Policy vs. Procedure

1.   Purpose

This "Policy vs. Procedure" document is an aid to those involved in drafting and reviewing proposed policies for inclusion in the SOU Policies web site.

2. Definitions

- Policy: Policy provides the operational framework within which the institution functions. Policy provides the formal guidance needed to coordinate and execute activity throughout the institution. When effectively deployed, policies help focus attention and resources on high priority issues, aligning and merging efforts to achieve the institutional vision.
- Procedures: Procedures are the operational processes required to implement institutional policy. Operating practices can be formal or informal, specific to a department or applicable across the entire institution. If policy is "what" the institution does operationally, then its procedures are "how" it intends to carry out those operating policies.

3. Distinguishing Characteristics

The distinctions commonly drawn between policy and procedures can be subtle. Nevertheless, there are common characteristics that discern policy from procedures.

a. Policy
- Governs institutional procedures
- Changes only through review process
b. Procedures
- Describes process
- Discretion to change at operational level

4. Examples

Following are some fictitious examples to help underscore the distinctions between policy and procedures:

- Student Financial Aid: The Financial Aid Office is responsible for the administration and resource coordination of the university's student financial aid program which covers all scholarships, loans, grants, fellowships, assistantships, student stipends, and work-study. A standard application is required for most of the financial aid programs. There is also an established filing period for priority consideration.

Comment: The first sentence represents a clear statement of policy that has certain responsibilities. The second and third sentences are procedures.

- Support Staff Employees: Evaluations for new staff are conducted after completion of six months of service. Once permanency is achieved performance evaluations are completed annually by the supervisor. The supervisor will use the procedures established in the Supervisor Handbook to evaluate staff employees.

Comment: The first and second sentences are policy. The third sentence is procedure.

- Receipting Gifts: Generally gifts will be centrally receipted by the University Development Office. The procedures for receipting gifts are contained in the Fund Raising and Public Affairs Policy and Guidelines.

Comment: The first sentence is a policy statement. The second statement is a reference to another document on procedures.