Savannah State University –
Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Travel

I. Meals and Miscellaneous

1. If a continental breakfast or an evening reception is offered as part of the travel event, can I still receive the per diem?

Statewide Accounting Policy & Procedure, page 17, states the following:
*Meals include those provided by hotels, meetings, conferences, or any other source. If a continental breakfast or reception is offered as part of the travel event AND the FOOD/TIMING is SUFFICIENT to serve as a meal, the traveler must reduce the per diem by the appropriate allowance amount. If a meal is offered as part of a conference and the traveler has medical restrictions, the traveler should make every effort to have the conference facilitate his/her needs by the deadline specified by the conference.*

Please note, however, that if the conference cannot provide or doesn’t provide accommodation, the traveler can purchase food that meets his/her needs and must provide a receipt (not to exceed the per diem allowed) documenting the necessity (i.e., dietary restrictions, no vegetarian alternative, etc.) for purchasing the meal to be reimbursed.

2. What is the best way to calculate the 75% allowed of the per diem to enter into my travel expense report?

If you are on travel status for more than 12 hours, you get *75% of the first and last day of travel regardless of the time left and the time returned.* Therefore, you can calculate 75% of each meal for all three meals unless one is provided as part of the event. For example, you are traveling on a Monday at 10:00 from the University to Macon State University for a conference. The conference lasts all day on Thursday (5:00 p.m.) so you will not be returning to campus until about 8:30 on Thursday evening to return the pooled vehicle and everyone else traveling with you to their cars. The conference includes Monday night dinner and lunch for Tuesday and Wednesday only. Assuming a $28/day per diem ($6 for breakfast, $7 for lunch, and $15 for dinner), your expense reimbursement would look something like the following chart.

Notice that only *75% of meals were calculated for the day of departure and the day of return.* This is mandated by State policy effective for all University travel occurring on or after September 1, 2012. If you will use the *new travel reimbursement form* it will
allow you to put in the day’s per diem and break it down for you, calculating the 75% on the first and last day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details of Subsistence (Attach Lodging Receipts)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XX/XX/XX</td>
<td>10:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>SSU to Macon State</td>
<td>Breakfast: $4.50, Lunch: $5.25, Dinner: Included</td>
<td>$129.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX/XX/XX</td>
<td></td>
<td>Macon, GA, MSU</td>
<td>Breakfast: $6.00, Lunch: Included, Dinner: $10.00</td>
<td>$141.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX/XX/XX</td>
<td>5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Macon to SSU</td>
<td>Breakfast: $4.50, Lunch: $5.25, Dinner: $11.25</td>
<td>$21.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: $21.00, $10.50, $31.25, $360.00, $432.75

3. In the past we could not get reimbursed for tips, but it is my understanding that we can now. Is that true and how does it work?

According to the State policy (page 17) incidental expenses (i.e. fees and tips) are reimbursable in the State of Georgia now due to the fact that the State does not include them in the per diem rate for meals. If you are traveling in state you must account for tip expenses separately as part of the miscellaneous reimbursement. You are limited to $5/day, with the 75% limitation, for tips.

According to the State policy, GSA meal rates for the day include the incidental fee. Therefore, effective September 1, 2012, you are eligible for this incidental reimbursement rate per day for travel outside of the State of Georgia. This will be broken down along with the meals in the new expense report and is subject to the 75% rule on the first and last day.
II. Travel Related

4. Can I extend a trip for personal reasons on a trip that is business in nature?

Revised Statewide Accounting Policy and Procedure, page 8, states: *Travelers who are combining personal travel with business travel may only do so when the personal portion does not add any cost to the State. Travel arrangements must be made to accommodate the business duties of the traveler and NOT personal preference.*

For example, a University employee must go to San Francisco for a conference that is running Sunday through Wednesday. Therefore, the traveler must book air fare and hotel to leave on Saturday and return on Thursday. Assuming no rental vehicle and the air fare is cheaper with a Saturday through Saturday flight, the traveler could take Friday as a vacation day, incur the cost of the hotel for two additional nights, and the cost of food. The University would only pay meal amounts not included for the return day (Thursday) based on the time the person should have returned if they had come back at the end of the conference. Please note in this example, it actually saved the University but be mindful that the employee must take vacation time and that travel reimbursements are only during the time of the conference, not during the personal time.

Another example is as follows and does not include air fare, but a pooled/rental vehicle is utilized. If the same conference was in Atlanta and Wednesday was only ½ day the employee would have to return to campus on Wednesday and return the state vehicle (whether rental or pooled) by the end of that day or first thing Thursday morning if too late returning.

