**E-mail Management: Access and Security**

**Who can view my e-mails without my permission?**

Typically, e-mail administrators have access to your e-mail account but should only view it when troubleshooting technical problems or if university policies or contractual obligations are violated. If violations occur, you also can expect your supervisors and their superiors to have access to your e-mail accounts.

**What policies exist concerning e-mail privacy?**

The Office of Libraries, Computing, and Technology has posted an administrative ruling on “Appropriate Use of MSU E-mail Services by Internal Users on MSUnet,” which can be found at [lct.msu.edu/guidelines-policies/appropriate-use-of-msu-email.html](http://lct.msu.edu/guidelines-policies/appropriate-use-of-msu-email.html).

**How should I manage personal e-mails that I receive at work?**

According to the policy on “Appropriate Use of MSU E-mail Services by Internal Users on MSUnet,” the university’s e-mail services are neither open to the general public nor intended for general public communication. The university’s e-mail services are not intended as a forum for the expression of personal opinions. Users should be aware that the ultimate privacy of messages cannot be ensured and should limit personal usage of university-sponsored e-mail systems. Personal e-mail that is sent or received at work should be deleted as soon as possible or forwarded to a personal account.

E-mail is discoverable in legal actions. Copies of personal e-mail also may exist on backup systems for weeks after you have deleted them from your e-mail account. Check with your systems administrator for more information about your e-mail backup.

**Who “owns” e-mails I send and receive at work?**

While e-mails sent or received at work may be considered “private” in nature, U.S. courts generally have held that employees do not have a right to privacy in electronic messages sent or received at work when the employer sponsors the system. Physical “ownership” of e-mail messages should be considered to reside with the employer, although intellectual property rights, such as copyright, may reside elsewhere. For example, if you receive an e-mail from a colleague with an article attached, although the university physically would own the e-mail, it would not own the intellectual property rights to the article. Consult your department supervisors or legal counsel for guidance regarding your particular situation.

See “How should I manage personal e-mail that I receive at work?”
What should faculty know about communicating with students via e-mail?

Several FAQs have established that e-mail is neither secure nor private. While it is common for faculty and students to discuss sensitive issues such as grades, advisory issues, or academic progress via e-mail, both parties should be aware of protections afforded to them and the risks of such communication.

At MSU, the registrar has enacted policies concerning the release of student-identifiable information in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. Every faculty member should be aware of that policy and whether students have waived their right to privacy. The policy is available at [reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/PrivacyGuidelines.asp](reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/PrivacyGuidelines.asp). E-mail correspondence with students made or received by faculty members or administrators for their own use and not shown to others falls outside the definition of “education records,” according to this policy. Faculty members should continue to be aware of the security issues surrounding the use of e-mail and the subsequent risk to students’ privacy. It is not always the best replacement for a telephone call.

Should I discuss sensitive or confidential issues via e-mail?

E-mail is not always a secure communications medium, and you should have no expectation of privacy when using it.

You should consult your e-mail system administrators and your supervisor to discuss using e-mail to transmit sensitive or confidential information. They can tell you about safeguards in place to protect that information. Your department may have policies against using e-mail in certain cases, such as transmitting protected health information or discussing personnel matters.

Why do I get so much “spam” and what can I do to avoid it?

Unsolicited or junk e-mail, or “spam,” clogs e-mail inboxes and can affect e-mail system performance, spread computer viruses, and generally be aggravating. E-mail software differs, but most packages contain some sort of filtering capability. Filtering options may exist at a larger, systemwide level. To learn about your e-mail system’s filtering functions, contact your e-mail system administrator. To avoid spam:

- Do not open messages that could potentially be from spammers.
- Don’t purchase anything from spammers.
- Be careful where you post your e-mail address online. It might be a good idea to use a personal e-mail address when posting on forums or bulletin boards.
- Don’t reply to spam or ask the sender to remove your address from a mailing list if the spam is coming from a site you do not recognize. Doing so will simply confirm that your e-mail address exists and you may receive even more spam.
• Block spam with filters. Filters are not perfect and may misidentify a legitimate message as spam. When using a filter, you may want to have spam directed to a folder so that you can review it before deleting. See your e-mail administrator for more information.

• When registering with or creating an account on a Web site, always choose “do not sell my e-mail address” if you have a choice.

See abuse.msu.edu for more information.

**When I delete an e-mail message, is it really deleted?**

E-mail software options differ in their deletion functions. Generally, deleting a message sends it to a “trash” folder or marks it with an “x.” You must then instruct the system to empty the trash folder or purge messages that have been marked for deletion. Some systems can be set to purge deleted messages automatically when you exit the system. Consult your e-mail system administrator to learn about this.

You also should inquire about the frequency of backup procedures. Many e-mail system administrators perform backup after business hours. If a message resides on the system and has not been purged when backup is performed, it may reside on the backup copy for a number of days or weeks until that particular copy is recycled or erased/reused.

**What happens when my office receives a public records request regarding e-mail?**

The university evaluates all requests for information submitted by the public. Consult the Office of the General Counsel for guidance if you receive such a request.