



DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

BRAND & EDITORIAL GUIDE

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DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS BRAND TOOLKIT



University of Maryland Brand

Our division-specific brand guidelines are in line with and a complement to the [University of Maryland brand guidelines](#).

What Are Brand Standards?

Brand standards are a collection of guidelines that define how an organization presents itself, ensuring everything feels and looks consistent and recognizable across its materials. That consistency builds trust, recognition, credibility and increased audience engagement.

Message Pillars

STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WELL-BEING

We put students at the center of everything we do—supporting their well-being, nurturing a sense of belonging and preparing them for life beyond college. Through inclusive, high-impact experiences and coordinated wraparound support, we meet students where they are and help them grow, persist, and thrive.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

We invest in our people because they make the difference. By fostering a culture of care, growth and shared accountability, we support our staff in doing meaningful, purpose-driven work that strengthens our entire community.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

We create communities where every student can feel valued, supported and connected. Through intentional recruitment, retention and development, we work to strengthen culture and climate while expanding access and opportunity for all.

ONE DIVISION

We show up as one team. By working collaboratively across departments and building strong partnerships, we amplify our impact and create more seamless, supportive experiences that help every student succeed.

VALUES IN ACTION

We live our values every day. From the way we make decisions to how we serve students, we are committed to practices that are equitable, transparent and grounded in integrity.

SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATIONS

We build with the future in mind. By strengthening our systems, resources and infrastructure, we support sustainable, community-informed progress that allows our work and our students to flourish over time.

Writing Style

Writing should do more than share information; it should create a conversation and connection. Every word should deepen dialogue with our diverse audiences.

The focus should be less about what we want to say and more about what the audience needs to know. Be consistent, clear and concise with messages.

The Division of Student Affairs' (DSA) writing approach aims to:

- Focus on engaging your audience. Speak with them, not at them.
- Keep it conversational. If it sounds natural out loud, it works.
- Less is more. The fewer words, the quicker our audience can receive a message. Smart brevity/plain language is key.
- Highlight benefit and value, not just information or facts.
- Skip the exclamation points. Let the words carry the energy.

Voice and Tone

Our voice is welcoming, supportive, inclusive, student-centered and practical. Our tone varies by context:

- Crisis: calm, direct, reassuring
- Events: energetic, inviting
- Policies: clear, straightforward

SMART BREVITY/PLAIN LANGUAGE

Audiences engage with information differently today, even when it's critical to their work.

Smart Brevity prioritizes clarity and efficiency by focusing on what's new and essential, organizing content for quick navigation, and presenting it in an easy-to-understand, absorbable format.

The results are communications that are often shorter than traditional formats while delivering the same core substance.

WRITING FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

- Write with your reader in mind. Adjust what you say and how you say it, based on what they need to know, what they expect and how familiar they are with the topic.

BEFORE WRITING, ASK:

- What does this audience need to know?
- What action should they take?
- What context do they already have?

Adjust your tone and content for the specific audience:

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

- Welcoming, informative and aspirational.
- Focus on opportunities and what they can expect.

CURRENT STUDENTS

- Direct, clear and actionable.
- Prioritize what they need to do, when and how.

PARENTS/FAMILIES

- Reassuring, helpful and explanatory.
- Provide context and emphasize support, safety and resources.

STAFF/FACULTY

- Concise, operational and caring.
- Focus on key information, timelines and expectations.

WRITE WITH CLARITY

- Lead with what matters most to your audience.
- Provide the action needed.
- Avoid internal language, acronyms or jargon when possible.
- Use “you” to make the message personal and direct.

FOCUS ON ONE MESSAGE

- The purpose of each communication should be clearly stated at the beginning of the message. If your audience has to search for the main point, the message is too complex.

Digital Writing Best Practices

Most audiences scan before they read. Structure your content so key information is easy to find quickly.

KEEP IT SHORT AND SCANNABLE

- Use short paragraphs (one to three sentences).
- Break up text with bullet points and subheadings.
- Avoid large blocks of text.

