

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI



COMMUNICATION POLICY

JANUARY 2014

VISION

A world-class university committed to scholarly excellence

MISSION

To provide quality university education and training and to embody the aspirations of the Kenyan people and the global community through the creation, preservation, integration, transmission and utilization of knowledge

CORE VALUES

- Freedom of thought and expression
- Innovativeness and creativity
- Good governance and integrity
- Team spirit and teamwork
- Professionalism
- Quality customer service
- Responsible citizenship
- National cohesion and inclusiveness

Foreword

This policy document stipulates how the University of Nairobi will handle communication between its internal and external stakeholders. The policy is founded on the strength of our Strategic Plan 2013-2018 which emphasizes communication between the university and its stakeholders as a two-way process—open communication from governance organs to its stakeholders and a system that encourages feedback.

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

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

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

The policy demonstrates that our institution is among organizations that have embraced best communication practices. It defines how communication is structured and practised. The university has chosen this path to realize its vision of moving towards world-class academic excellence that emphasizes the centrality of the stakeholders in its communication web. We appreciate feedback in any format as the best way of strengthening our university.

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



Prof. George Magoha
Vice Chancellor

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Abbreviations

- CCM - Corporate Communication Manager
- CCMT - Crisis Communication Management Team
- DPEC - Development, Planning and Establishment Committee
- ICT - Information and Communication

Definition of Terms

Corporate communication: the activities undertaken by the University of Nairobi to communicate with internal and external stakeholders as well as with the wider public. The term implies an emphasis on promoting a sense of corporate identity and ownership, thus presenting a consistent and coherent corporate image.

Crisis communication: designed to protect and defend the university in case of a swelling public challenge to its reputation, coupled with its brand or community or both.

Internal communication: exchange of information and messages between employees or departments across all levels or divisions of the university.

External communication: the exchange of information and messages between the university and organizations, groups, or individuals outside its formal structure.

Spokesperson: someone engaged, elected or appointed to speak on behalf of the university.

Collaborating institutions: institutions with which the university has entered into formal agreements.

Stakeholder: a person, group or organization with a stake in the university.

Media: a means of communication that reaches or influences people widely and rapidly where necessary.

University community: the university Council, Senate, staff and students.

Executive Summary

Simply understood communication is the creation and sharing of meaning through common symbols. In an institutional framework, it is the fine thread that connects all the activities and functions both internally and externally. It is therefore critical to the effective functioning and productivity of any enterprise. It can of course take many forms and shapes depending on the nature of who is communicating and for what one is communicating. It can be quite complex and the rapid growth in the information communication technology has added to its complexity.

Every organization has its own nature and culture and in this regard the University of Nairobi occupies a social and cultural space particular to itself in the Kenyan academic arena. Taking into consideration dimensions and complexity of communication and its effects in as far as they are put in place to add value to the proper functioning of our university, it is in order for the university community to have a common understanding in this matter. This need perhaps together with the requirement from the Commission for University Education brought about the need to come up with our own policy on communication.

The committee that was put together to develop this policy sought to address the internal and external communication function of the university. In regard to internal communication, the committee focused on communication as it happens within the administrative structure of the university as well as the dissemination of knowledge which is the core function of our institution. In regard to external communication, the committee looked critically at the Public Relations Office of the university and recommended strengthening the office with the possibility of a decentralized structure that extends to the colleges.

Developments in the information communication technology cannot be wished away by any institution that intends to be productive and competitive in today's world. As such, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) within our communication function took centre stage in the deliberations of the committee.

It is expected that this policy will enable the university community to harness opportunities availed by the internal and external communication function of the university.

Dr. Wamugunda Wakimani Dominic
Chairman, Communication Policy Committee

The Communication Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

There have been changes in the handling of corporate communication all over the world, with an implication that if an organization has to survive and thrive, then it must communicate effectively with all its stakeholders.

The University of Nairobi continues to generate knowledge, and it must ensure that the knowledge is appropriately transmitted to stakeholders. Consequently, the manner in which the university communicates, the content of that communication and the feedback generated are powerful indicators for the university to position itself strategically as it releases its goods, products, and services to the market.

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

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

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

1.2 Purpose

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

2.0 Background to the communication function in the University of Nairobi

2.1 Corporate communication

There is little documentation regarding the communication function. Interviews with key stakeholders indicate that the history of corporate communication in the university dates back to the institution's inception as a fully-fledged university in the early 1970s.

