



Drafting Unit Rules: Best Practices

Overview

What is a unit rule? Unit rules apply to a unit or to the functions over which a unit has authority. Along with procedures, unit rules address needs at the unit level or control issues that affect a subset of the university or its operations. Unit rules are developed and approved by a specific unit and describe that unit's approach to implementing relevant University Policies or Standards, or describe mechanisms for the administration of programs and unit-specific functions. These rules are applicable only to their home units, or to functions over which that unit has authority, but may affect the entire university and university community. Unit rules may be more restrictive than University Policies or Standards but must accord with them and with relevant statutes and regulations.

Is it a unit rule or a University Policy? It's a unit rule if it:

- Applies solely to your unit or to the functions over which your unit has authority.
- Governs a range of individuals (students, employees, volunteers) but only as the rule pertains to their interactions with your unit.
- Describes mechanisms for the administration of unit programs and unit-specific functions.
- Specifies how a unit will implement a University Policy or Standard.

A note on nomenclature: To avoid confusing unit rules with University Policies or Standards, it is recommended to refer to them as unit rules, rules, or some other designator, as opposed to policies or standards. The terms University Policy and University Standard should not be used for rules and are only to be used for items that have gone through the formal university policy process and reside in the *University Policy and Standards Manual*.

Steps in Unit Rule Development



Effective unit rule drafting begins with a clear and consistent process. Rather than revising unit rules in an ad hoc manner, consider establishing a process in advance, identifying the employees who will shepherd the rule through the process and the university leader who will approve new

rules and rule changes. Additionally, identify whether the unit will rely on an individual or a small group to draft new and revised rules. Define how proposed changes will be vetted and approved to ensure consistency and transparency.

Initiate

The **initiation** of a unit rule begins with clearly framing the issue and identifying the problem to be solved. This involves identifying a specific need, whether it stems from a gap in current guidance, a change in operations, or a compliance requirement. Early benchmarking is essential to ensure the proposed rule aligns with peer institutions and current best practices, and does not conflict with existing University Policies or Standards.

Identifying potential impacts—legal, operational, financial, or otherwise—is critical at this stage. Rules may also have implications for other units. If your rule will affect another unit in any meaningful way, that unit should be consulted early and be involved in the rulemaking process. Groups, or individuals who will be subject to the rule should also be alerted, and potentially, be involved in the rulemaking process.

Draft

Once the need is identified, the **drafting** phase begins. A drafting team composed of subject matter experts, operational leads, or other relevant stakeholders can be assembled to develop the rule. It is important to note that drafting committees typically do not serve as approval bodies. Their role is to develop content that accurately reflects the intent and scope of the proposed rule, while considering its practical application.

Whether written by an individual or a group, drafts should follow university style guides to ensure clarity and consistency. Consider using a template that includes sections on which behaviors are required or prohibited, scope or applicability, roles and responsibilities, and links to additional resources and forms. Then, consider what you are seeking to accomplish with the rule and focus your efforts toward that objective. Try to avoid drifting into peripheral areas that are unnecessary; sometimes less is more. Rules should be direct, specific, and written in plain language.

Each draft should be dated and assigned a unique identifier to support tracking and version control throughout the development process. The University Policy Program offers resources such as templates and training to support this phase and is available to review drafts for readability, accessibility, and alignment with established university guidelines before they move forward. Early and ongoing consultation with affected units and stakeholders is encouraged to ensure the draft is comprehensive and well-informed before it enters any formal review and approval phase.

Vet

Vetting is a critical part of the drafting process. Effective engagement requires timely consultation with campus constituents and affected units. Input should be actively sought, and the rule should be socialized to ensure transparency and broad awareness. This step helps identify downstream impacts and ensures the rule is comprehensive and practical. The drafter or drafting team is responsible for adjudicating comments and making necessary revisions. Early and thorough review and vetting can help mitigate risks and strengthen the quality and applicability of the final rule.

Approve

Approval authority should be clearly defined, whether vested in a single leader or a committee. Approval decisions must be documented to establish a formal record, and if a committee is involved, the required vote threshold should be specified to maintain transparency. Speaking of authority, some unit rules will require a designated authority for appeals or escalation, and this may be the same authority for approval.

Publish

Once approved, the rule is then **published and communicated**. A consistent notification process helps ensure awareness and supports compliance. The unit is responsible for presenting the rule in a clear and accessible format, typically via a designated website. Stakeholders, including affected units and campus constituents, should be formally notified. Depending on the rule's scope, broader university-wide communication may be necessary. Publication includes timely updates to websites, clear messaging, and accessible documentation to ensure that all affected parties are informed and able to ask questions where needed.

Implement

Following approval and publication, procedures may be developed to support the effective **implementation** of the unit rule. This step builds on the initial needs assessment and ensures that operational details are clearly defined. The unit holds responsibility for implementation through tasks such as training, maintaining clear channels of communication, and developing any necessary forms or materials.

Review

Policies and unit rules should be **reviewed** at least every three to five years to ensure continued relevance, accuracy, and alignment with University Policies and Standards. Non-substantive updates such as title changes, grammatical corrections, or formatting adjustments may be made by the designated point-of-contact without undergoing full review. Substantive revisions, however, require a more formal review and update process consistent with the original approval procedures.

Archive

When a unit rule is retired or rescinded, it should follow a structured **archiving process** in accordance with the university's records retention schedule. Regular review and responsible archiving help maintain a clear and current unit-level policy framework across the institution.

Consultation with the University Policy Program

Throughout this process, the University Policy Program is available to provide guidance and support. Whether you need help developing a rule, navigating “policy questions,” or managing stakeholder engagement, the Program offers resources and consultation to ensure your unit's rules are effective, accessible, and aligned with existing University Policies and Standards.

Email OSU-policy@oregonstate.edu for assistance.