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Appropriate Use of MSU E-mail Services by Internal Users on MSU.net

(Administrative Ruling)
2 May 2009

I. Background

Michigan State University (MSU) provides e-mail services to its students, faculty, and staff to facilitate the academic and administrative functions that support the University's mission of teaching, research, and service. The University's e-mail services are not open to the general public; nor are they intended for general public communication. The University's e-mail services are not intended as a forum for the expression of personal opinions. Other means exist in the University community for the expression and dissemination of personal opinions on matters of interest within the University community. Rather, the University's e-mail services are provided to support the University's instructional, public service, research, and administrative objectives.

This Administrative Ruling regulates the use of e-mail by internal users of MSU.net. [\(1\)](#)

II. Applicability

This Administrative Ruling applies to all internal users of MSU e-mail services and to all e-mails sent to or from a MSU e-mail account, regardless of the location or name of the source account from which those users may send e-mail messages.

III. Definitions



- λ. Bulk e-mail: The transmission of an identical or substantially identical e-mail message within a 48 hour period from an internal user to more than 10 other internal users who have not elected to receive such e-mail.
- λ. Internal user: Any University employee, student, or other individual who is assigned a University NetID.
- λ. Unsolicited E-mail: E-mail received by a person who has not elected to receive the e-mail by having indicated a prior interest and willingness to receive communications from the sender (e.g., having previously sent a communication to the sender to which the sender may be responding; being an acquaintance of the sender; belonging to a set of individuals who have chosen to affiliate and communicate with one another for a particular University purpose). Unsolicited e-mail is often referred to colloquially as “spam.”

IV. Personal and Commercial Use of the University’s E-mail Service

The University’s e-mail services are not provided for private or personal use. Incidental personal uses of the e-mail system are permitted as long as they do not violate the law; restrictions that derive from the University’s tax-exempt status; University policies, ordinances, rules, guidelines, or contracts the University has made. The University’s e-mail services may not be used for commercial or profit-making purposes unrelated to University business.

V. Regulations Regarding Bulk-E-mailing

The volume of unsolicited e-mail (“spam”) that users of University e-mail services receive is large and continues to increase. Significant University resources must be expended to identify, process, delete, and block unwanted “spam” e-mail. This “spam” also diminishes the perceived value of other e-mail received and may obscure important messages. Therefore, this Administrative Ruling regulates the use of bulk e-mail in order to promote institutional operating efficiency and the effectiveness of electronic communications within the MSU community.

A. Broad Cross-University Mailing

University offices may use bulk e-mail only to send academic or administrative communications necessary to some aspect of the University’s operations or mission. Such communications typically involve action to be taken individually by the recipients of the communications. Such communications include:

- Dissemination of urgent information regarding the health and safety of University students and employees.
- Distribution of information regarding changes to University policies or

procedures, or actions that affect employment or compensation status or status as a student.

- Notices (for example, to University employees) that are required by law, regulation, or University policy for which bulk e-mail replaces paper transmittal.

B. Targeted Mailing

University offices may create and use mailing lists for communicating with targeted University audiences having a special interest in the specific information being distributed (e.g., account signers, budget and business officers, academic advisors). Offices are encouraged to use alternate methods of communication, such as listservs and Web sites, as much as possible for distribution of information of interest to specific sets of internal users. Faculty and other instructional staff may e-mail targeted sub-populations having a special interest in the information being distributed, such as students enrolled in a particular course.

Students, faculty, staff, and administrative offices may use e-mail targeted to members of committees, clubs or organizations, work groups, and other sets of individuals who are affiliated for a particular University purpose, if the e-mail is relevant to their business or concerns. Academic governance bodies, standing committees of Academic Council, all-University student government groups, and major governing groups wishing to communicate by bulk e-mail with internal users outside of their regular constituencies must obtain approval from the appropriate administrative office prior to sending such communications. (2) All-University student government groups and major governing groups must obtain approval from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Services. Academic governance bodies and standing committees of Academic Council must obtain approval from the Office of the Provost.

Use of mailing lists and listservs which recipients may voluntarily opt into and opt out of is encouraged. Because the recipients have elected to participate in the listserv and mailing list, this type of e-mail distribution is not included in the definition of "bulk e-mail" in this Administrative Ruling.

C. Uses Within Administrative Units

Any individual academic or administrative unit (Major Administrative Unit, department, division, office) may, at its own discretion and solely within its own unit, permit the use of bulk e-mail for communications among the unit's faculty, students, and staff, such as announcements, newsletters, and notices on the unit's own governance and concerns.

D. Surveys

All surveys conducted by e-mail must receive prior approval by the appropriate University office(s), as set forth below. Surveys may not interfere with MSU's employee relationships developed through collective

bargaining agreements, or with MSU's own surveying or related activity bearing on University interests such as research, external reporting, or participation in multi-institutional studies.

