Electronic Messaging Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of electronic messaging (including email, instant messaging and sending an SMS) is to allow
greater efficiency in teaching, learning, research, communication and administration at the University. Staff
members (collectively known as ‘Users’) are provided with a University email account and access to instant
messaging services and for some staff, mobile telephony devices, to be used for University purposes. These
electronic messages become a formal University record and are governed by relevant legislation, by the
University’s stated values and standards of professional conduct, the *Code of Conduct* and by the protocols
that apply to written communication.

The use of electronic messaging requires attention to the needs of the University and its legislated
responsibilities, consideration of the receiver, and regard for the demands of efficiency and professionalism.

Like all University assets and services, electronic messaging facilities should be used in an efficient, lawful
and ethical manner.

Use of the University’s electronic messaging systems will be taken to indicate the User understands and
accepts the University’s conditions of use for computing and communication facilities.

COMPLIANCE

This is a compliance requirement under the University’s *Code of Conduct* and the *Information Act 2002*.

INTENT

The intention of this document is to provide University staff members with clear and concise guidelines on
what constitutes corporate electronic messages; how to compose effective corporate emails; general
electronic messaging etiquette; and staff obligations in relation to retention and disposal of corporate
electronic messages.

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

In the context of this document

**Email (electronic mail)** means a message, including any attachments, sent in an electronic format from one
user to one or more other users via a computer network, using an email protocol;

**Email address/email account** means the officially recognised University email address as allocated by Office
of Information Technology Management and Support (ITMS) when a staff member commences
employment with the University;

**Internet** includes the University intranet or network;

**Offensive or objectionable material** includes material which infringes socially accepted standards of good
taste or good manners, such as insulting or aggressive language directed at another person or persons. This
includes but is not limited to pornographic material;
Senior Manager means a staff member of the University holding the position of Director or Head of School or equivalent;

Short Message Service (SMS) means a text messaging service component of phone, web, or mobile communication systems that allows the exchange of short text messages between fixed-line or mobile telephony devices;

Staff Member means anyone employed by the University and includes all continuing, fixed-term, casual, adjunct or honorary staff or those holding University offices or who are a member of a University committee;

University Record (in the form of email) means any email that is in support of University business, whether or not the equipment, software, or facilities used to create, or store the email record, are owned by the University; and

Use of email services means to create, send, forward, reply, copy, store, print, or possess email messages. For the purpose of these guidelines, receipt of email is excluded from this definition to the extent that the email user does not have control over the email received.

GUIDELINES

Email

Email through the University email address is a professional means of communication that is the property of the University. All emails may be released/accessed under the freedom of information provisions in the Northern Territory Information Act 2002.

Access to a University email account is provided to staff members for the purpose of sending and receiving emails related to the business of the University. However, a small amount of personal use is accepted and tolerated (for further information refer to the University’s ICT Acceptable Use Policy and Email Acceptable Use Policy).

Emails sent and received by a User acting in their University capacity, are considered to be official records and must therefore comply with the University’s Records Management Policy and associated Procedures as well as relevant legislated Retention and Disposal Schedules and relevant Commonwealth and Northern Territory legislation.

Use of email within the University is subject to the laws relating to copyright, freedom of information (Information Act 2002), breach of confidentiality, privacy, spam and anti-discrimination. Users of a University email account are required to respect confidentiality, privacy, legal/professional privilege and the rights of others and to ensure that the content and dissemination of email does not jeopardise those protections.

Users of University email are expected to respect the standards of courtesy and professionalism that apply to all University communications and to avoid aggressive or abusive messages, messages that could reasonably be viewed by others as offensive or objectionable, or messages containing content that is obscene.

Users of University email must not use language that could reasonably be viewed as defamatory or discriminatory. Users must not send or forward emails (including Bcc emails) that may intimidate, vilify, harass or humiliate the receiver or any other person.
Email resources should not be used in a way that causes excessive strain on the University’s Information Systems, including use that consumes a large amount of bandwidth such as sending emails with large attachments to a number of recipients.