The communication function was initially run as a section under the Registrar but was constituted to be run under the Department of Planning, Public Relations and Information in the 1970s to, among other duties:

- a) prepare the academic calendar
- b) prepare the annual report
- c) prepare publications
- d) prepare estimates
- e) prepare development plans
- f) coordinate graduation ceremonies
- g) service the Development, Planning and Establishment Committee (DPEC) and
- h) manage publicity and related materials.

The corporate communication function was placed in the Office of the Vice Chancellor and assigned to the Vice Chancellor's personal assistant after 1982. For more than 20 years during which this arrangement existed, personal assistants to the Vice Chancellor were required to be trained journalists in order to handle the function. The function was not effective in this mode as the officer shuttled between the immense duties of a personal assistant and of corporate communication. The outcome was that the public relations function was relegated to the periphery as the duties as a personal assistant were given priority.

In 2005, the university advertised the position of a public relations manager to be based in the Office of the Vice Chancellor as a separate function from that of a personal assistant. This was a knee-jerk reaction as the function was not properly structured and staffed, or premised on any policy hence making it difficultly for the public relations manager to discharge its duties effectively. Yet, the office has become an important reference point for many internal and external stakeholders, though often it relies on staff from other departments to discharge its duties especially in regard to publications, documentaries, special events and crisis communication. This prevailing situation needs review as we go forward.

2.2 Communication practices

That there is no clear structure on how the communication function works within the university is partly attributable to a lack of a communication policy. In the circumstance, the public relations office in the Office of the Vice Chancellor partly handles some communication activities, such as media and publicity, while most departments in the university enjoy some limited degree of autonomy in carrying out key communication activities including advertisement, signage, branding, and production of documentaries. Thus, communication activities are not properly coordinated. Best practices dictate that for purposes of sending uniform messages from and portraying a common identity of the university, the communication function should be centralised and coordinated—from a focal point.

2.3 Current status

The staff in the Public Relations Office are the Public Relations Manager, the Web Communication Officer, and one secretary.

As and when the need arises, the Public Relations Office outsourced:

- a) photographers (co-shared with the library),
- b) documentary producers,
- c) media liaison and mobilization staff,
- d) writers and editors, and
- e) advertising liaison officers (jointly handled with media houses).

The Public Relations Office:

- a. deals with links between the university and a variety of publics,
- b. gives updates through websites and social media,
- c. profiles and markets the university through avenues such as documentaries, in-house publications, and supplements,
- d. monitors media (only newspaper coverage is monitored, however),
- e. manages events in liaison with other departments,
- f. manages some corporate responsibility activities,
- g. organizes public lecture series,
- h. handles advertising,
- i. prepares speeches for the Vice Chancellor, the Chairman of the University Council and the Chancellor, and
- j. performs any other functions as may be assigned.

3.0 Challenges: A situational analysis of the University of Nairobi

3.1 Information reach

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

3.2 Uniformity of information

Different supervisors might sometimes give different, conflicting messages on important issues. These messages cause confusion and distrust among employees.

3.3 Flow of information

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

3.4 Sharing of information

In some cases, critical information is not shared by key stakeholders. The top management often does not engage the employees, who have regular contacts with the customers, on important aspects of the organization. This oversight hampers feedback at all the levels of the institution.

3.5 Clarity of expectations are not clear

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

3.6 Sharing of trust and information

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

competition, which undermines productivity of teams, departments or units, and the organization.

3.7 Communication between units in different locations

The university is a college-based institution, with units located in separate geographical regions. Departments or units in different locations do not communicate with one another as often and as much as those in close proximity do. The distance makes face-to-face meetings difficult to arrange and collaboration takes time.

Even in this age of email, cell phones, text messaging, and video conferencing, critical communication among leaders, between the management and employees, and between departments or units, is still not as effective as it should.

3.8 Sequencing and systematizing of information

Every organization must solve the problem of what pattern and content of communication shall be created, and what information shall be directed to which offices. There are limits to the amount and nature of information that can be received, processed and effectively handled by any one unit. The apparent absence of clear communication policy guidelines results in unduly large amounts of information being channelled to units at once, resulting in information overload.

3.9 Uptake of communication technologies

The university uses a number of different communication technologies such as data-based reporting systems, e-mail, voice mail, intranet, bulletin boards, websites, and video conferencing. They are cost-effective in eliminating distance barriers and providing information to large numbers of people quickly. In spite of the robust ICT infrastructure in place, the uptake in use of these technologies by many members of the university community has not been impressive. The low uptake could be explained by people's preference for more personalized modes of communication.

