Department of Student Life (../../../index.html)

Guidelines Regarding Bulk Email by Internal Users on MSUnet

(Administrative Ruling)

June 22, 2009

Preamble

Communications are increasingly conducted by way of email and other electronic means. Because the marginal cost of distributing email is very small (for the sending party) compared to paper-based or voice communications and email travels very quickly, email is seen to hold great potential for cost savings and operational efficiencies.

There also are problems associated with increased use of email:

- The quantity of undesired email ("spam") everyone receives is large and continues to increase. Spam is not only bothersome and sometimes offensive, but it also entails a material cost of personal time to process and eliminate from one's email Inbox. Additionally, it diminishes the perceived value of other email received. If opening, reading, thinking about and disposing of a piece of mass email takes each recipient only 10 seconds, then email sent to and read by every MSU student would consume more than 5 person-days of collective time, and email sent to and read by every MSU employee almost 2 person-days of collective time.

- The university's electronic network and the subnets, devices and storage connected to it are finite resources provided to facilitate the scholarship and work of members of the university community. Excessive use of bulk email will negatively affect the performance of these resources.

- Not all intended recipients of electronic messages may receive or regularly open email, nor have routine access to computers in their workplace. Some carefully targeted paper-based communications may continue to be necessary in some cases.

Thus, it makes sense to permit broader use of bulk email to promote institutional operating efficiency, but simultaneously to recognize that operating efficiency is also critically dependent on judicious use.

Guidelines for use of bulk email

These guidelines apply to members of the MSU community (students, faculty, staff, affiliates, university offices and programs). **The purposes of these guidelines are to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of electronic communication, and to minimize the amount of _undesired_ email that members of the MSU community receive from other members of the MSU community.** It is anticipated that the application of the guidelines (1-6) will minimize the amount of undesired email originating from within MSU and sent within and outside of the university. Further, it is hoped that the set of effective practices described by the design guidelines (A-N) will guide the University community in decisions and designs regarding the distribution of email.

"Bulk email" in this context means the transmission of an email message within a short time frame to more than a small set of recipients who may not have elected voluntarily to receive the email. "Short time frame" means an interval spanning as long as 2 days. "Small set of recipients" means the size of individual-recipient address lists (To, CC, BCC fields) typical of most emails in common use, ranging from 1, to a few, to as many as may be involved in a large committee or work group (20-30). Use of mailing lists and listservs to which recipients may voluntarily opt in and opt out is encouraged, and this type of email distribution is not included in the meaning of "bulk email" in this document.

- **Prohibited uses.** Bulk emailing may **not** be used for personal purposes, advertising or solicitations, or political statements or purposes.

- **Permitted uses for broad cross-university mailing.** Bulk emailing may be used only by university offices to send communications necessary to the normal course of business and which typically require some official action be taken individually by recipients. Such permitted uses include:

  - Dissemination of urgent information of health and safety concern for students and university employees.

  - Communication of information regarding changes of university policies or procedures, or actions that affect employment or compensation status, or status as a student.

  - Regular communications (for example, to university employees) that are required by law, regulation or university policy for which bulk email may largely replace paper

transmittal.

- **Permitted uses for targeted mailing.** In support of certain permitted uses, university offices may create and use mailing lists for communicating with targeted university sub-populations having a special interest in the specific information being distributed (e.g., account signers, budget and business officers, academic advisors, etc.). Offices are encouraged to use listservs and websites as much as possible for distribution of information of targeted interest. Similarly, faculty and others involved in instruction may email targeted sub-populations having a special interest in the information being distributed, such as students enrolled in their class(es).

- **Permitted uses within MAUs.** Major Administrative Units (colleges, divisions) and schools, departments, institutes and centers of the university may, at their own discretion and constrained to their own administrative domains only, expand on the permitted uses to send bulk email to their own faculty, students and staff regarding announcements, newsletter-type content, or their own governance and business issues.

- **Surveys.** It is desirable to minimize the use of bulk email for surveying for all of the reasons given in the "Preamble" and to minimize the frequency of bulk email generally. Additionally, care needs to be taken such that surveys do not interfere with MSU's employee relationships developed through collective bargaining agreements and contracting cycles, or with surveying or other actions that MSU may undertake for institutional interests such as institutional research, external reporting or participation in multi-institutional studies.