Users must be aware that email messages which they send may be construed as representing the University’s position. Where a User does not have authority, is not aware of the University’s position, or where their personal view may differ from that of the University, the opinion should not be expressed or at the very least, the message should state that the opinion expressed is that of the writer and does not necessarily reflect the views of the University.

**Instant Messaging Services and SMS**

The University provides access to instant messaging services and for staff members who have been allocated a mobile telephony device, the ability to send and receive text (SMS) messages. The same rules around appropriate content and use of such messaging services also apply.

**Limitation on Email Message and Attachment Size**

The size of attachments to email messages can be limited by ITMS. ITMS has no control over the email size limitations an external organisation may have put in place as this can vary from place to place. It is possible that emails sent from the University may be refused, by the recipient’s email servers, because it is too big.

Users of the email service are allocated a standard amount of storage on the University email system. This is referred to as the email quota. Users are expected to manage their email within this quota (details about this quota and methods to better manage email is available from ITMS).

Users should minimise network traffic by reducing the size of large messages and attachments prior to transmission. Electronic documents in excess of any mail server’s maximum allowable size may automatically be barred from transmission to the intended recipient. Large documents are best made available by sending recipients a URL link to the document or to a collaborative tool such as a wiki, or in some cases, writing it to a USB, CD or DVD and sending it by secure post or courier.

**Staff email as official corporate records**

Email messages sent or received by Users that refer to or contain information on or about University business, whether from within or outside the University and whether or not the equipment, software, or facilities used to create or store the email record are owned by the University. They are official records of the University and must be managed as such.

As official records, ownership of email messages rests with the University rather than with the individual. Email is considered a business document and, as such, can be accessed under the Information Act. All staff members using email as a means of corporate communication have a legal responsibility, to capture and retain messages so that they are accessible as records to meet business and evidential needs over time (for further information see University [Records Management Policy](#)).

Emails are subject to the same retention and disposal requirements as other electronic and paper-based records. As such it is important that all corporate emails are kept as evidence, and where appropriate are captured within the University’s records management system. ITMS backup emails on a regular basis but staff should not rely on this system to keep copies of their emails.
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Emails that are sent or received using a non-CDU address but which relate to official University business also constitute official University records. In these cases, normal record keeping requirements must be observed.

Given the University’s obligation to retain records under relevant legislation and policies, periodic deletion of corporate email messages irrespective of their content or the business activity they support is inappropriate (for information on secure storage options for electronic records, refer to ITMS).

Composition of Corporate Emails

Internet email messages consist of two major sections:

- **Header** — Structured into fields such as From, To, Cc, Bcc, Subject, Date, and other information about the email; and
- **Body** — The basic content, as unstructured text; usually containing a personalized University signature block at the end. This is exactly the same as the body of a regular letter.

The header is easily distinguishable from the body and is often separated from the body by a blank line.

Header

With email, recipients of a message are specified using addresses in any of these three fields:

- **To**: Primary recipients/audience of the message;
- **Cc**: Carbon copy field - recipients are others whom the author wishes to publicly inform of the message — secondary or other interested parties; and
- **Bcc**: Blind carbon copy field - recipients are those surreptitiously being included in the communication. They receive the message without anyone else (including the To, Cc, and other Bcc recipients) seeing who these hidden recipients are.

Header Fields

To

The email address/es, and optionally name/s of the message’s recipient/s. Indicates primary recipients (multiple allowed). The “To:” field is similar to the addressing at the top of a conventional letter which is delivered according to the address on the outer envelope.

The primary recipient/s, defined by the ‘To’ line, can reasonably be expected to respond to, or take action on an email, but recipients of carbon copies cannot be, although they still might.

Cc

In email, the abbreviation Cc (carbon copy) indicates those who are to receive a copy of a message addressed primarily to another. The list of Cc recipients is visible to all other recipients of the message. The person receiving a Cc message is informed of the content of the message but no action is required or needed by them.