In no case may a State vehicle (owned, pooled, or rental) be utilized for personal purposes. Again, the overriding principle is the addition of cost to the State/University or the usage of State property for personal reasons.

5. How far in advance do you recommend I prepare a Travel Authorization to ensure that I have a pooled/rental vehicle available?

A general rule of thumb would be *to have an approved travel authorization to the Transportation Office two weeks prior to the travel date.* Please allow for processing.

Once you submit your Travel Authorization, which now includes your Cash Advance, to the Office of the Comptroller, it must be logged in and budget reviewed by either Budget or Grants. Back at the front desk a travel authorization number is assigned and copies made for Accounts Payable to produce cash advances on time. We also have to ensure that any necessary Travel Pre-Audit steps are taken before approval. Only after all of this does it get sent back to your office. This process takes 5-7 business days.

The important issue is that once you receive the fully approved Travel Authorization with an assigned number, this can be attached to your Vehicle Request. *Do not attach your vehicle request to the Travel Authorization when you send to the Comptroller’s*
Office. Only attach the vehicle request to the Travel Authorization AFTER you receive back from the Comptroller’s Office with an assigned number. Your TA will then include all of the appropriate signatures so you will not have to get anything else approved for your vehicle request by attaching a properly completed TA. Transportation will process within 24-48 hours depending on the time of receipt. If a pooled vehicle is not available, Transportation will send to Procurement for a rental vehicle which will be processed within 24-48 hours depending on the time of receipt.

Think of the process as follows:

TA with all approvals to Comptroller’s Office → 5 -7 business days

BACK TO YOU

Vehicle Request with attached TA → 3-4 business days to confirm vehicle if it has to be rented (pooled will turn around in no more than 48 hours to Procurement and Procurement will turn in around in no more than 48 hours when received.)

Taking TAs to the Comptroller’s Office or Vehicle Requests to Transportation is encouraged if you are on a short time-frame as there can be delays caused if sending through interoffice mail.

The key is planning as much as you can, but at least 3 weeks prior to needing a vehicle. We do understand that there are a few extenuating circumstances and we will do what we can to secure a vehicle as quickly as possible, but within our business policies and processes.

6. Can I use a Purchasing Card to pay for any of my travel?

You can use your PCard to pay for conference registration for employees as long as you have a properly approved Travel Authorization to support the purchase. PCards cannot be used for any other employee travel, with the exception of the PCards held by Procurement for air fare and other company purchases.
7. How far in advance should you book your air fare?

Planning will always be the key. Air flights should be booked at least 14 days in advance. Depending on the size of the event, the number of people attending, and the event location a few events will require that you book a few months in advance. However, please be mindful that changes are costly and you should be relatively sure that you are attending an event before booking any travel.

8. How late is too late?

Statewide Accounting Policy & Procedure, page 9, clearly states the following: 
*Travel plans should be made as far in advance as possible, once travel dates have been confirmed.* To obtain discounted rates, all flights should be booked at least 14 days in advance. *Flights booked with less than 14 days advanced purchase require a WRITTEN EXPLANATION for the booking delay for the approver. Approvers may DENY charges that result from last minute airline booking.*

9. Speaking of air fare, does the University pay for my bags?

As per the State policy, travelers are reimbursed for a maximum of (1) piece of check luggage and baggage charges for excess weight will not be reimbursed. Excess weight is generally over 50 pounds. This should be reported on the second page of your expense report under miscellaneous fees. Make sure that you print the receipt as support for the reimbursement. (In many cases, you can email the receipt to yourself as well when checking in for the flight.)

10. What do I do when I attend a conference or other event and receive a lot of materials that I need to bring back and the weight will be in excess if I put in my luggage?

It is highly recommended that you FedEx or use another postal service to send these items back to the University as this is the least expensive option. Baggage excess weight charges are very high and are intended to penalize customers.

If you are taking equipment to or returning from a business event where you are flying, it is encouraged that you check with the airline on the cost of an additional bag, box, etc., as it may be more cost effective and will be allowable with an appropriate business purpose explanation. These types of questions can generally be asked of our travel agent who provides information on flight costs. Planning is encouraged for these types of issues.

11. How should I request cash advance for travel and is there a minimum amount?

Please be aware that there is now a cash advance request as part of your Travel Authorization form. You should request only the amount needed for your personal
travel. There is no minimum amount, but be conscientious of the processes that it requires to produce advances in a timely manner.

