

School of Geology and Geophysics Fieldtrip Policies

Our fieldtrip policies are listed below. A FAQ section follows which contains some specific information.

Doug Elmore

- 1) The University policy regarding alcohol and drugs “prohibits illegal use of drugs and alcohol in the workplace, on University property, or as part of any University-sponsored activities (Section 5.2, faculty handbook).”**
- 2) Fieldtrip leaders should follow the policies as required by their units.**
- 3) The faculty handbook requires that each participant file a release. In addition, if the trip is outside the Oklahoma City area for a period exceeding 24 hours an itinerary must be filed in the department office and the OU Department of Public Safety prior to the trip. The relevant section of the faculty handbook is copied below.**

Section 4.24 Faculty Handbook

“(1) Itineraries. A field trip, requiring the filing of an itinerary, is any University-sponsored activity that is conducted off-campus outside the Oklahoma City metro area for a period exceeding 24 hours. Academic units sponsoring off-campus field trips as described above for University students – whether mandatory or voluntary and regardless of whether credit is awarded–must file an itinerary with their department’s or college office and OU Department of Public Safety prior to the trip. The itinerary should include telephone numbers where the group may be reached or emergency telephone numbers, destinations and, if possible, trip routes. A list of the names of the students and other participants also must be filed with the sponsoring academic unit.”

“(2) Releases. In addition, academic units sponsoring any field trips that are either by commercial carrier or that involve unusual activity outside the classroom (hiking, climbing, athletic activities, etc.) are responsible for obtaining releases from each participant prior to the filed trip. The releases are designed to protect the University and inform participants of the University’s responsibilities in the event of injury. For information about releases, contact the Office of Legal Counsel (325-4124).”

“Low-cost accident and illness insurance policies are available for field trip participants from the Center for Student Life (325-4444).”

3) Require all students to wear seat belts.

4) All persons operating University owned vehicles must be employees of the University of Oklahoma and must have a valid driver's license appropriate for the vehicle being driven.

We recommend that the fieldtrip leader get contact information for each participant on the trip. Although this might sound like a major headache, if a student were to be hurt in an accident, I am sure that you would want to contact their parents or guardian without delay. A section for this information is included on the attached

representative release forms. One form is for required fieldtrips and the other is for optional trips.

Frequently asked Questions

The answers in blue are from Sally Garrison (Legal Counsel) and the red comments are from Lynda Manley (from Risk Management).

1) Please clarify the distinction between getting waivers for students in a class going on a day trip, and graduate students doing field work as part of their degree work (research). The graduate students are paid as RAs and have some health insurance. Do they need to sign waivers for all their activities?

Graduate students who are employees of the University, in the conduct of their employment, should not require releases. I would caution the supervisor to know the field areas and potential risks in advance of sending an RA or GA there.

It is my understanding that graduate students, professional staff (and faculty), and paid undergraduate student workers gainfully employed on a research project do not have to file releases for field activity. After all, they were hired to perform those activities and are covered by Worker's Compensation during their deployment. Is that correct? As an employer (and as an employee), I don't understand how OU can be held harmless in the event of an injury to my person or my personnel if that injury was caused by negligence on the part of the University.

Graduate students, who are in the performance of their employment at OU, are covered by workers' compensation because they are employees paid to perform a specific job, and no waiver would apply in the event of injury to one of them in the performance of that job. The **hiring department, usually the employee's direct supervisor**, is required to stipulate that the employee was performing his/her job at the time of injury for workers' compensation benefits to be provided. Also, FYI... health insurance excludes employee work-related injuries.

2) Considering waivers, it is my understanding that people who "volunteer" during a field project do have to sign waivers. Volunteers should not perform essential duties, drive university vehicles, nor perform tasks which parallel those of paid employees. Allowing them to do so places a liability on the university for wages and benefits, not to mention injury incurred during the performance of a task.

Does the above statement generally reflect university policy? **YES**

I think that is generally accurate. However, volunteers have driven University vans before and have limited liability under the Oklahoma Tort Claims Act when driving.

3) Considering itineraries, opportunities may arise making it difficult to submit timely itineraries with significant amount of detail. Would it be permissible to submit a blanket itinerary for a given geographic region and a given time frame? If so, that would alleviate my greatest concern regarding application of this requirement.

I believe this would be sufficient.

The request for specific itineraries may relate to the need of the University to assure prompt response to emergencies, specifically for fieldtrips and remote operations. Frequent communication with the home department could meet this requirement for specific itineraries when the operation is extremely mobile and constantly on the move

4) We have a large undergraduate class which we would like to have visit a few local places. Is it permissible to simply ask the students to convene at these places rather than go to all the trouble of getting and paying for vans, obtaining legal drivers, doing all the waivers, etc., just to go 2 miles? Are there any liability issues here?

This should not require a release. Such travel is treated in the same manner as a student driving to OU's campus. It is their own liability.

This happens frequently. Rather than reporting to their normal University of Oklahoma classroom, the students report to a different "classroom." Care should be taken to observe their safety for issues such as unsafe locales, driving at night, rural locations, unsafe parking facilities, etc.