FRONT-LOAD KEY INFORMATION

- Put the most important information first.
- Lead with deadlines, actions or key takeaways.
- Don't bury the main message.

USE CLEAR, DESCRIPTIVE HEADINGS

- Headings should tell the reader exactly what to expect.
- Avoid vague labels like “information” or “details.”

WRITE STRONG CALLS TO ACTION

- Be specific about what the reader should do.
- Examples:
 - “Register for the event.”
 - “Submit your application by May 10.”
 - “View program dates.”

USE LINKS INTENTIONALLY

- Embed links in descriptive text (“View the event schedule”).
- Avoid “click here” or “learn more.”
- Limit the number of links to avoid overwhelming the reader.
- Avoid duplicate links (linked text and buttons).

BE CONSISTENT ACROSS PLATFORMS

- Email: concise, action-oriented, with clear next steps.
- Website: structured, informative and easy to navigate.
- Social media: brief, engaging and audience-focused.

Questions to Ponder

Once the copy is created, ask these questions to make the communication more effective.

CAN THIS BE SHORTER WITHOUT LOSING MEANING?

Even if you've already edited, be sure to review for additional ways to trim copy and reduce overall word count.

IS YOUR WRITING MORE ABOUT THE AUDIENCE OR ABOUT YOU?

Be sure to write for the audience. Use the second person point of view (you, your, yours) more than the plural first person (we, us, ours).

CAN YOU DISTILL YOUR MESSAGE INTO A THREE OR FOUR-WORD HEADLINE?

This ensures your message is well defined.

ARE YOU COMMUNICATING A SINGLE MESSAGE IN ONE COMMUNICATION?

Too many concepts in a single message can confuse the audience.

EDITORIAL GUIDE

The Division of Student Affairs follows the editorial style guide from the Office of Marketing and Communications, which is based on Associated Press (AP) style and tailored with university-specific guidelines.

Alumni terms

- Alumnus—one male graduate
- Alumna—one female graduate
- Alumni—multiple graduates (mixed group or all male)
- Alumnae—multiple female graduates

BEST PRACTICE:

Use “alumni” as the default, as it’s inclusive and widely understood.

Use “alums” in casual or conversational contexts.

Acronyms

Spell out the first reference.

Example: the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs (OVPSA)

Capitalization

Use lowercase for general references; capitalize formal office or unit names.

- The division offers a wide range of student support services.
- The Division of Student Affairs offers a wide range of student support services.
- The student conduct office manages the conduct process.
- The Office of Student Conduct manages the conduct process.

Rule of thumb: Capitalize formal titles *before* a name. Lowercase titles after a name.

- University of Maryland, Division of Student Affairs, Vice President Patty Perillo
- Patty Perillo, vice president

Commas

Simple lists:

Do not use a serial comma in a simple list of three or more items.

Example: “The Maryland flag is red, white, black and gold.”

Use a serial comma only when necessary to add clarity in a lengthy or complex list, or when the formal name of a unit includes one, such as College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences and the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies.

Examples:

- Through strong collaboration, the Division of Student Affairs supports all aspects of student life, including housing, dining, student activities, community engagement, recreation, health and wellness, spirituality, and career and social development, so every student can thrive.

- Three kinds of sandwiches will be available: grilled cheese, ham and Swiss, and peanut butter and jelly.

Use the comma when needed for clarity:

If omitting the comma may cause a reader to misunderstand the list, add it.

- “I’d like to thank my family, my mentor and my friend” could suggest the mentor and friend are family. Adding the comma clarifies it’s three separate people: “I’d like to thank my family, my mentor, and my friend.”

Also, use a serial comma when the final item includes and, or, or nor.

- Three kinds of sandwiches will be available: grilled cheese, ham and Swiss, and peanut butter and jelly.

Dashes

Dashes are punctuation marks used to connect or separate ideas. They can replace commas, colons or parentheses to make sentences clearer—and more conversational.