12. If I cannot get a hotel at the conference rate, can I be reimbursed for another hotel in the area?

Statewide Accounting Policy & Procedure, page 15, states:

Lodging Expense: The traveler should select the least expensive option available taking into consideration proximity to the business destination and safety. The traveler . . . MUST inquire about the government rate available or the conference lodging rate . . . Lodge expenses are reimbursed at actual cost provided they are reasonable and comparable to GSA rates.

Again, planning is the key and while travelers may not always be able to get the conference hotel, rates should be reasonable and comparable to the conference hotel and/or GSA rate.

13. Am I responsible for taxes on my lodging?

Statewide Accounting Policy & Procedure, page 15, states:

State and local government officials and employees traveling within the state on office business are exempt from paying the county or municipal excise tax on lodging. Travelers are required to submit a copy of the hotel/motel tax-exemption for when they register at a hotel/motel. . . If the hotel refuses to accept the form at check-in, the traveler should attempt to resolve the issue with hotel management before checking out . . . If the matter is not resolved by check-out time, the traveler should pay the tax.

If you have to pay the tax, you will have to note on your travel expense statement that you had the proper tax-exemption form along with your identification as a State employee but that management refused to allow. In addition to this exemption, the policy states that travelers are to make every effort to avoid payment of sales tax when lodging in the State of Georgia. You can do this by requesting a check to be made payable from Savannah State University directly to the hotel/motel, or you can take a sales tax exemption form with you to present along with your excise tax exemption. The hotel/motel doesn’t have to honor the sales tax exemption if you are paying with a personal payment, but, in many cases, they will.

14. Can I use my credit card statement instead of a receipt since it has all my charges on it for my trip?

No. State policy clearly states on page 25 that credit card slips and statements are not acceptable in lieu of receipts. Travel expense reports may be selected for audit at any time and all required receipts must be retained...
15. Can I be held liable as an approver if my employee does not follow travel policies and procedures?

Yes. The state travel policy clearly notes the following on page 6:

By approving travel expenses, the approver is attesting that he/she has thoroughly reviewed each transaction and the supporting documentation, and has verified that all transactions are allowable expenses. The approver is the “check” in the expense reporting process to identify potential or actual errors in expense reporting and is equally accountable for all expenditures.

Upon granting approval of expense submissions, approvers are certifying:
- Appropriateness of the expenditure and reasonableness of the amount.
- Availability of funds.
- Compliance with funding agency regulations and State reimbursement policies.
- Completeness of documentation and accuracy.

Please note that SSU is audited every year for Travel-related expenses and you may lose your privilege to travel and, in some cases, your job for violations of the State Travel Policy. We want to ensure that everyone is able to travel for business in an efficient and effective manner, while also staying in compliance with the State of Georgia and Savannah State University policies and procedures. We look forward to your comments and what we can do to assist you in understanding the revised Georgia Statewide Accounting Policy and Procedure related to travel.

III. Transportation

16. Why can’t family members or friends ride in a pooled or rental vehicle?

DOAS (Department of Administrative Services) regulations and the SSU Vehicle Usage Policy in support of these State regulations prohibit the transport of families, friends, associates or other persons who are not employees of the University System of Georgia, OR serving the interest of Savannah State University in owned, leased, or rented vehicles. This does not prohibit the transport of students for a valid business purposes as that is serving the interest of Savannah State University. Vehicles owned, leased, or rented using University funds must be used for official business only and never the personal interests of the employees. Under no circumstances should a University vehicle be used for personal reasons.
17. Can I take my family on the University’s buses or vans to athletic events, etc.?

No. These University-owned vehicles are subject to the same policy as noted in the first question. Only employees, students, and volunteers performing business functions on behalf of SSU and registered with Human Resources as volunteers can ride in these vehicles. Vendor-provided buses with vendor-provided drivers have been leased on some occasions to transport non-employees and these are covered by the vendor’s liability insurance.

18. I know the new State policy discourages the use of a personal vehicle, but is there any time where it is clear that I can use my personal vehicle and be reimbursed for mileage?

Yes, if you are using your personal vehicle within a 50-mile radius and are traveling on business you can be reimbursed mileage less any miles regularly traveled to and from home. This is particularly applicable to areas that don’t have a department vehicle at their disposal and where the use of a pooled/rental vehicle is not always feasible at the last minute or for just temporary use. This mileage is reimbursable at the Tier 1 rate.

