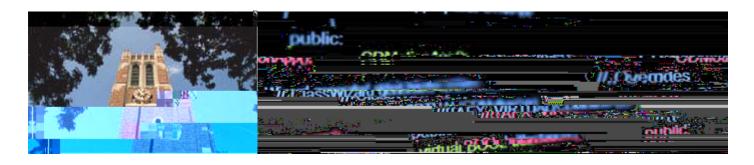Libraries, Computing & Technology

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

(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 MSUnet. (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

A. 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.

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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.

Contact LCT: 400 Computer Center, East Lansing, MI 48824. Phone (517) 353-0722.

B. Keep bulk e-mail messages short.

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

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

E. Use plain text; avoid HTML.

F. 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.

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

H. 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 Recordss

- 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)

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