Guide to Writing and Updating College Policies

- College policies align operations, set behavior expectations across the College community and communicate policy roles and responsibilities.

- You, as the Responsible Unit or writer, have the important task of reaching your intended audience with policies that are clear and easily understood, and that provide the right level of information to the individuals specifically affected by the content. If users understand a policy, they are more likely to follow it and incorporate it into their daily work.

- There is a standard policy template that organizes the information in such a way that is consistent across all policies. This guide provides explanations and guidelines for each of the policy sections to make it easy to begin drafting your new policy, or updating your existing policy.

- The Compliance Office is a resource to support you in your effort, whether to review drafts, or guide you through the full policy development, review, and maintenance process.

Acknowledgement

The College of New Jersey adopts these materials with permission from and originally created by the University of Colorado Office of Policy and Efficiency. Additional guidance information was adopted with permission from the University of California, Davis, Administrative Policy Office. The content included herein has been modified as needed to fit the needs of The College. The Compliance Office appreciates this collaborative support.

Writing Styles of a Good Policy

- **Write in the "active voice" rather than the "passive voice."**

For example:
Write, *"The Compliance Office prepared this User Guide";*
rather than,
"This User Guide was prepared."

In an active-voice sentence, the person or department/unit taking the action is the subject of the sentence.

- **Use language that reflects the policy's intent**

Select the words carefully. Words like "should" and "may" and even "guidelines" may imply a choice. For example,

"Faculty and staff should not smoke in class."

This might be interpreted as they shouldn't smoke but will be allowed if they do. The statement also does not address restrictions applicable to students.

Examples of alternative phrasing would be:

"Faculty, staff and students are prohibited from smoking in class." (better, but only addresses a class setting)

"Smoking is not allowed inside or within twenty five (25) feet of the perimeter of College buildings." (best)

- **Ensure that clarifying a statement did not alter its meaning**

For example:

"All College faculty and staff, under the leadership of its administrators, are obligated to ensure that College funds are used only for mission-related purposes."

This statement implies that only those "under the leadership" are required to follow policy. An alternative to the example statement is:

"Employees may only use College funds for mission-related purposes and may not participate or contribute in any way towards the use of those funds or purposes that are not mission-related."

- **Use as few words as possible to state a case**

For example:

"All faculty and staff must …"

The word "all" is redundant. Simply stating "Faculty and staff" implies all unless an exception is also written.

Preparing to Draft a Policy

Always ensure you are well prepared to begin the process of drafting a new policy or reviewing and updating an existing policy. This is an important step for developing an accurate and useful document. Be sure you are clear on the purpose of the policy you are about to develop or update. Some questions to consider include:

- Is the policy needed in response to a problem encountered on campus? Or, a problem or issue on another higher education campus relevant to our College community? Or, any other "hot topic" from recent events or news relevant to our industry?
- Is the policy needed in response to a new College-wide policy? Or, a new state or federal law or regulation? Or, a mandate from a governmental, accrediting or licensing authority?
- Do I understand who is implicated by the policy requirements? Who should be assigned roles and responsibilities?
- If you are updating an existing policy, have roles and responsibilities changed?
- Will other existing policies or procedures be substantially affected or impacted by a new policy or revision?
- Is a policy the only document that is needed, or should a procedure, guideline, or other supporting document be developed to provide further guidance to the user?

Always check to be sure you are not duplicating existing information found elsewhere in another College policy. Rather than drafting a new policy, a better option may be to expand an existing, related policy to include the new information you are developing. At the least, this step will allow you to identify if there are related policy documents in existence that will help inform the policy you are developing.

It may also be helpful to look at policy documents issued at other colleges and universities regarding the topic you plan to address. Many institutions of higher education deal with similar issues, therefore reviewing other college and university policies can often help focus your policy development and provide you a starting point for your policy. Policies from other public New Jersey institutions may be particularly helpful.

Types of Policies

Board of Trustees Policies

Board of Trustee Policies include policies that relate to the organization, administration, and development of the College as a whole and overarching rules, regulations and orders issued by the Board that are necessary and proper for the administration and operation of the College. They establish fundamental principles as a basis and guide for mandating or constraining action by College administrators, employees, students, and other members of the College community.

