

Principles Guiding the Use of Electronic Communications at UC Merced

(Version 1.0, Approved 11/15/2005)

Introduction

UC Merced encourages the use of electronic communications in the conduct of the University's business. The proper use (legal, safety, privacy, and similar aspects) of electronic communications is governed by policies including the UC Electronic Communications Policy (ECP) and the UC Merced Acceptable Use policy. However, these policies do not give guidance as to when electronic communication may be preferred to printed or other means of communication, which of the electronic communication modalities might be preferred, or how to manage the ever increasing quantity of communications. The purpose of this document is to outline principles governing these choices. Its scope is not intended to include communication with the general public, fund raising, or similar activities, but rather with students, staff, faculty, and affiliates who have access to the University's electronic resources.

As a new university, starting from scratch with 21st century technology, UC Merced has a plethora of electronic communications mechanisms actually or potentially available. Many of these are available within the UC Merced portal and include notices, announcements, and discussion forums, which could address the entire UC Merced community or be specialized for specific groups or topics. Typical email and mailing list capabilities are also available. The UC Merced Identity Management system coupled with the central electronic directory provides functionality not only allowing the tailoring of services within the portal, but also to broadcast email to different cross-sections of the University community based on attribute values (staff/faculty/student, building, department, School, or arbitrary designations what we may create). Moreover, electronic communications mechanisms are likely to evolve as time goes by, and UC Merced has the capability to augment these with locally developed functionality.

The principles outlined below distinguish two different categories of communications. The first, non-personalized communications, is the equivalent of mass mailings. The same message is to be sent to a given target audience. The second category, personalized communications, refers to communications directed at specific individuals, containing information specific to each of those individuals. Fundamental differences between these categories necessitate different treatments.

Principles

Non-personalized communications

These communications include announcements, notices, press releases, etc., where the same information is sent to all recipients without any personalization.

- Prefer electronic rather than hardcopy means of communication, whenever consistent with the intended goals of the communication.
- Restrict communications to the smallest audience possible while still ensuring that all interested/concerned parties are reached.
- Default to “pull” rather than “push”¹ delivery mechanisms, except when justified by the nature of the communication (urgent announcements, messages from the Chancellor, etc.).
- Provide mechanisms to allow individuals to elect “push” for categories of communications that they are particularly interested in.
- Require approval for large-scale communications (for the purposes of this policy, “large-scale” is defined as 50 or more recipients) from designated officers responsible for corresponding segments of the UC Merced community. These officers shall be designated by the Chancellor; however, faculty and other instructors shall never require approval for course-related communications.
- Exploit available fields or similar facilities (such as “sender” and “subject” in email) to distinguish institutional versus personal communications and to indicate the category within which the communication falls (allowing recipients to either manually or automatically classify and sort messages).

Personalized communications

These communications include personalized information which may be of a private, sensitive, or confidential nature such as invoices, grades, financial or benefit information, etc.

- All communications must be private and secure. Email and web services should employ encrypted transmission and require appropriate user authentication
- Officers responsible for the different segments of the University population (e.g., the Registrar for students) shall be responsible for determining the appropriate means of communication for each type or instance of communication, taking into account Federal and State law, UC policies, and UC Merced policies.
- For routine communication of sensitive information such as grades, financial information, etc., preference should be given to making the information available using a secure application and, if appropriate, informing the concerned individuals via non-specific e-mail when new or updated information is available (as opposed to directly sending the information).

¹ “Pull” refers to a mechanism that requires a user to take an action to discover what communications may exist, such as logging on to a discussion forum. “Push” refers to mechanisms that deliver a notification directly to the user, such as email.