An example would be that you have to leave work and pick up someone from the airport for an interview late afternoon and take them to their hotel on the way home. The next morning you have to pick them up in the morning on your way to the University for their interview, return them to the Airport early afternoon, and return to work. In this case, let’s assume your average mileage to work is 10 miles and the hotel is between your home and the University. On the first day of the pickup, you need to record your odometer readings from the University to your home (the hotel stop was in between) and reduce that by the 10 miles you would have taken to go home at the end of the day. On the second day, the hotel is on your way to work so there would be no mileage reimbursement. However, because you are taking the person from the University to the Airport and coming back to the University to work you would be reimbursed this round trip with no deduction of miles.

19. What if I want to use my personal vehicle so that I can take my family or for other personal reasons. Can I just get reimbursed for the gas cost?

The DOAS, and as confirmed in the SSU Vehicle policy, doesn’t allow the reimbursement of gas for personal vehicles. The State travel policy only allows mileage reimbursement and there are stipulations on when that can occur. Mileage reimbursement includes the cost of gas as well as the usage of a personal vehicle. If you choose to utilize your personal vehicle for comfort or personal reasons, you are choosing to not be reimbursed unless you meet the requirements and are preauthorized to use a personal vehicle.
20. Okay, so when exactly can I use a personal vehicle besides the 50-mile radius?

In most cases you will find that the use of a personal vehicle is not less expensive than the use of a pooled/rental vehicle. However, if BOTH of the following criteria are met then you can get reimbursed for mileage if approved in advance, justification is properly attached and approved as part of the Travel Authority, and the Travel Authority is fully approved BEFORE incurring the cost:

- The mileage reimbursement for the use of a personal vehicle is less than the pooled/rental vehicle plus gas and this can be shown using the State’s Vehicle Cost Comparison at [http://ssl.doas.state.ga.us/vehcostcomp/](http://ssl.doas.state.ga.us/vehcostcomp/), AND

- This cost comparison is attached to the Travel Authorization when submitted, signed by the Traveler, and approved by both the Budget Unit Head and the Vice-President of the division.

Please note you must always check yes on question number 3. Employees always have access to pooled and rental vehicles provided. Therefore, mileage reimbursement will be made at the Tier 2 level, or **24 cents per mile as of January 1, 2013**, if utilizing a personal vehicle for cost effectiveness.
Exceptions may also be made in extenuating or emergency situations that occur, but these must be justified in writing, signed by the employee, and approved by the Vice-President of the division and the Vice-President of Business and Finance as extenuating or emergency situations before they can be reimbursed.

21. **If I am going to an out-of-state location, do I have to utilize public transportation to get to my hotel, conference event, etc.?**

Revised Statewide Accounting Policy and Procedure, page 12, states:

*Travelers are responsible for knowing which type of ground transportation is the least expensive. . . . Public transportation may be the more economical alternative. This could consist of taxis, shuttles, or mass transit.*

According to the revised statewide policy each individual traveler has the obligation to utilize the least expensive alternative. Employees and supervisors should be aware of this objective. Therefore, when traveling by air to a distant location, one must consider all modes of transportation that can be utilized and select the least expensive alternative.

22. **If I am using a rental car at a distant location (i.e., traveling by plane to a destination where public transportation is not available to get me to the hotel, conference, etc.), do I need to book it myself or what process should I go through to utilize the State’s contract with Enterprise?**

You must put a requisition into ePro and note the approved Travel Authorization number on the request. Make sure that you indicate the number of people who are traveling in the vehicle, location (i.e., Airport) that you are picking up the vehicle at, the dates and times of pickup and return, and your driver’s license number. Unless you indicate the number of people, economy cars will be rented when the number of passengers is not noted.

23. **Should I pay for additional insurance on vehicles rented through the State contract with Enterprise?**

No. Because the vehicle is being rented under a State contract, we are told to decline insurance as all USG employees are covered. If you authorize payment for insurance and we cannot get reimbursed, you will be responsible for this cost. This is an unallowable expense and if it is charged to Savannah State University’s Purchasing card and not reimbursed, this amount is eligible to be deducted from your pay.

*Additional insurance, GPS devices, car seats, and other non-business related items are unallowable. If Savannah State’s Procurement Card is charged for these items you will be subject to payroll deduction for reimbursement.*
NOTE: When you return your vehicle it is recommended that you get a complete copy of all charges and review BEFORE you leave the site to ensure that any unallowable expenses have NOT been charged.

For more information, please contact the following individuals:

General Travel Questions: Khrystyn Owens, Campus Travel Coordinator
912-358-4060, or OwensK@SavannahState.edu

Policy Clarification Issues: Mary H. Loomis, CPA, MPA
Assistant Vice-President, Business & Finance/Comptroller
912-358-4055, or MLoomis@SavannahState.edu