# Non-Emergency Text Messaging Guidelines

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Messages intended for the campus community are best communicated by regular email, ULink, digital signage, social media, and printed materials, such as flyers. Mass text messaging is intended to supplement the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's ("University") communications strategy.

The Non-Emergency University Mass Texting policy applies to any University-affiliated individual granted permission by the University Text Communications Committee to text groups of constituents regarding University-related matters. These guidelines are for said Policy.

**NOTE:** These Guidelines are intended for every day, non-emergency use. In case of emergency, contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety with any questions about the University's emergency guidelines at 337-482-5830 or taz@louisiana.edu.

# Emergency vs. Non-Emergency Communications

Text messaging must not be used as the sole means of communicating an essential message or announcement. A text message must be supplemented by some other means of communication, such as an email, phone call, or paper notice, to ensure that all target audience members, including those who have not opted in, receive the message.

Non-emergency text messaging must NOT be used for the following:

a) As a sole method of communication to ensure that students, employees, etc. who have opted out still receive this information.
b) To communicate personal or confidential information, such as GPA or academic standing, social security numbers, passwords, credit card numbers, or any FERPA-protected data.
c) As a method of sending general information to large populations (e.g., Fall classes start Monday!)
d) For personal matters (e.g. items for sale, farewell messages).
e) To appeal on behalf of individuals or groups of students (e.g., to attend social, cultural, or sporting events).
f) As emergency alerts.

For any emergency-related communication, please consult the Office of Environmental Health and Safety with any questions about University emergency guidelines at 337-482-5830 or taz@louisiana.edu.

# Text Messaging Across the Student Lifecycle

Text messaging (which includes SMS and MMS messages) can only be used by authorized University officials to relay information about cancellations, closures, admissions and academic requirements or deadlines, registration information, financial aid, and other matters that are time sensitive and necessary for student success.

## Texting Prospective Students

For prospective student communication, the University must obtain permission to communicate via text message during the application process on a request for information form, inquiry card, or on the application itself. Prospective students should opt-in to each communication channel individually — text, email, phone, mail — for customized preferences. If a student does not choose to attend the institution, an opt-out should be assumed and they should be removed from receiving future communications.

Staff in the Admissions, Office of Distance Learning, Financial Aid, and Athletics departments are approved to text with prospective students within the guidelines of their short codes.

Example text messages that can be sent to prospective students include:

a) **Application status:** submitted, incomplete, missing documents, etc.
b) **Financial Aid status:** FAFSA deadline, submitted, missing documents, scholarships, work study, etc.
c) **Campus visit/tour/orientation information:** visit confirmation, reminder, survey, etc.
d) **Admission status:** congratulations on acceptance, enrollment next steps, advisor introduction, deposit due, etc.
e) **Athletics:** recruiting, official visit, letter of intent, etc.

## Texting Current Students

When a student enrolls at the institution, they must confirm or update their communication preferences. Students should be reminded of the types of messages they will receive through text, and asked to opt-in to each type individually.

Staff in the Registrar's, Academic Success, Financial Aid, Athletics, Student Life, Career Services, Office of Distance Learning, and Graduate School offices have approval to text current students within the guidelines their short codes.

Text messages that can be sent to current students include:

a) **Academics:** add/drop deadline, major selection, transfer credits
b) **Class registration:** advisor meeting, class registration deadline
c) **Housing:** Housing application/deposit, meal plan payment
d) **Financial Aid status:** FAFSA deadline, document submission reminders/confirmations, scholarships, work study

## Texting Alumni & Donors

Staff in the Advancement, University Foundation, and Alumni Relations departments will be responsible for texting with alumni and donors.

Text messages that can be sent to alumni and donors include:

a) **Give requests:** Giving Day information, initiative-specific gifts, stewardship
b) **Donor recognition:** acknowledge past donations, share how gifts support the institution, special initiatives
c) **Alumni engagement:** networking events, regional events, homecoming celebrations, mentoring students

# Text Messaging Guidelines

Each office must appoint no more than two authorized officials to be responsible for monitoring and approving text messaging requests on behalf of their office to ensure compliance.