[View this guide](#) to learn keyboard shortcuts for typing em dashes on Windows and Mac devices.

HYPHEN (-):

Use a hyphen to connect compound modifiers and to indicate relationship and time, date and number ranges. Do not use spaces on either side.

- first-year students
- full-time staff
- 2026-27
- October-November 2026
- Feb. 12-14
- 20-30 hours per week
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Living-Learning Programs

EM DASH (—):

An em dash is used to set off additional information or a break in a sentence. Do not use it to connect two sentences. Do not use spaces on either side.

- In 1932, the University of Maryland selected the diamondback terrapin—a turtle native to the Chesapeake Bay—as the school’s mascot.
- Applications must be turned in on or by the due date—no exceptions.

Dates/Years

MONTHS:

- Capitalize the names of months.
- Abbreviate only when a full date is used: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.
Example: Monday, Sept. 14
- Spell out when used alone or with a year
Example: September 2026
- Do not abbreviate: March, April, May, June, July

DATES:

- Do not include ordinal endings (st, nd, rd, th) with dates: Sept. 1 (not Sept. 1st)
- Day comes before date: Monday, Sept. 14
- Do not use “on” before dates or days:
Example: The meeting is Monday.
- Example: The report is due April 10.

YEARS:

- In a sentence, put a comma after the year if it is included.
Example: Commencement was held May 21, 2026, at SECU Stadium.
- Omit the year when it is implied (occurs in the current year or within one of the publications).
Example: Commencement is May 20.

DAY RANGES:

Use a hyphen with no spaces.

- Monday-Friday

Seasons

Lowercase seasons unless referring to a specific semester.

- The spring semester
- Fall 2026
- Spring 2027

Email

Email is one word with no hyphen.

- email address

But: e-newsletter, e-book and e-scooter

Living-Learning Programs

Preferred over living and learning programs.

Numbers

Spell out the numbers one through nine, and use numerals for 10 and up.

Spell out numbers starting a sentence.

AGES:

Use numerals

- A 19-year-old student
- The student is 19.

PERCENT:

Use numerals and the symbol.

- 25%

LARGE NUMBERS:

Use numerals.

- 2,500 students

Spell out any number starting a sentence, and use numerals for ages within sentences.

Example: Three University of Maryland students were recognized for their outstanding leadership, including a 19-year-old sophomore serving in the Student Government Association.

PHONE NUMBERS

Should follow the format xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Example:

- 301-405-0000

Programs

Capitalize the names of formal programs.

- Terps After Dark
- College Park Scholars
- Banneker/Key Scholarship Program

Pronouns

Avoid using he/she, him/her or similar constructions when referring to an unspecified person.

Rephrase the sentence using they/them, or substitute a role (the student, the applicant, etc.).

When referring to a specific individual, use the pronouns they use.

The [LGBTQ+ Equity Center](#) and [GLAAD](#) have further resources on gender-inclusive language.

Residence Halls

The Department of Resident Life's (or Res Life, two words) preferred/required term for a building. The department avoids the terms "dorm" and "dormitory".

Time

Use numerals with a.m. and p.m. (lowercase, with periods). Don't add extra zeros.

Example: 2 p.m.

Use noon or midnight when possible.

Example: The event begins at noon.

TIME RANGES:

Use a hyphen (-) and include "a.m." or "p.m." only once if the range is within the same part of the day.

Examples:

- 2-4 p.m.
- 10-11 a.m.

University Name

University of Maryland, College Park

The full, formal name of the university. Note the comma. Do not use an em dash or "at."

On first reference use: University of Maryland.

On subsequent references use Maryland, UMD or the university, or Terrapins or Terps.

Do not use: U-MD, UM and U of M.

URLs

For web addresses, remove "www".

- stamp.umd.edu

If the URL is at the end of a sentence, add a period.

When including URLs in email communications, use clear, descriptive link titles.

