University of Baltimore

III-1.2 E-mail Guidelines

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Introduction

The University of Baltimore has adopted a University-wide policy intended to describe appropriate use of electronic mail. The purpose of these guidelines is to recommend procedures and tips for effective adherence to the E-Mail Policy.

I.   Appropriate content and tone:

E-mail should be thoughtfully written, carefully edited, and sent only to appropriate recipients. Users should remember common courtesy and respect for others. Think before clicking "Send". E-mail is the modern form of writing a letter, so the writer should use similar standards for e-mail. Do not say anything in an e-mail that you would not want to put in writing on paper, permanently. Ask yourself: Would I say this in person?

Never send e-mail when angry or exhausted. Try not to reply immediately to a message that upsets you. Save your thoughts in writing and look at them the next day. Sometimes, upon reflection, you may rewrite the message and improve the tone, and sometimes, you may not need to send the message at all.

The University cannot, in general, protect users from receiving electronic mail that they may find offensive. Members of the University community, however, are strongly encouraged to use the same personal and professional courtesies and considerations in electronic mail as they would in other forms of communication.

II. Determine whether E-mail is the right medium.

Evaluate whether face-to-face, telephone, or formal written communication is more appropriate. The best use of the e-mail medium is as a substitute for a conversation where information is being exchanged, and the topic is not controversial or sensitive. Since the possibility of misinterpreting tone is much greater with the written than with the spoken word, some communications are better handled with a phone call or a conversation. Sensitive matters are better left to direct communication. Avoid using e-mail to reprimand, reward, or terminate someone who reports to you. If your object is to persuade someone to do something, e-mail is not an adequate substitute for an in-person meeting.

III. Privacy: UB's E-Mail Policy states

"Because of the nature of electronic communication, the University can assure neither the privacy of an individual user's use of the University's e-mail resources nor the confidentiality of particular messages."

Employees should have no expectation of privacy in anything they create, store, send, or receive on the computer system. Keep in mind that anything you create or store on the computer system may be reviewed by others. Remember, for example, that e-mail can be copied and forwarded with ease. A reply on a discussion list or listserv can be sent inadvertently to all readers of the listserv, rather than to the individual it was intended for. E-mail is not easily deleted; it may live on in University backup facilities.

UB's E-Mail Policy also states that "The University, however, may deny access to its electronic mail services and may inspect, monitor, or disclose electronic mail policy… (See 2C) … when required for the orderly conduct of University operations, as long as such actions would not infringe on legitimate privacy interests of the holder. While it is impossible to Identify all circumstances under which this clause will apply, users should expect it to be invoked frequently, for routine system housekeeping, such as blocking accounts that exceed their storage quotas; occasionally, when required to preserve or repair the system, such as removing attachments deemed likely to carry viruses; and rarely, to retrieve vital content, such as payroll information, that might have been sent to the e-mail account of an absent manager.

IV. Security:

Sensitive or confidential information must be handled with care and according to organization policy. If it is something that you would not say with a third party listening, then you should avoid writing it in an e-mail message.

V. Tips and Tricks

- Users are encouraged to organize e-mail upon receipt. Save important messages to word processor files or some other reliable medium.

- To handle the overload of incoming e-mail, scan subject headers and delete everything not relevant to you or your work.

- Create standard headers and footers; save time by not having to retype your name and address. Keep an up-to-date address book.