## Opt-In and Opt-Out Management & Procedures

Recipients must opt in (provide name and mobile number) to receive text messages from the University and ensure their contact information held by the University is current. This can be done through a form on the website, email, or paper form.

Recipients must have the ability to opt out at any time.

If a recipient chooses to opt out of receiving text communications from a specific office, they are not automatically opted out from other offices. Recipients should have the ability to text 'STOP' or 'OPT OUT' at any time to opt out of messages.

It is a best practice for the administrators of the institution's texting platforms to run regular reporting and update the system of record to manage contact texting preferences.

Recipients should also be notified of these modified preferences and asked whether or not they would like to receive University communications through another channel.

## Text Message Content

Messages should be as concise as possible and professional while still maintaining a conversational tone.

Authorized text messaging officials must abide by all policies and ensure the following:

- Messages should be no longer than 160 characters. (not including URL length)
- Content is accurate.
- Wording is appropriate and fits the institution's voice and brand.
- Tone is casual but professional and ends with a question when a response is desired.
- List of recipients is correct and relevant to the message being sent.
- Information within the message is directly related to the recipient.
- When possible, address the recipient directly by name or with "you/your."
- Include essential points and, if needed, further instruction, such as "Check your University email account for full details."
- Message clearly states the action that the student needs to take or how the information impacts the student, and who to contact for additional information.
- All messages must be tagged with the appropriate identifier so recipients can immediately recognize who it's from.
    - For example, if an authorized official is sending an initial text message, open with, "Hi Becky, it's Chris Smith from UL Lafayette Admissions." On all subsequent

communications, authorized officials can sign off at the end of a text message: "– Chris Smith, Admissions."

- The number of messages received by a student are appropriate to ensure he/she will continue to regard the text messages as important information and does not choose to opt out of future communication.
- Messages are sent with adequate time for a response, action, or activity.
- Abbreviations and text messaging lingo are not used.
- Emojis approved for use by the institution are used appropriately, with no more than one emoji per message. Not every text message should include an emoji.
- Use hyperlinks sparingly, and instead, use text messaging to encourage a student to check their email or the University's website for more information. When using links, use the full website URL. Do not shorten through a service, such as bitly as those links often break and look like spam to recipients. It is acceptable for the text to be more than 160 characters if the hyperlink is lengthy.

Text messages should comply with privacy regulations for texting students, including:

- Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 (TCPA).
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA)
- Mobile Marketing Association (MMA)

Here's a quick checklist of best practices to get your started:

- Get consent to send recurring messages via text (TCPA, CTIA)
- Identify your institution in the first message (TCPA)
- Provide an automatic opt-out option (TCPA, CTIA)
- Indicate that texts may incur costs (CTIA)
- Always respond to texts asking for help or more information (MMA)
- Ensure personal student information and education records are sent via a secure, FERPA-compliant system (FERPA)
- Avoid offering promotional programs, such as contests or sweepstakes, via SMS texting (MMA)

# Response Timeframe

As a best practice, text messages should only be sent during designated business hours (to be respectful of a recipient's time and University staff's availability to respond. Any incoming replies to messages should be reviewed and responded to in a timely manner (preferably within 24 hours or less), so as to provide optimal student support and prevent future messages from being ignored or a student opting out.

If a staff member is out of the office for an extended period of time, they are required to create an “Out of Office” away message with information about how a student can receive assistance in their absence, such as another staff member’s contact information.