Avoid vague phrases like “click here”, “learn more” or “here,” which do not provide meaningful context for screen readers or other assistive technologies. Instead, use descriptive link text when linking to a web page. This is a significant accessibility requirement because the term “click” or “here” is not relevant to many assistive technologies and provides insufficient context for screen readers.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Incorrect: To learn more about the Division of Student Affairs, [click here](#).

Correct: To learn more about student life, please visit the [Division of Student Affairs website](#).

Incorrect: [Click here](#) for the schedule of events.

Correct: View the [Stamp e-calendar](#) for a full listing of events.

Ensure content is free of obscenities, profanity and vulgarity. Avoid publishing content that may be considered offensive or disturbing. Department content must align with the University of Maryland and the Division of Student Affairs’ content and tone.

Website, Webpage

Website is one word, with a lowercase “w”. Webpage is one word, with a lowercase “w”.

COMMON ERRORS

These words never end in an S:

- toward (not towards)
- forward (not forwards)
- backward (not backwards)
- upward (not upwards)
- downward (not downwards)

People are referred to by “who.” Things are referred to by “that” or “which.”

Big Ten (not Big 10).

First-year instead of freshman. Sophomore or second-year student are both acceptable.

Division of Student Affairs specifics:

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS OR DSA

The Division of Student Affairs comprises 17 departments and more than 3,000 staff members, including student employees, all dedicated to providing services, support and experiences that help students thrive and feel a true sense of belonging.

Through strong collaboration, the division supports all aspects of student life, including housing, dining, student activities, community engagement, recreation, health and wellness, spirituality, and career and social development, so every student can thrive.

OUR MISSION:

Every student thrives

OUR VISION:

We are an inclusive community of care where every student can realize their full potential. Our intentional use of resources creates environments that support and enhance student learning and growth, engagement, belonging, and health and well-being.

OUR VALUES:

- Community
- Equity and Social Justice
- Learning and Growth
- Inclusive Excellence
- Innovation
- Integrity

Strategic Plan: Forward Together

Our Strategic Commitments

- We Put Students First
- We Invest in Our People
- We Create Caring and Inclusive Communities
- We Thrive As One Division
- We Align Practices with Values
- We Strengthen Our Foundations

The Thrive Center for Essential Needs

The Thrive Center for Essential Needs (may also be shortened to The Thrive Center) is the University's centralized hub for students facing basic needs challenges that can impact well-being, belonging and academic success. By bringing critical supports together in one place, the Thrive Center reduces barriers to access and ensures students receive timely, coordinated care and guidance that empowers them to navigate challenges and build lasting skills.

The Unity Center

The Unity Center fosters learning, connection and a shared sense of belonging for all Terps. Envisioned as a hub for community and inclusion, it features a multipurpose room and five student lounges.

The Student Affairs Difference

The Division of Student Affairs makes the difference between getting a college degree and getting an education. It's where students figure out not just what they want to do in the world, but who they want to be. It's the difference between succeeding in the classroom and thriving for life. Student Affairs helps students come into their own and build strength—because solving the grand challenges of our time requires courage, resilience and self-knowledge.

TERPS LEARN EVERYWHERE

At the University of Maryland, [Terps Learn Everywhere!](#) Co-Curricular Learning (CCL) designs outside-the-classroom opportunities to maximize growth and development. We're preparing leaders, changemakers and compassionate citizens who have confidence, skills and vision to lead and thrive. It's not just about what students study, it's about who they become. This is learning reimagined. This is Maryland.

Through co-curricular learning, Terps:

- Engage Inquisitively: Terps engage with curiosity and innovation.
- Practice Compassion: Terps seek to understand, then act with care.
- Act with Courage: Terps do brave things.
- Work for Justice: Terps work toward equity for all.