1. Approvals:

- Surveys that are intended to include students must be approved by and coordinated through the Office of the Registrar. The Registrar will consult with and obtain the approval of the Chair of the Committee on Release of Confidential Information and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for surveys intended to include undergraduate students, and the Dean of the Graduate School for studies intended to include graduate students.
- Surveys that are not being sent to students must be approved by and coordinated through [Academic Technology Services](#) (ATS). ATS will expect that additional applicable approvals will have been obtained by the requestor, and may assist the requestor in consulting with the appropriate offices to obtain those approvals.
- Surveys intended to include MSU employees must be reviewed and approved in advance by the Office of Employee Relations. The Office of Employee Relations will consult with and obtain the approval of Academic Human Resources for surveys intended to include MSU faculty or academic staff, and the Dean of the Graduate School for surveys intended to include graduate student employees. Employee Relations may also consult with or need to obtain the approval of the appropriate collective bargaining unit(s).
- For all surveys, if the results of a survey might be published, the survey must be approved in advance by the [University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects](#).

2. Other requirements:

- All surveys must be carefully targeted to reach only legitimate subjects of the survey. Surveys of large groups (e.g., all faculty, all staff) should be conducted through stratified samples of the group rather than by surveying all group members.
- Bulk e-mail associated with a survey should be minimal in content, containing an invitation to the survey explaining its purpose and providing a link to the survey itself at a separate web site.
- The [Office of the Registrar](#) or [Academic Technology Services](#) may charge a fee for assisting with a survey.
- Survey requests are rarely accepted from non-University requestors.

VI. Design Guidelines

Judicious and well-managed use of e-mail, even for permitted purposes, is critical to maintaining recipients' perception of the validity and effectiveness of electronic communications. The following design guidelines are strongly suggested for e-mail distributions originating within the MSU community:

- a. Use bulk e-mail infrequently and for reasons of high value to the recipients.

3. Keep bulk e-mail messages short.
4. Always use a valid MSUnet address in the "From" line.
5. Always use a clear, specific and non-empty subject line.
6. Use plain text; avoid HTML.
7. For bulk e-mailing, clearly identify in the body of the message the originating unit or individual, the set of individuals being e-mailed, and the purpose of the message.
8. Use URLs rather than attachments to refer readers to policy or practice statements, and to long content.
9. Do not include or attach personal, confidential, or sensitive information. To assure the integrity of student education records, consult MSU's Guidelines Governing Privacy and Release of Student Records.
10. Carefully target lists of recipients to minimize the number of people who receive any given bulk e-mailing.
11. Do not assume that all targeted individuals will receive the e-mail (i.e., do not disadvantage those who may not receive the e-mail).
12. Send large quantities of bulk e-mail at non-peak times for e-mail traffic (e.g., after 5:00 pm and before noon).
13. Use existing targeted mailing lists and listservs whenever possible, within the permitted uses of the lists. Recipients should be allowed to opt-in and opt-out of listservs at their own discretion.
14. Use the "blind carbon copy" (bcc:) address field to suppress a long list of addresses in the "To" field.
15. E-mail sent to students must comply with the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) and MSU's [Guidelines Governing Privacy and Release of Student Records](#) (PDF)*, and should be sent using the "Blind Carbon Copy" (BCC:) address field to suppress names of students to whom the e-mail is being addressed.

VII. Complaints

Complaints regarding alleged violations of this Administrative Ruling should be directed to abuse@msu.edu for consideration by MSUnet administrators. Users who violate this Administrative Ruling may be subject to revocation or limitation of e-mail privileges or referral for disciplinary action under established University procedures.

VIII. History

This document was originally implemented on November 21, 2004 and was updated in September 2007 and May, 2009. The following groups were consulted in the development of this document:

- Council of Deans (Fall 2003)
- Provost's staff (Fall 2003, Spring 2004)
- Vice President for Finance and Operations staff (Fall 2003, Spring 2004)
- CORE group of vice presidents (Summer 2004)

- Communications and Computer Systems Advisory Committees
 - Network Communications Committee (Fall 2004)
 - Instructional Computing and Technology Committee (Fall 2004)
- Information Services and Technologies Coordinating Council (March 2009)
- University Committee on Student Affairs (April 2009)
- University Committee on Faculty Affairs (April 2009)

*[Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) is required to view this document.

Footnotes

(1) - Other University policies may also regulate the use of the University's electronic resources, including the *Acceptable Use of Computing Systems, Software, and the University Digital Network*.

(2) - For example, the regular constituency of ASMSU is all undergraduate students; the regular constituency of COGS is all graduate and graduate-professional students; the regular constituency of UCFA is all faculty.

Contact LCT: Questions regarding this Administrative Ruling should be directed to the Vice Provost for Libraries, Computing, and Technology, 400 Computer Center, East Lansing, MI 48824. Phone (517) 353-0722.

See also: [Frequently Asked Questions about Appropriate Use of MSU E-mail Services by Internal Users on MSUnet](#)