
MASS DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY, GUIDELINES, AND PROCEDURES

Category: Information Technology
Responsible Office: Chief Information Officer
Responsible Executive: Chief Information Officer

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Summary

Defines when and how use of mass digital communications may be used to broadcast time sensitive messages to large segments of campus audiences. This policy sets forth guidelines and procedures for appropriate use of mass digital communications.

Policy

BACKGROUND

Many academic and administrative entities on campus are interested in using email and other digital communication services, such as text messaging, to send important but unsolicited messages to large segments of the University community: for example, to all students, all faculty, all staff, or to some combination of these large segments. The majority of messages intended for the campus community are best communicated by using MyUB, the University calendar on the Web and other official Web pages, regular campus mail, and printed materials, such as flyers. These methods continue to be preferred means of mass communication, rather than mass electronic mailings or text alerts.

University at Buffalo has made the Rave Wireless Emergency Text Alerts service available to instantly reach students, faculty, and staff in cases of major or catastrophic emergencies. This system is an "opt-in" system and mass text alerts to the campus community members "opting in" will be sent **only** in cases of major or catastrophic emergencies affecting the campus and campus community in whole or in part. Please see the [UB All Hazards Emergency Plan](#) for information on the definition of major and catastrophic emergencies. Students have indicated in several surveys that they prefer email to text messaging for the delivery of official University communications.

POLICY STATEMENT

Mass digital communications should be utilized only when a University emergency or an urgent need-to-know warrants their use and should be used sparingly. The appropriate University officer, as outlined in the procedures below and in the [UB All Hazards Emergency Plan](#), will be responsible for determining whether a requested mass digital communication is warranted. It is also important to use multiple channels, that is alternative means, to broadcast emergency, urgent, and time-critical important information, since there is no guarantee that members of the University community will read their email or text messages in a timely manner. Mass text messages/alerts will be sent only to those who have opted in to/signed up for the service.

RESPONSIBILITY

The appropriate University officer must approve mass emailing and text alerts. The officer will consider whether the request is appropriate in light of the criteria and guidelines noted above. Requests for mass email should be directed as follows.

- The Office of the Vice President for University Life and Services in the case of email directed solely to students
- The Office of the Provost in the case of email directed solely to faculty members
- The Office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration in the case of email directed solely to staff members
- The Office of the President or the President's designee in the case of email directed to any combination of all students, faculty, and staff.
- The Office of Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations in the case of email directed solely to alumni.

In an emergency, the approval process outlined above will be suspended. In accordance with our Emergency Communications Plan, University Police and University Communications will have the authority to approve mass email notification and text alert requests in a campus emergency, as well as to provide the timely notice of crime risks to the campus community. For more information on how UB handles mass notifications in emergencies, please see the [UB Emergency Preparedness web site](#).

If the request is approved, the University officer granting approval will send the mass email message to the CIO office that will have the message distributed to the appropriate recipient group. For those messages not deemed appropriate for mass distribution, the requester will receive a message indicating this.

For non-emergency notifications, lead time of at least one working day is required for any mass emailing, since several hours may be required to set up a mass emailing and messages will be sent in batches over several hours so that normal University email delivery will not be seriously impacted and degraded.

DEFINITIONS

Mass digital communications - messages sent, unsolicited, to large segments of the university population using email, text messaging, or voice telephony. Does not include digital signage.

Procedure

Guidelines for Mass Email

Content: Appropriate Topics

Appropriate broadcast topics include, but are not limited to

- urgent security (physical or computer) matters, such as bomb or terrorist threats, computer system threats
- campus-wide policy changes that are time critical, such as a new immunization requirement or other legal requirement that must be met for continuing matriculation at the University
- other time critical financial and administrative deadlines
- natural disaster alerts
- administrative announcements that are time critical

Inappropriate broadcast topics include, but are not limited to

- any message whose content is not relevant to UB's mission of teaching, research, and public service
- the announcement of events
- club or group information
- any commercial mailing
- any solicitation **except as approved by the President for University purposes**
- personal messages

Campus email systems and email addresses are provided and intended to be used primarily for University purposes, and UB strives to send only those unsolicited messages that provide important/useful content to UB community members.

Additional Criteria for Email Messages

1. Email Subject: The Subject line must be descriptive.
2. Email Body:
 - The initial text of the message should indicate that it is a broadcast message and the office sending the message.
 - The message body should indicate why the message is being sent and to whom the message is being sent.
 - The name, email address, and phone number of a person to contact should be contained in the message.
 - The broadcast message must contain **plain text only**. No graphics, bolding or other font styles are permitted.
 - **Attachments**, such as Microsoft Word documents, are not allowed.
 - Messages should be brief and to the point. Provide instructions on how additional information can be obtained.
 - Any hyperlinks should include the fully qualified (include the http:// part) protocol to assure that most recipients will see the "active" links in your message.
 - The message must be approved by the department head of the individual sending the request and should be proofread for spelling, grammatical and content errors.
 - A notice that the mass emailing has been approved by the appropriate University officer must be included. (See the Responsibilities area above for the list of appropriate University officers.)

In general, people do not like to receive unsolicited email and may let you know this via heated replies.

Applicability of Policy

This policy applies to all University data regardless of its medium and/or form, and to all those who handle University information (faculty, staff, students, third party contractors, and any others).

Policy Review and Update

The Chief Information Officer or his designee will periodically review and update this policy as needed. Questions concerning this policy should be directed to the Office of the Associate VP for Information Technology.

Compliance

Violations of this policy will result in appropriate disciplinary measures in accordance with University policies, applicable collective bargaining agreements, and state and federal laws.

Contact Information

Office of Chief Information Officer
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University at Buffalo
furlani@buffalo.edu
(716) 645-7979

Related Information

University Documents:

Title of Related University Policy, Procedure, or Form linked when possible

[UB All Hazards Emergency Plan](#)

[UB Emergency Web Site](#)

[FERPA](#)

[FERPA Privacy Resources](#) (Educause)

[IT Security for Higher Ed](#)

[Electronic Communications Privacy Act \(ECPA\)](#)