PRIMARY LOGO



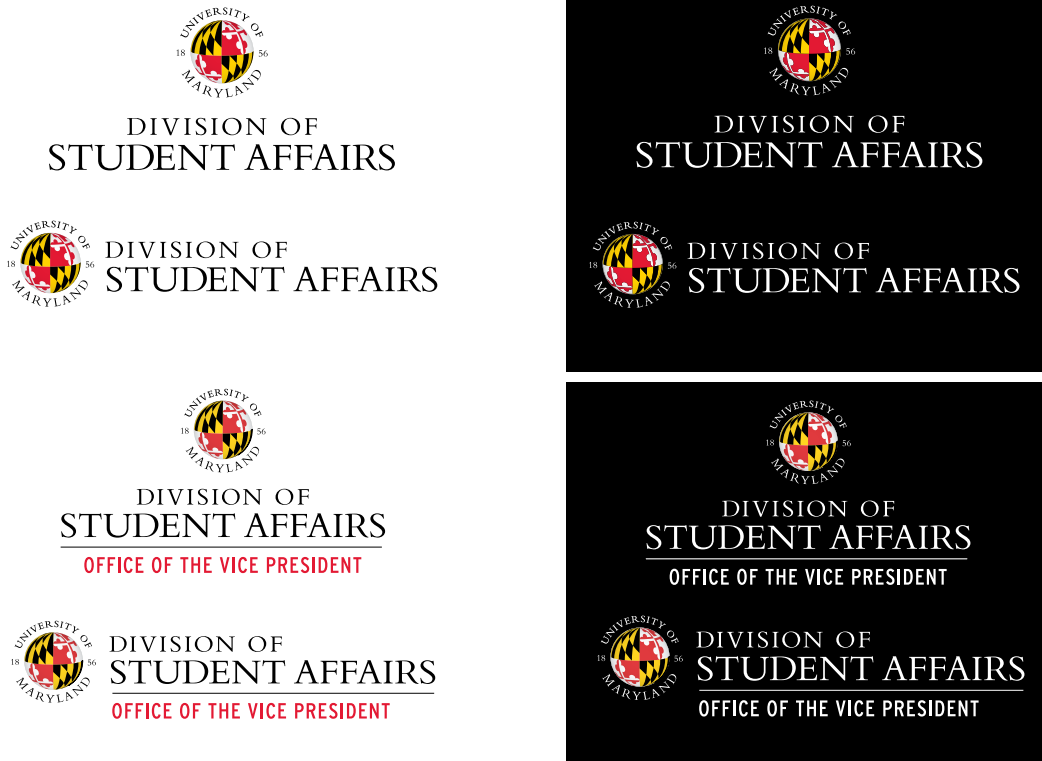
DOMAIN ICONS

VISUAL IDENTITY

Logo

When promoting to a broad audience, please use the Division of Student Affairs departmental lockup logo, which includes the Division of Student Affairs with the departmental name underneath. This helps strengthen the connection between the Division of Student Affairs and the 17 departments, all of which offer services and resources to help students thrive. If you need access to your departmental logo lockup, please contact studentaffairs@umd.edu.

Each department has access to its suite of logos, offering different formats and colors for each department.



INCORRECT LOGO USAGE



VISUAL IDENTITY (CONTINUED)

Color

The Division of Student Affairs must use the established university colors as the primary color palette.

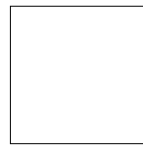


RED

RGB 224/58/52

CMYK 0/91/76/6

HEX #e21833



WHITE

RGB 255/255/255

CMYK 0/0/0/0

HEX #ffffff



FOR UNCOATED PAPER

RGB 255/225/79

CMYK 0/9/80/0

HEX #ffe14f



BLACK

RGB 0/0/0

CMYK 0/0/0/100

HEX #000000



GOLD

RGB 255/213/32

CMYK 0/15/94/0

HEX #ffd200

UMD Color Combinations for Text and Background that Meet Accessibility Requirements

TEXT/BACKGROUND COLOR	WHITE	RED	BLACK	GOLD
WHITE		LS	LS	
RED	LS		L	L
BLACK	LS	L		LS
GOLD		L	LS	

LS: LARGE AND SMALL

All text sizes can be used for these combinations of color

L: LARGE

Only use these combinations for text that is 18 pt. or larger (14 pt. or larger if set in bold.)



