1 Only persons with social media accounts registered with the NWU Digital Media Forum may use social media to interact, engage or comment in the name of the university.
- 3.1.2 A comprehensive online directory of all official NWU social media accounts must be made available by the director on <http://www.nwu.ac.za/connect> .
- 3.1.3 Employees and students with responsibilities of administering official NWU social media accounts must make themselves known to the DMF, whose members may also be included as administrators for emergency posts and social media audit purposes.
- 3.1.4 Accounts in the name of a recognised NWU entity may only be established if:
 - 3.1.4.1 The requisite authorisation from the executive dean (in the case of faculties) or the executive director or DVC (in the case of support departments) to represent that particular entity has been obtained;
 - 3.1.4.2 A “Social Media Establishment” form made available by the DMF has been completed, and
 - 3.1.4.3 The DMF has granted clearance.
- 3.1.5 3.1.5 All official NWU social media accounts must adhere strictly to the NWU's corporate identity guidelines as per NWU's Corporate Identity (CID) Manual and must include the name “NWU” in the account name.

- 3.1.6 The university reserves the right to request the removal of its name, symbol or any registered trademarks from any social media accounts.
- 3.1.7 Unless otherwise directed by the DMF, anyone setting up an official NWU social media account is required to use the following wording in the “About us” or similar section of the account:

The opinions expressed by individuals on this social media account are not official statements or opinions of the NWU. The NWU reserves the right to remove members or comments that contradict the values of the NWU or that are detrimental to the good name, order, discipline or performance of the work of the University or of any part of the University, including any office bearer, supporter, member or employee or student thereof.

- 3.1.8 Social media activities may not interfere with employment or educational commitments to the university.

3.2 Official Spokespersons

- 3.2.1 Only the mandated spokespersons of the NWU (paragraph 4.2 of the Communication Policy) or their duly appointed nominees are authorised to communicate in the social media on behalf of the university.
- 3.2.2 Employees and students of the university who see a post that they think requires, or would benefit from, an official response, must be encouraged to inform the director about it, where possible accompanied by a screenshot of and link to the relevant content.
- 3.2.3 Comments and posts made by mandated spokespersons on behalf of NWU must be for the sole purpose of:
- 3.2.3.1 Advancing or articulating the official position of the university on a particular subject;
 - 3.2.3.2 Marketing and promoting the university;
 - 3.2.3.3 Conveying critical information during crisis situations; or
 - 3.2.3.4 Engaging one-on-one with students, in order to improve the student experience.
- 3.2.4 The use of social media, whether using an NWU account or otherwise for official communication purposes forms part of the university’s communications strategy and must comply with this Communication Policy and all its Addenda.
- 3.2.5 Official spokespersons are personally responsible for communications made by them on social media.

3.3 Monitoring of official NWU social media accounts

- 3.3.1 By completing the Social Media Establishment form referred to in 3.1.4.2 above, the applicant enters into an agreement with the university to adhere fully to university’s requirements for official social media accounts.
- 3.3.2 The university reserves the right to monitor any online activity relating to the official NWU social media accounts and to remove inappropriate posts and material that contravenes this policy, or to block disruptive users and to require a student or employee to do so.
- 3.3.3 The university reserves the right to edit or amend any misleading or inaccurate online content regarding anything concerning the university or the NWU brand.
- 3.3.4 Non-compliance with the agreement referred to in 3.3.1 above allows the university to terminate the account and to take disciplinary action.

3.4 Content which is prohibited from being published on or via official NWU social media accounts

The following content may not be published on or via any official NWU social media account:

- 3.4.1 content that is defamatory, harassing, threatening, abusive, discriminatory, racist, sexist, homophobic or that would otherwise constitute hate speech;
- 3.4.2 disparaging comments about the university or a stakeholder of the university;
- 3.4.3 content that is illegal;
- 3.4.4 content that contravenes any policy of the university;

- 3.4.5 foul language or language that contravenes the language policy of the university;
- 3.4.6 content that is pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd or suggestive;
- 3.4.7 content that infringes on anyone's intellectual property rights;
- 3.4.8 false or fraudulent information;
- 3.4.9 content that is invasive of anyone's privacy, including proprietary information and unauthorised disclosure of any form of personal information;
- 3.4.10 any other content that may reasonably be considered objectionable by the relevant NWU entity or the relevant social media account manager.

