

Am I Authorized to Sign University Documents?

by Heather Hosfeld

We are often asked whether the University has a policy about signing authority. Our response is threefold: first, we don't have a formal written policy; second, we are working on a policy; and third, until the policy is finalized, there are certain guidelines to follow.

As a starting premise, the University's Bylaws govern how and to whom signing authority is granted. The Bylaws provide that "the President shall have power ... to ... execute all documents to make effective the actions of the Board [of Trustees] or its Executive Committee. The President may delegate to Officers of the University Administration authority to execute documents ... to make effective actions of the Board or its Executive Committee or as necessary for the general operation of the University".

As you might imagine, it isn't practical for the President to sign all University documents. Each Vice President is authorized to sign documents relating to his/her respective area and may use his/her judgment to determine whether additional approvals should be obtained. Also, it is also up to each Vice President to delegate signing authority to his/her staff, as necessary and as permitted by the University Bylaws and policies.

Ultimately, the process of delegating and documenting signing authority will be formalized in a specific University policy. As part of the final policy, our office will maintain a log of all written delegations. Delegations should always be made to a "position" rather than a "person" so that the delegation remains effective despite job changes, retirements, etc.

Why is this so important? Legally documented signing authority is an element of creating a binding contract for University business. In addition, if you sign a document for which you did not have the authority, you could be held personally responsible. When in doubt, please contact our office for guidance.