Typography

The Division of Student Affairs uses UMD brand typefaces (Adobe Bembo, Interstate, Crimson Text, Source Sans 3, Roboto Condensed) while embracing Source Sans (sans serif) for its simplicity and flexibility on print and web.

Each font family also has numerous versions, including bold, condensed, thin, italic, oblique, black, light, etc. Consult with Creative Services in the Office of Marketing and Communications and/or the Division of Information Technology on how to download and install typefaces on your computer.

Substitutions of fonts that are native to Microsoft Word and Gmail (for emails) may be used as needed: Garamond, Georgia or Times New Roman (serif), Verdana, Helvetica or Arial (sans serif).

APPLICATIONS



Email Signature

Standardized email signatures help convey continuity throughout the division. Please use the template provided below for your email signature. This template was developed with accessibility in mind. Avoid attaching images to your signature, as they can cause issues delivering and displaying your email to some users.

SUGGESTED FORMAT:

First Name Last Name (optional pronouns)
Title, Unit
Department | Unit
Division of Student Affairs | University of Maryland
Office Address | College Park, MD 20742
Phone number | Website

Optional add-ons:
Social media handles
Make a Gift

EXAMPLE:

Zimri Diaz (he/him)
Coordinator for Communications and Marketing
Office of the Vice President | Marketing & Communications
2108 Clarence Mitchell Building
Division of Student Affairs | University of Maryland
301-314-8402 | studentaffairs.umd.edu

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)
[Make a gift to Student Affairs](#)

Business Cards

Business cards are to be ordered by individuals, with approval by their department head or supervisor, using the template provided by [University Printing Services](#) via the online ordering system for business cards, letterhead, envelopes and more.

Signage

Avoid posting handwritten signage on building doors, windows, etc., especially when communicating about opening, closing service disruptions, etc.

Signage templates are available in Canva for Teams, or staff should contact their departmental communications team or OVPSA Communications team for guidance. Signage should always include a logo (either DSA lockup or departmental logo) and contact information.

Avoid posting fliers, posters and signs with tape visible to the viewer, as it distracts from the message. Tape should be applied to the back of the sign (roll tape and place it on the back for posting). Take care to hang signs straight (avoid slanted, crooked hanging).

ACCESSIBILITY



Digital Accessibility (Six Essential Steps)

The Division of Student Affairs is committed to digital accessibility so that all students, families and community members can access information and engage with our resources.

We strive to create digital content that is clear, inclusive and usable for people of all abilities by following accessibility standards and best practices across our websites, emails, videos, social media, internal documents and files.

Digital accessibility is a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is reinforced by the University of Maryland's Accessible Technology Policy. This requirement applies to all digital content, whether public-facing or behind authentication, such as materials housed within ELMS-Canvas.

Below are the [six essential steps for digital accessibility](#).

Headings and Structure

- Use properly formatted headings to structure a document or web page.
- Never skip heading levels (h1, h2, h3, h4...).

Links

- Write meaningful link text.
- Links embedded in text should describe the link's destination.
- Avoid using text such as "click here" or "read more" to describe the link destination.
- Do not use full URL link.

Color Contrast

- Use sufficient color contrast.
- Avoid using color alone to convey meaning.
- Add labels to charts and graphs.

Images

- Provide an alternative (alt) text to convey the purpose of an image.
- The alt text should be short and functional. For example, an appropriate text alternative for a search button would be "search," not "image of a magnifying glass."

Tables

- Create tables with column and/or row headers.
- Ensure proper reading order.
- Don't merge cells or use tables to format a document.

ACCESSIBILITY



Media

- Add captions to your videos.
- Edit and correct automated captions.
- Provide a transcript for audio files.

For more information about our accessibility standards, view the Division of Information Technology's [six essential steps to accessibility](#).