3.5 Best Practice Guidelines

The annexure to this framework, which may from time to time be updated by the director, provides best practice guidelines for social media engagement and must be borne in mind in the management of official NWU social media accounts.

4 Rules for the use of personal or private social media accounts affecting the NWU

4.1 General principles

Employees and students of the university and organisations that work in partnership with the NWU may not bring the name of NWU into disrepute through their conduct on social media, and must therefore keep in mind that –

- 4.1.1 all contractual obligations, as well as the obligations incurred in terms of the policies of the university apply equally to conduct on social media;
- 4.1.2 in the social media one's affiliation with the NWU is easily identified, known or presumed and one's online content is therefore readily associated with NWU;
- 4.1.3 content which is prohibited in terms of 3.4 above on official NWU social media accounts is also unlawful in private communications, and
- 4.1.4 communication on social media is no different from other forms of communication where sound judgment, common sense, and integrity is called for.

4.2 Specific principles governing NWU Employees

- 4.2.1 As soon as an employee leaves the employ of the university, such person must remove all social media references to the NWU as current employer.
- 4.2.2 Academic employees and topic experts wishing to provide commentary within their area of expertise on social media –
 - 4.2.2.1 must be encouraged to engage in public debate and to provide commentary within their area of expertise, but
 - 4.2.2.2 notwithstanding their right to express their academic views without restriction, must, where the discussion, publication of findings or making of announcements may generate robust debate or interaction which may directly reflect on the university, be encouraged to liaise with the director first, in order to ensure effective coverage and to anticipate the type of publicity likely to result.

Annexure to the Social Media Policy

Best Practice Guidelines for Social Media Engagement

1 Create a social media strategy:

Before engaging on social media, it is advisable to answer the following questions:

- a. **What would you like to accomplish?:** If you want to promote an event or share news about your faculty/department/center, submitting content for consideration on the NWU's existing social media sites might be a better choice for you. Social media outposts, such as those on Facebook and Twitter, require daily maintenance as well as a desire to engage with others.
 - b. **Who is your audience?** Researching the type of people you want to have a conversation with will help determine which platforms are best for you, and the kind of content you should share with that audience.
 - c. **Do you have what it takes?** To be successful at social media not only takes time and strategy, but also an outgoing personality, enjoyment in providing helpful information, knowledge to make connections, and a thick skin. You will also have to monitor your platforms and upload and schedule content daily. The accounts cannot be shut down during holidays or at weekends.
 - d. **How is this in the best interests of NWU?** Any activity on social media on behalf of the NWU should align directly and measurably with the NWU strategic plan, dream, purpose and values.
- 2 Be respectful:** Anything you post in your role as an NWU ambassador reflects on the institution. Be professional and respectful at all times and do not engage in arguments or extensive debates with naysayers.
- 3 Be transparent:** Always be sure NOT to represent yourself as an official NWU spokesperson if you are not one. Make it clear that you are blogging/tweeting/Facebooking, etc. on behalf of the relevant NWU entity, and not on behalf of the NWU.
- 4 Be active:** All content on official social media accounts must be kept up to date and accurate at all times. This includes:
- a. Log into official NWU social media accounts at least once per day to monitor and respond to activity. Being present and responsive will gain you credibility and value. Establishing a social media channel, and then deserting or not checking it regularly, will reflect poorly on the university.
 - b. Ensure you have 24/7 access to pages and are able to instantly respond to urgent queries or deal with crisis situations.
 - c. Post fresh content several times a week (the exact number of times must be indicated in the Social Media Establishment form).
- 5 Be prompt:** One of the great benefits of social media is the ability to share information almost instantly with a global audience. Be prepared to move quickly in response to new developments, trends, announcements, or emergencies with relevant information on your platform.
- 6 Be careful:** Think before you post. Remember that anything you share on social media, even within a closed network, is not private. It can and will be shared, stored, and spread globally. Don't post anything online you would feel uncomfortable seeing on the front page of the newspaper.
- 7 Commenting:** Social media is not only about sharing your news and successes, but also information that is of interest to your readers and viewers. When commenting as part of your role, be sure to indicate who you are, and your affiliation with the NWU. If you see a post that you think requires, or would benefit from, an official NWU response, please contact your campus social media representative.