- **Approvals:** All bulk email surveys must receive prior approval by the appropriate university office(s):

  - Surveys that are intended to include students must be approved by and coordinated through the Office of the Registrar. The Registrar will consult additionally with and obtain the approvals 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 IT Services. IT Services 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 (faculty, staff or graduate student employees) must be reviewed and approved in advance by Human Resources Office of

Employee Relations, which will additionally 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 units.

- For all surveys, if the results of a survey might be published, the survey must be approved in advance by the <u>University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (https://hrpp.msu.edu/)</u>.

- **Other requirements:**

  - All surveys should be carefully targeted to impact only those recipients who may be 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 an email to the entire group.

  - Bulk email associated with a survey should be minimal in content, containing an invitation to the survey and explaining its purpose, and providing a link to the survey itself at a separate website.

  - <u>(http://www.reg.msu.edu/)The Office of the Registrar (https://reg.msu.edu/)</u> or IT Services may charge a fee for assisting with a survey.

  - Survey requests generally are not accepted from non-University requestors.

- **Questions and ambiguities regarding the guidelines.** The CIO shall be consulted regarding questions or ambiguities involving bulk email or these guidelines. Complaints regarding the misuse of email, the distribution of bulk email that may or does violate these guidelines, etc., should be directed to <u>abuse@msu.edu (mailto:abuse@msu.edu)</u>, for consideration by MSUnet administrators.

Design guidelines

Judicious and well-managed use of bulk email, even for permitted purposes, is critical to maintaining recipients' perspectives of the validity and effectiveness of electronic communications. The following additional design guidelines are strongly suggested for any email distributions originating from the MSU community and sent to recipients inside or outside the University:

- Use bulk email infrequently and for reasons of high value to the recipients.

- Keep bulk email messages short.

- Always use a valid MSUnet address in the "From" line.

- Always use a clear, specific and non-empty subject line.

- Use plain text; avoid HTML.

- Clearly identify in the body of the message the originating unit or individual, the scope of individuals being emailed, and the purpose of the message.

- Use URLs rather than attachments to refer readers to policy or practice statements, and long content.

- 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.

- Carefully target lists of recipients to minimize the number of people who receive any given bulk emailing.

- Do not assume that all targeted individuals will receive the email (i.e., do not disadvantage those who may not receive the email).

- Send large quantities of bulk email at non-peak times for email traffic (e.g., after 5:00 p.m. and before noon).

- 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.

- Use the "blind carbon copy" (bcc:) address field to suppress a long list of addresses in the "To" field.

- Email sent to students must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/PrivacyGuidelines.aspx) and MSU's Guidelines Governing Privacy and Release of Student Records (https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=112#s542), and should be sent using the "Blind Carbon Copy" (BCC:) address field to suppress names of students to whom the email is being addressed.

Admissions

Academics (https://admissions.msu.edu/academics/default.aspx)

More Success Stories (https://spartansuccess.msu.edu/)

Office of Admissions (https://admissions.msu.edu/)

Office of the Registrar (https://reg.msu.edu/UCC/onlineprograms.aspx)

Visit MSU (https://admissions.msu.edu/visit/default.aspx)

Entertainment

Arts & Culture (https://artsandculture.msu.edu/)

Athletic Information (https://msuspartans.com/)

Breslin Student Events Center (https://breslincenter.com/)

University Activities Board (UAB) (https://uabevents.com/)

Wharton Center for Performing Arts (https://www.whartoncenter.com/)

Community

East Lansing Community (https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/)

Live On (https://liveon.msu.edu/)

Housing Exception (../../../../housing/housing-exception.html)

Neighborhoods (https://liveon.msu.edu/neighborhoods)

MSU Police (http://police.msu.edu/)

Off Campus Housing (../../../../housing/index.html)

Resources

Be SAFE (https://www.canr.msu.edu/be_safe/)

Career Services Network (https://careernetwork.msu.edu/)

Commencement (https://commencement.msu.edu/)

The Gender and Sexuality Campus Center (https://gscc.msu.edu/index.html)

Office of Cultural & Academic Transitions (https://ocat.msu.edu/)

Office of Institutional Equity (https://oie.msu.edu/)

Financial Aid (https://finaid.msu.edu/)

MSU Today (https://msutoday.msu.edu/)

Spartan Life Handbook and Resource Guide (../../index.html)

Student Health Services (https://olin.msu.edu/)

The Dean of Students Office (https://www.deanofstudents.msu.edu/)

Women*s Student Services (https://wss.msu.edu/)

(HTTPS://www.facebook.com/msustudentlife/) (https://www.instagram.com/msu.studentlife/?