3.10 Attitude issues

The more traditional communication problems such as the manner in which messages are coded and receiver resistance to change, change initiatives often fail to meet their objectives. Some of the communication sent out is lofty, vague and impersonal to the extent that a message is never really understood

and therefore fails to make the intended impact. Further, pervasive rumours and innuendos militate against desired changes in the university.

3.11 Fragmented communication

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

4.0 Rationale for a communication policy

Communication is an important tool for disseminating the university's values and philosophy to its external and internal publics. Internal communication is particularly vital in strengthening our organisational culture and feeling of commitment and belonging among staff and students.

To support the university's quest for world-class excellence, there is a need for effective communication among all stakeholders, hence, the rationale for a comprehensive communication policy. This policy document is designed to support the university's mandate as spelt out in the Universities Act No. 42 of 2012, the University of Nairobi Charter, the University of Nairobi Strategic Plan, and the university's statutes as well as policy documents and guidelines.

Overall, the policy will ensure that at all times there is a viable approach to communication and that the responsibilities and expectations of staff are identified and understood.

4.1 Goal and objectives

The goal of this policy is to support the university's aspirations and mandates as spelt out in the Universities Act 2012, the University of Nairobi Charter, and the university's vision, mission and objectives outlined in the University of Nairobi Strategic Plan 2013-2018.

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

- a) provide efficient and effective communication mechanisms among management, staff, students and other stakeholders,
- b) promote the coherence and consistency of information flow, internally and externally,
- c) minimize communication breakdown and delays including overseeing a customer feedback programme,
- d) promote the use of appropriate channels of communication and
- e) disseminate research findings.

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

- a) interpret information emanating from the university and present it in a useful and sustainable manner to enhance relations with stakeholders,
- b) correct lapses in the flow of information between the groups both that make up the constituency of the university and which constitute opposition to and competition with the university,

- c) facilitate the role of the university in taking up its place in society as a gesture of cooperation in civil, educational and charitable situations, and
- d) facilitate the role of the university in articulating its interests and to direct attention to its activities through the development of a visible, long term community relations and outreach programme for research uptake.

4.2 Justification

This policy emphasises professionalism in communication and serves as a guide to members of the university community with respect to their responsibility in serving the interests of the university. It therefore outlines the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance based on mutually satisfactory communication.

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

5.0 Communication Policy

5.1 Principles of good communication practice

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

5.1.1 Effectiveness

The university shall ensure that all communication is effective and appropriate and shall convey information and respond to requests by stakeholders through appropriate communication channels.

5.1.2 Clarity

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

5.1.3 Pro-activity

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

5.1.4 Transparency

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

5.1.5 Efficiency

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

5.1.6 Cultural awareness

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

5.1.7 Responsibility

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

5.1.8 Integrity

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

5.1.9 Best practices

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

5.2 The University Spokesperson

On all matters pertaining to the university, the Vice Chancellor is the spokesperson. From time to time as and when necessary, the Vice Chancellor may authorize other officers to be spokespersons. These officers will be fully informed on developments in the university requiring external communication or response. In this connection, heads of departments are expected to keep the spokespersons apprised on significant developments in the university.

5.3 Audiences

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

5.3.1 Internal audiences

The internal audiences of the university are staff and students.

5.3.2 External audiences

The external audiences of the university include the Government of Kenya, the Commission for University Education, the ministry in charge of university education, collaborating institutions, suppliers, industry, donors, development partners, parents or guardians, alumni, and the general public.

The mass media is one of the most sensitive and key audiences of the university because, if they carry clear information regarding the university, the university can better be understood. To this end, the Corporate Communication Office will seek to:

- a) provide accurate and objective information,
- b) maintain an open-door policy culture,
- c) package as newsworthy and current information coming from the university, and
- d) monitor the media continuously.

5.4 Types and methods of communication

5.4.1 Internal communication

To maintain a good working environment for the realization of its vision and mission, the university aims at facilitating efficient and effective internal communication to staff and students as well as to all its stakeholders. In this respect, it will utilize, but not limited to utilizing, these three communication channels:

- a) Print media: newspaper articles and supplements, Varsity Focus, fliers and ad-hoc publications; this written communication will remain a vital component of communication in the university.
- b) Broadcast: documentaries, podcasts, advertorials, interviews, and spots.
- c) New media: web-based communication; controls on these will be professional at the level of content.