College Operating Policies

College Operating Policies are policies for executive management and conduct of the College in all units and for the execution and enforcement of the Bylaws, rules, regulations and orders governing the management, conduct and administration of the College in accordance with applicable law and consistent with Board of Trustees Policies and delegations of authority. College Operating Policies are issued by the President.

Unit Policies

Unit policies apply to only a single or several units and are established by or for that or those units.

For additional information on determining the appropriate type of policy, and its review and approval process, refer to the following College policies:

- o **Policy Framework**
- o **Governance Document**

STANDARD POLICY TEMPLATE

The standard College policy template contains a variety of sections that need to be completed when writing a policy. Below are descriptions of each section as well as tips, samples and more.

Section:	Will be assigned by Compliance Office
Title:	Insert Title Here
Effective Date:	Insert date policy or revision to take effect.
Approved By:[1]	This is the position title (e.g., Provost) or entity title (e.g., Board of Trustees)
Responsible Unit:	Insert name of responsible office/department here
Related Documents:	*See guidance on Pg. 9*

History: *See guidance on Pg. 9 and 10*		
Version	Date	Notes

    I.   INTRODUCTION

   II.   DEFINITIONS

  III.   POLICY

---

[1] Note that a lower level position or entity cannot modify an existing policy or issue a new policy that is contradictory to an existing policy that was issued by a higher position or entity (i.e., a Director or Vice President cannot modify an existing College Operating Policy or Board of Trustees Policy.) Nor can a Director or Vice President issue a new policy that is inconsistent with an existing College Operating Policy or Board of Trustees Policy.

ELEMENTS OF THE STANDARD POLICY TEMPLATE

Policy Title

Key points to follow when determining the title of a policy:

- o The title must identify the key purpose of the policy, in as few words as possible.
- o The title may include verbs to either show separation from another closely titled policy, or to indicate which portion of the topic will be covered by the policy.

Example: Employee Training vs. New Hire Employee Training

Introduction[2]

Briefly summarize the information covered in the policy. A concise summary of the objectives may also be given to help clarify the subject matter. If there is a state or federal law with which this policy is aligned, it may also be specifically reference in this section. You may also include an explanation of the steps that were taken to develop the policy, for example, referencing the Governance process and committee charge. Other key areas that may be addressed include:

- o Legal or regulatory reasons
- o Description of the issue the policy will address
- o Overall benefits
- o Summary of Applicability

Definitions

List unique terms that, by being defined, would add to the reader's understanding of the basic policy. This allows the reader to approach the content in a more knowledgeable manner, and to easily refer back to the definitions as needed when the term is used frequently throughout the policy section. When a term has more limited use, it can be defined in the body of the policy.

- o Define unfamiliar or technical terms
- o Define terms with special meanings

Policy Statement

What to include

---

[2] The Introduction is intended to assist the reader in understanding the policy, but the more specific language included in the Policy Statement will prevail in the event of an inconsistency.

This is the most important section of the policy. It will provide specific direction for the intended audience. The policy statement is the governing principle that guides the reader's actions. Questions that are typically answered through the policy statement include:

- Who is the primary audience? (Who needs to follow the policy?)
- In what situation(s) does this policy apply or not apply?
- What are the major conditions or restrictions?
- What is expected of the staff member, faculty or student?
- Are there exclusions or special situations?

Here are rules for the policy owner/writer to follow when drafting the policy statement:

- Sentences and paragraphs must be clear and understandable for the given audience.
- Acronyms may be used if spelled out completely the first time the phrase is used. For example, The College of New Jersey ("TCNJ") or principal investigator ("PI").
- Use strong action words (will, must, are responsible for, etc.).

What not to include

The policy statement should not include background details on the policy nor should it contain procedural steps. Avoid using a specific label, such as name of a software product. Generic terms are more sustaining and require less maintenance.

Example: use 'enterprise financial system' vs. PeopleSoft Financials

Related Documents

List information that supports the specific policy in this section. These documents may be internal or external to the College, such as references to state or federal laws. Related documents may include:
- **Statutes or Regulations**
- **Policies**
- **Forms**
- **Guidelines**
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

History

Maintain a record of instances of reviews of and changes (approved by the issuing authority) to the policy by date, including a brief statement on the changes made. A record of review through the governance process should not be included here.

Example:

History:		
Version	Date	Notes
1.0	01/01/2012	New policy, initial release