Be prepared to accept, and respond to, comments. To protect your site, moderate all comments before posting them. Understand that not all comments will be positive. Respond to negative comments professionally and by providing any additional information that may help resolve the issue. Acknowledge the negative post/comment, and pursue it further in a private forum. *Inbox* or *Direct Message (DM)* the person to ask for more information and contact details. Post a disclaimer on your site stating that you reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments. Remove any comments containing vulgar language, those that attack a specific group or individual, and those that are obviously spam.

- 8 **Separate personal from professional:** Balancing your professional and personal social media presences can be difficult, particularly if you are a user in both areas. Content that is appropriate and of interest to your personal friends is most probably not appropriate or of interest to your department's "friends". Keep these two presences as separate as possible by restricting content about your personal life to your personal page.
- 9 **Networking:** Be polite and accessible, keeping in mind all the guidelines offered here. Having a personality and a voice will help you build your audience. Once you have established your social media presence, cross-promote in your various channels, both online and offline.
- 10 **Do not judge your success solely by numbers:** While it is tempting to use views, fans, or followers as a measure to assess your engagement in social media, it is not the ideal measurement tool. Success with building community via social media is not an end result. It is a process.
- 11 **Do not let social media interfere with your day job:** You must respond promptly and manage crises – but never forget that you are first and foremost an employee/student of the NWU and must prioritise your obligations in this regard.
- 12 **Defining and measuring success:** What do you hope to gain? How will you know when you have achieved it? Do you want increased traffic to your website? More energetic *give-and-take* with prospective students? Do you want to reach out to new colleagues on campus or around the world?

Define success, how you will measure it, and the tools you need to measure it (e.g. Hootsuite). Also make sure to check the built-in tools provided by your platform regularly to monitor engagement (an example is *Facebook Insights* which can monitor engagement with pages or posts). Using this information, you can make necessary changes to your content strategy in order to encourage more engagement.

Online Publications Framework

1 Definitions

In this policy -

“**database**” means a relational or hierarchical structure of entities that stores data in a computer system from which information can be extracted to publish online or for other use, e.g. to assist in managerial decision-making;

“**Drupal**” refers to the Content Management System (CMS) of the NWU, which consists of application software and a database designed to enable and guide online editors (publishers) when publishing content on the NWU Website in HTML format;

“**internet protocols**” means a set of international standards (protocols) normally referred to as IP and TCP/IP technologies, used on networks linked to the internet;

“**network**” means a group of computers and peripherals interconnected wireless or via cable that is capable of sharing software and hardware resources between many users;

“**online content**” means any text, image, video or audio content that is used to convey information or messages to an online audience on the internet;

“**social media**” means any system that creates online-based community groups aimed at facilitating interaction among individuals, either socially or professionally, such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Google+, YouTube etc.;

“**subdomain**” means a domain that is part of the NWU website at www.xxxx.nwu.ac.za, where ‘xxxx’ is the subdomain name;

“**the NWU Intranet**” means the NWU website subdomain which can only be accessed by employees and which is mainly used for internal communication as well as the provision of organisational resources to internal stakeholders, and

“**the NWU Website**” refers to the main domain of the university at www.nwu.ac.za and includes all its subdomains.

2 Framework Statement

2.1 Regarding online publications, it is the policy of the NWU to –

- establish a multilingual presence on the internet in support of the core business of the university while meeting the needs of its stakeholders and audience;
- ensure the university's visibility on the internet, and to
- strive to instil international recognition for its teaching, learning, research and community involvement activities.

2.2 All content published online in support of the objectives of the university forms part of the digital assets of the university.

2.3 The overall strategy and the current advancement goals as defined in the annual performance plan of the university must be supported by its online publications while maintaining optimal relationships with internet users both in South Africa and internationally.

2.4 Overseeing the NWU's online publications must promote the branding and public image of the university with the purpose of facilitating its ability to be successful at its core business

3 Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Corporate Relations and Marketing Forum (CRMF)

- The UMC has overall responsibility for ensuring that the online presence of the NWU is managed effectively and responsibly within the NWU in accordance with the Drupal guidelines determined by the director.
- The UMC may delegate the management of the university's online presence to the CRMF.