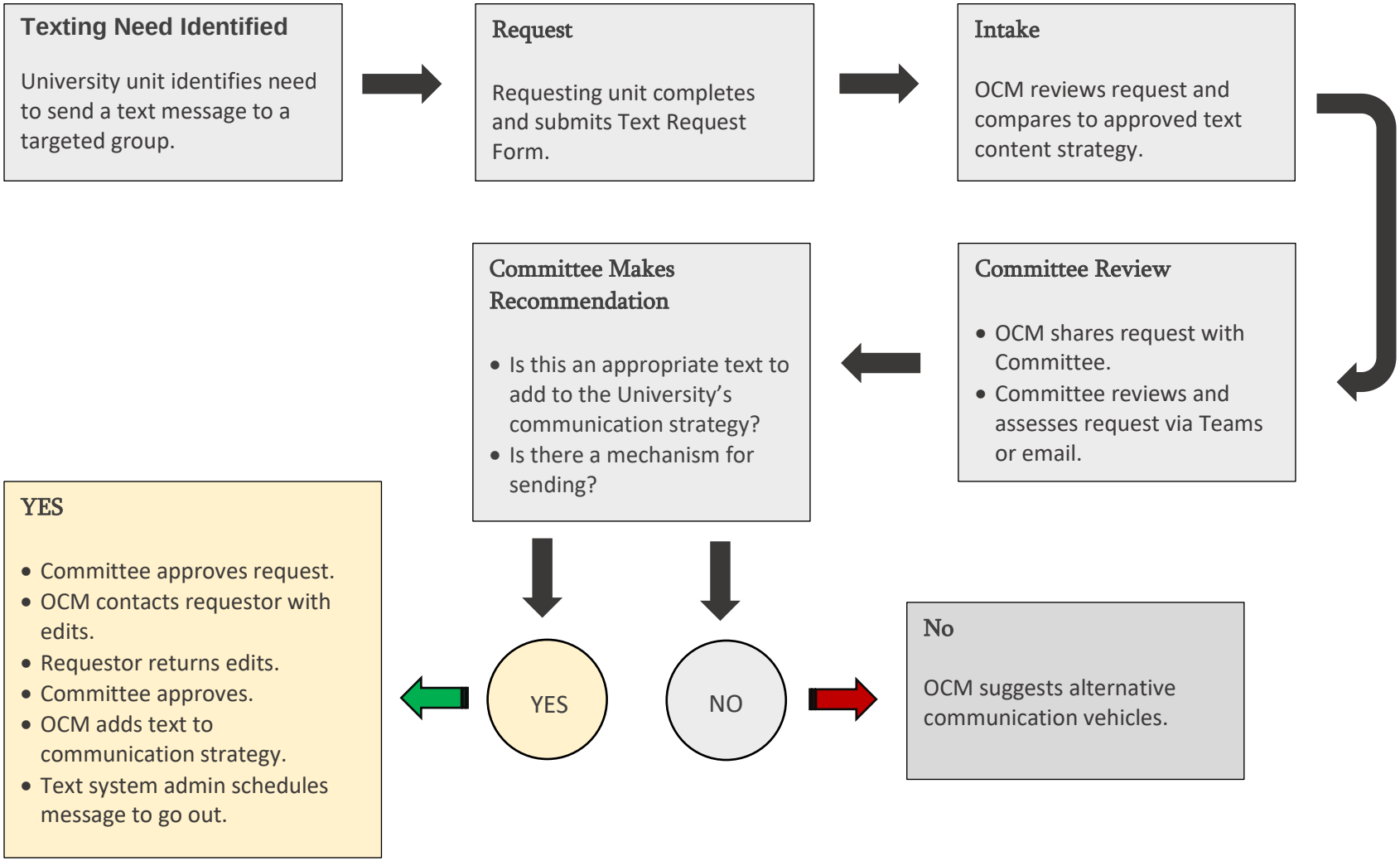
# Text Messaging Approvals and Institution Policies

Individuals wanting a message to be sent on their behalf must complete the Online Text Request Form and receive approval before a text can be sent to students or employees. Individuals who have been authorized to send text messages by the University Text Communications Committee do not need prior approval to send periodic messages.

Text messages containing images or video must be reviewed and approved in advance by the Office of Communications and Marketing (communications@louisiana.edu) to ensure proper logo usage, branding, colors, fonts, voice, etc.

All non-emergency text messaging services and software must be approved by the Office of Information Technology. Failure to comply with the policy may result in the revoking of texting permissions.

The University Text Communications Committee must ensure each text message:

- Is valid and in compliance with the University Mass Text Messaging Policy
- Has appropriate wording that aligns with the outlined text message content best practices
- Has the correct circulation list

## Text Approval Process