It is considered good practice to indicate to the other recipients that a new participant has been added to the list of receivers (e.g. by writing "I have Cc Jack Johnson").
**Bcc**

In the context of correspondence, blind carbon copy (abbreviated Bcc) refers to the practice of sending a message to a recipient or multiple recipients in such a way that conceals the fact that there may be additional addressees from the complete list of recipients.

It is common practice to use the Bcc field when addressing a very long list of recipients, or a list of recipients that should not (necessarily) know or need to know each other, e.g. in mailing lists. Recipients listed in the Bcc field receive a copy of the message, but are not shown on any other recipient’s copy (including other Bcc recipients).

Tell the sender if you forward a message to somebody else to deal with, so they know who to expect a reply from or, if you forward their message to a third party to read;

Use the Bcc field when sending bulk email. If sending email to a whole list of people, put their email addresses in the Bcc field. That way, the privacy of the recipient is respected, and spammers cannot harvest the email addresses for other purposes;

**Subject**

The subject line is to summarise the message and make prioritisation, storage and retrieval easy. For these reasons, every email should contain a subject line. The subject line should summarise the body of the email. Ask yourself, 'will the recipient/s know what this email is about just by reading the subject line?' For example, Instead of Subject: Exam, say Subject: Results of Exam 23 July 2010.

If your email is confidential – then you should also add this to the subject line. For example if you needed to convey a confidential message to your supervisor say Subject: In Confidence – HR issue.

**Body**

- Do not assume the recipient knows the background. Include enough contextual information at the beginning of the email for the recipient to know what the matter is about. If in doubt, include background information;
- Keep it concise. Keep messages brief and to the point. This includes deleting any irrelevant text when an email has been back and forth several times. If the sense of the email will be lost by deleting that text however, leave it in;
- Layout the message for readability. Use spaces and breaks between paragraphs and long sentences to make it easier on the reader;
- Keep the thread. When replying to an email, use the reply option in your email program. This will keep the message in the "thread", and make it easier for the recipient to follow;
- Do not Reply to All unless necessary. Think twice about sending a reply to everyone. Sending it to everyone may simply be contributing to an already cluttered In-Tray. As a general rule if you were a Cc on an email – you should only reply to the sender (not to all);
- Mark the email with the correct priority. Avoid marking an email 'high priority' when it is really 'normal' priority;
- If you are forwarding or re-posting a message you've received, do not change the wording. If the message was a personal message to you and you are re-posting to a group, you should ask permission first. You may shorten the message and quote only relevant parts, but be sure you give proper attribution; and
- If sending the email to a number of recipients, ensure it is clear what you want each one to do by addressing each individually in the body. This makes it clear what each has to do and lets others know what is being done by others. It also allows others to identify if any actions have not been
assigned or missed. Failure to identify correct responsibility allows each addressee to believe the actions are being taken by someone else, resulting in nothing being done.

**Signature Block**

An email signature is a block of text appended to the end of an email message often containing the sender’s name, address, phone number, email address, disclaimer or other contact information as required.

Using a signature block has the effect of "signing off" the message and in a reply message of indicating that no more response follows. It is common practice for a signature block to consist of one or more lines containing some brief information on the author of the message.

The University has a standard, uniform email signature block that all Users are required to personalise and utilise (for further information refer to the Office of Marketing and Communication Brand information).

The University email programs can be configured to append email signatures to all outgoing mail. However, when multiple replies to the same post occur, care should be taken to prevent multiple signatures from building up so that message length remains legible and message size manageable.

Whether intended for an internal or external recipient, it is recommended that signatures and disclaimers in line with University branding be added to the end of all email as they may potentially be forwarded to external parties.