- The CRMF has overall responsibility to oversee that the online presence of the NWU is in line with the strategic objectives of the NWU.
- The CRMF must give guidance and direction to proposed policy changes in the NWU Online Publication Policy.
- The CRMF must ensure consistency in the application of the corporate identity and brand standards in the online environment.

3.2 Corporate Relations and Marketing: Corporate Communication (CRM)

- CRM is the custodian of this framework.
- CRM liaises with campuses, faculties and NWU Information Technology (IT) regarding user needs and user technology development needs.
- CRM liaises with teaching and learning, research, innovation and technology transfer and community engagement content owners.
- CRM plans and oversees the design, information structure, navigation structure and development of the website.
- CRM is responsible for all aspects of the CMS console administration, including access rights.
- CRM provides a central service for client and user enquiries and development proposals.
- CRM conducts research into user expectations and requirements.
- CRM provides editorial training to online editors.
- CRM ensures that the responsibility of online quality assurance is allocated to online editors (publishers) at institutional level.
- CRM ensures the availability of online editors (publishers) at a central point.
- CRM provides management reports on all aspects related to the performance of user technologies in terms of both technical and non-technical indicators.
- CRM measures the online presence of the NWU.
- CRM oversees the management of projects related to the development and implementation of online engagement technologies

3.3 Information Technology

- IT liaises and coordinates with CRM in order to establish business needs for the establishment of online user technologies.
- IT provides stable staging and production server environments suitable for handling high volumes of internet traffic.
- IT implements network technologies and internet protocols to support accessibility of online content.
- IT provides database administration services for online content, including multimedia content, data backup, data recovery, data security and data integrity.
- IT provides and implements services and techniques to enhance network and server performance.
- IT provides and implements user training on CMS technologies.
- IT implements user technology application software for online publication of content.
- IT conducts research into user application software and its technical requirements to enhance the ability of NWU to provide online content.

3.4 Legal Services

The NWU Legal Services –

- provide legal services and advice regarding online publication of content, inter alia including copyright issues, intellectual property issues, online contractual agreements, consumer rights-, and terms and conditions of the use of content, and
- identify potential legal risks that may affect the publication of online content

4 Rules

- 4.1 This framework as part of the communication policy applies to all employees, students and service providers who develop or publish online content, develop software applications for the

purpose of developing or publishing content online on behalf of the university, and to the maintenance of such user technologies.

- 4.2 This framework must be read in conjunction with the other addenda to this Communication Policy, and in particular with and against the background of the following:
- 4.3 the values of the university
- 4.4 the NWU Brand Policy
- 4.5 the NWU Language Policy
- 4.6 the NWU Records Management Policy
- 4.7 All web content aimed at an online audience and intended for public access must be published on a server environment that is hosted and maintained by IT.
- 4.8 An exception to the rule in 5.3 may be granted by the director, based on a sound business plan, if the service cannot be provided by IT and after due consultation with IT and CRM.
- 4.9 Online content must be published bearing in mind the user technologies in use, such as desktop computers, tablets and mobile phones.
- 4.10 Online editors (publishers) are responsible for ensuring that content adheres to the Drupal guidelines before it is published on the internet.
- 4.11 The integrity and reputation of the university must be upheld at all times.
- 4.12 All online editors (publishers) must undergo CMS training and online editorial training.
- 4.13 Editorial integrity of online content must be upheld at all times.
- 4.14 Search engine optimisation must be upheld.
- 4.15 Usability, user focus, and ease of access are key deliverables in all areas of responsibility.
- 4.16 All initiatives related to e-commerce (including third party advertising on internet user technologies, handshake agreements, trademark usage, and receiving online payments for goods and services) must be dealt with in accordance with the applicable financial policies and guidelines of the NWU and in close liaison with CRM and IT where applicable.
- 4.17 All publications on social media platforms, whether informal or formal, must support NWU strategic and operational objectives and comply with the Social Media Framework (Addendum 3).
- 4.18 Subdomains of the NWU website will be established in support of the core business of the university and according to the Drupal guidelines.
- 4.19 Administration rights to third party platforms that are being used to promote, market and advance the objectives of the university must be provided to the director when requested to do so.

5 Review of this framework

CRM must review the Online Publications Framework at least once every two years.

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