

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION BTRU Board of Trustees		POLICY NUMBER BTRU 1.19
POLICY TITLE Protecting the Institution from External Influences		
SCOPE OF POLICY USC System	DATE OF REVISION June 23, 2023	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Chairman, Board of Trustees	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Board of Trustees	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the commitment and adherence of the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees to Standard 4.2.f of the *Principles of Accreditation* promulgated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, which requires the board to “protect the institution from undue influence by external persons or bodies.”

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

External Stakeholders: Individuals other than elected or appointed members of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina, or employees of the University of South Carolina, who have a valid interest in the welfare of the University of South Carolina.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC): The University of South Carolina System’s regional accrediting body.

System Governing Board or Board: The Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina.

University System: The eight-campus system comprising the University of South Carolina.

POLICY STATEMENT

The System Governing Board recognizes and supports the inherent values of institutional autonomy and freedom from external influences. The Board will adhere to the following principles, consistent with the exercise of its fiduciary duties as set forth in policy [BTRU 3.02 Fiduciary Duties of Trustees](#):

- A. The System Governing Board will promote and demonstrate independence to govern, consistent with South Carolina State law.
 - 1. The Board will govern as a collective, corporate body, while taking into consideration the need for individual members to apply and express their individual consciences and judgments during the deliberative process. Individual Board members whose views are not consistent with Board decisions will respect the

actions of the corporate body and avoid putting their personal interests before that of the institution.

2. Individual Board members will respect the input of all stakeholders in considering specific actions and policies or overall strategic direction, while recognizing that Board members and decision-making processes must remain free from undue pressures from external stakeholders – from policymakers, donors, alumni and boosters, corporate sponsors, or political interest groups – to influence their individual judgement on matters that are the province of the Board.
3. Individual Board members will not abdicate their independent judgment to assume the role of advocate for an external, special interest in the outcome of the Board’s decisions.
4. Individual Board members recognize that the standard of independent judgment is especially important in the selection or approval of institutional and campus leadership and high-level management positions.
5. Individual Board members will commit to the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience as essential fiduciary responsibilities, which define their ethical and legal obligations to the University System, and which are outlined in policy [BTRU 3.02 Fiduciary Duties of Trustees](#).

B. The System Governing Board will preserve institutional independence and autonomy.

1. The Board will keep the mission and purposes of the University System and its individual campuses as the focal point of all policy decisions and be mindful of statewide policy agendas as a framework for their actions.
2. The Board will ensure that external stakeholders – from policymakers, donors, alumni and boosters, corporate sponsors, or political-interest groups – do not influence inappropriately institutional and Board independence and autonomy or skew academic programs or missions.

C. The System Governing Board will promote and protect academic freedom appropriately and be the standard-bearer for the due-process protection of the institution, its faculty, staff, and students.

D. The System Governing Board will assure institutional accountability to the public interest.

1. The Board will serve as a bridge to the external community.
2. The Board, acting through its Chair and in consultation and concert with the President, will inform, advocate, and communicate on behalf of the institution.
3. The Board and its individual members will exhibit exemplary public behavior.

PROCEDURES

Board members who believe they have been approached by an external stakeholder for the purpose of improperly influencing their independent judgement shall first cite this policy to the external stakeholder, and then shall immediately inform the Board Chair, who shall notify the Governance Committee of the Board and the President.

As soon as practicable, the Board Chair and Vice Chair, citing this policy, shall inform all Trustees of the alleged approach by an external stakeholder for the purpose of improperly influencing a Trustee’s independent judgment—with the goal of enabling all Trustees to recognize other, similar efforts by external stakeholders to influence the Board improperly.

In addition, at the next meeting of the Governance Committee, after having been informed of an alleged attempt to influence the Board improperly, the Board Chair and Vice Chair shall re-assert to all Trustees in attendance the fiduciary duties and independence of Trustees, the requirements of this policy, and the potential consequences for Trustees who may violate their fiduciary duties. Thereafter, the Board Chair and Vice Chair shall communicate this same information to Trustees who are absent from the meeting of the Governance Committee in question.

If an external stakeholder allegedly succeeds in improperly influencing a Trustee’s independent judgment, the Governance Committee shall consider procedural options for discipline as outlined in policy [BTRU 2.03 Censure, Sanction, or Removal of a Board of Trustees Member](#).

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE, AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[University of South Carolina Board of Trustees Bylaws](#)

[BTRU Oath of Office: Code of Conduct and Statement of Commitment](#)

[BTRU 1.18 Conflicts of Interest and Commitment](#)

[BTRU 2.03 Censure, Sanction, or Removal of a Board of Trustees Member](#)

[BTRU 3.01 Presidential Candidate Search Committee](#)

[BTRU 3.02 Fiduciary Duties of Trustees](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
February 14, 2020	New policy approval
June 23, 2023	Line edits, adjustments to capitalization, and other revisions for style. Addition of related University, state, and federal policies. Addition of procedural steps (at the suggestion of an external consultant with expertise regarding governance).