**Email Etiquette**

As a general rule, email etiquette involves the same principles as plain old etiquette – basic courtesy, respect and ethics. The following are some general guidelines on email etiquette within the University:

- All email sent whilst a representative of the University or on official University business should be standardised in size, colour, and font; contain the sender’s full name; position within the University; telephone, fax and email contact details; and the University logo as specified by the University Brand Identity Guidelines;
- Each Email should have a subject heading which reflects the content of the message;
- Try to minimise the number of people included in the email. Only include those that need to know so they can take action or know that action is being taken;
- To Cc senior staff in emails from the outset of an email dialogue can be perceived as intimidation or bullying by the recipient and should be avoided. If unsatisfied with the result of the initial email dialogue, it should then be escalated through your chain of command;
- Use correct punctuation, spelling (ensure your spell checker is using the Australian English dictionary) and grammar. Use punctuation in a normal manner. One exclamation point is just as effective as five!!!!! Use correct grammar and spelling as with any written message. If you do not know how to spell something, look it up;
- Unless you are using an encryption device (hardware or software), you should assume that email on the internet is not secure. Never put in an email message anything you would not put on a postcard;
- The use of all capital letters, (UPPERCASE), or oversized fonts is equivalent to shouting in face to face communication. If you choose to use either of these then the reader will likely feel they are being threatened or at least that you are shouting at them. If you must use UPPERCASE, use it very sparingly and only to emphasise a particularly important point. Ask yourself, ‘If I was talking to the recipient face to face, would I be raising my voice to them?’ One way to add emphasis is to enclose the word/phrase with an asterisk, for example "It is *important* not to shout at people by using
Email often tends to imitate conversation rather than formal correspondence, but remember that the reader will not have the cues of tone of voice or facial expression to help interpret your message, and your intent may not be clear. A humorous or off-hand comment may appear curt or irritable to the reader, so choose your words carefully.

If you are a recipient of an email in the ‘To’ section then action is required from you. Try to reply to an email within 24 hours or as soon as possible – even if it is to let the sender know you have received their message and will action it as soon as you can.

Be brief without being overly terse. When replying to a message, include enough original material to be understood but no more. It is extremely bad form to simply reply to a message by including the entire previous message: edit out all the irrelevant material.

If replying to a long email it is sometimes useful to comment on the email piece by piece. In the body of your reply say something like: “see my inline comments in blue”. Then change your font colour and comment below each paragraph in the original in the new font colour. If someone has already commented in one colour choose another and add your comments. Make sure all the colours are easily distinguishable from one another.

Avoid conducting arguments in public, for example on a general email.

Avoid angry outbursts. Do not send or reply to email when you are angry. Wait until you have calmed down and then compose the email. Once written and sent, it cannot be recalled. Angry or intemperate email has a way of rebounding on the sender. As a guide, ask yourself, would I say this to the person's face?

Respect the copyright on material that you reproduce. Almost every country has copyright laws.

Never send or forward chain letters via email. People often receive email warnings from people they trust or respect and with the best intent forward them on to everyone they know. In the vast majority of cases these emails contain incorrect information or the warning is out of date. Spend some time researching if the warning is actually valid before forwarding it.

Watch Cc when replying. Do not continue to include people if the messages have become a two-way conversation.

If you forward an email you have received, ensure that it does not include personal comment not intended for a wider audience. The original sender may not wish something they entrusted you with, being spread further afield. If at all unsure check with the originator of the message before forwarding the email on; and

An email message that has not been responded to does not mean that the message has been read and actioned or that the recipient’s “silence” means agreement. Always follow up on an email rather than assume anything. Allow time for a reply. Email messages are not usually required to be answered immediately, though it is good practice. Before sending a reminder, allow some time for a response. Not everyone is online 24 hours a day and many people receive a few hundred emails per day.

**ESSENTIAL SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Internal

**Code of Conduct**

**Email Acceptable Use Policy**

**Email General Use Procedures**

**Handling Suspected Cases of Unacceptable Use of Information and Communication Technologies Procedures**
Identifying Unacceptable Use of Information and Communication Technologies Procedures

Information and Communication Technologies Acceptable Use Policy

Information Privacy Policy

Records Management Policy

External

Information Act 2002 (NT)
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<td>9 Nov 2011</td>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>Creation of original document and upload to CDU website.</td>
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| 1.02    | 3 Apr 2013    | Governance   | • Converted document to current template  
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• Updated definitions  
• Updated hyperlinks  
• Replaced Code of Ethics with Code of Conduct  
• Replaced Privacy Policy with Information Privacy Policy |