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

5.4.2 External communication

5.4.2.1 Electronic communication

E-mail and the web are the primary modes of electronic communication and constitute a key platform for external communication. The Corporate Communication Office shall have the overall editorial responsibility for all university websites. The content of the university web pages should always be up-to-date, user-friendly and regulated to conform to the objectives of the organization. The content must meet the set standard for web publishing as defined in the University of Nairobi System of Websites Policy.

Further, the university shall encourage the use of email—guided by the University ICT Policy—as a way of engaging with external stakeholders. At the same time, the university shall encourage the generation of general podcasts and video clips for marketing and enhancing its corporate image; these must be authorised by the Vice Chancellor, however. Meanwhile, access to information technology (IT) shall be made available to more staff, while the university shall embrace the use of social media and blogging by the university community to the external stakeholders.

5.4.2.2 Public lectures

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

5.4.2.3 Meetings

The university uses meetings—such as courtesy calls, meetings with collaborating institutions, staff meetings, and governance and management meetings—to communicate with stakeholders. Given the importance of meetings for sharing of and passing on information, the university will regulate meetings to ensure that the agenda, lists of participants, timing, and minutes or records are available, as it is appropriate to good communication practice. Where possible and appropriate, meetings should be covered through the existing communication channels.

5.5 General guidelines for internal communication

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

5.6 Flow of information

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

5.7 Crisis communication

The university shall continue to proactively prevent events that are likely to lead to loss of stakeholder confidence and to take care of events stemming from

rumours, speculation and insider lack of confidence that give the university negative publicity. In these cases, appropriate crisis communication should enable the university to respond rapidly and effectively to potentially negative situations.

Given the importance of crisis communication:

- a) Only the Vice Chancellor or any authorized person shall give information to the media.
- b) The Corporate Communication Office shall maintain regular contact with stakeholders and give advice where issues or developments appear to cause problems.
- c) The Corporate Communication Office shall monitor local and international news and events and advise the Vice Chancellor on issues or events relevant to the university.

5.7.1 Crisis response

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

5.7.2 Crisis Communication Management Team

In case of a crisis, the University Management Board and Senate shall become the Crisis Communication Management Team (CCMT) and co-opt other members as the situation may demand. The Corporate Communication Manager (CCM) shall be a member of the team. The CCMT shall constantly monitor, interpret and manage issues with potential to escalate into crises and shall gather details about crises and approve strategies for internal and external communication.

5.7.3 Releasing information to the media

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

5.8 Corporate Advertising

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

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

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

5.9 Branding

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

5.10 Responsibility

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

5.10.1 Staff

Members of staff shall:

- a) be aware of the communication policy and demonstrate the institutional standards in communication,
- b) demonstrate the principles of good practice,
- c) be responsible for ensuring that they communicate effectively and appropriately in line with the given standards of communication,
- d) be aware of the various methods of communication and utilize them appropriately in their work,
- e) tackle incidents of poor communication in proactive and constructive ways,
- f) ensure that information is shared appropriately and in a timely manner, and
- g) consider carefully feedback in situations where stakeholders constructively raise issues relating to poor or inappropriate communication, and adjust their communication style appropriately and timely.

5.10.2 Supervisory and management staff

All the supervisory and managerial staff shall ensure that:

- a) all staff members are sensitized on the Communication Policy,
- b) communication systems and processes actively support the vision and mission of the university,
- c) they act as role models by leading by example and demonstrating good practice in all aspects of communication,
- d) effective, timely and appropriate feedback is provided to staff and students,
- e) they reflect on communication standards and practices within their respective teams and identify opportunities for improvement,
- f) they take action to ensure they are resolved amicably where staff and students raise issues of poor communication,
- g) there is effective communication between the staff, students and other stakeholders,
- h) they support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion, transparency and involvement of all concerned parties,
- i) all staff members in their areas of responsibility have an understanding of the strategic direction of the institution, faculty and service departments, and
- j) there is consistency, equity and parity in communication processes across the university.

5.11 Monitoring and Evaluation

The Corporate Communication Office shall:

- i. develop appropriate strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Policy,
- ii. carry out annual evaluation on the implementation of the policy, and
- iii. define the short-term, mid-term and long-term interventions based on the outcomes of the evaluation reports.

5.12 Review

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

