

Acceptable E-Mail and Internet Usage

FACT SHEET



Through the deployment of electronic mail (e-mail) and Internet services, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHSC-H) offers tremendous opportunities for productivity enhancement and cost savings in the scholarly, service, and administrative operations. Those who use the University e-mail and Internet services are expected to do so responsibly; that is, to comply with state and federal laws, with the policies and procedures of UTHSC-H, and with normal standards of professional conduct and personal courtesy. Appropriate use of UTHSC-H's e-mail systems and Internet services is the responsibility of every student, faculty member, staff member, and anyone using UTHSC-H information resources.

University-provided e-mail addresses and other Internet designations remain the property of UTHSC-H. Such information constitutes directory information for students, faculty, and staff and may be disclosed or listed as directory information by the University. A student's e-mail address is considered directory information under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); however, it may be withheld upon the request of the student.

E-mail and Internet must be used only for legitimate state business; however; brief and occasional Internet browsing and e-mail messages of a personal nature may be sent and received subject to the permissible and prohibited use sections of the University's policy.

Permissible Uses of University E-mail and Internet Services

The following are examples of appropriate use of University e-mail and Internet services to conduct official UTHSC-H business:

- Electronic dissemination of information, including the establishment of web sites, building web applications as well as the distribution of bulletins, memoranda, reports, and committee notes
- Instructional use, specifically to enhance communications between students and instructors including the facilitation of distance learning
- Support of University research activities
- Service activities of faculty and staff. Such uses as are consistent with the traditional academic freedom accorded to faculty members
- E-mail and Internet usage records are considered state records and are subject to the same guidelines and regulations required for all records at the UTHSC-H
- The use of e-mail and Internet services are subject to the same requirements as any other UTHSC-H resource and personnel are required to abide by policies outlined in the Information Resources Security Manual and all HOOP policies that pertain to its use.

Examples of Prohibited Uses:

The following are a few specific examples of the inappropriate use of University e-mail and Internet services under this policy. This list is not all inclusive:

- Personal e-mail and Internet usage should not impede the conduct of state business; only incidental amounts of employee time--time periods comparable to reasonable coffee breaks during the day--should be used to attend to personal matters.

- Racist, sexist, threatening, or otherwise objectionable language and topics are strictly prohibited in e-mail and Internet usage
- E-mail should not be used for any personal monetary interests or gain
- Employees should not subscribe to mailing lists or mail services strictly for personal use
- Personal e-mail should not cause the state to incur a direct cost in addition to the general overhead of e-mail. Consequently, employees, upon receiving personal e-mail, should read it and delete it.

Additional Cautions

Users of e-mail and Internet services should be aware of the following cautions:

- e-mail is a medium that conveys information. It is the information that carries a retention period and must be treated as a record in accordance with state and federal law
- Unless an e-mail message is signed with a digital signature, there is no assurance that the message was actually sent by the sender identified in the message header
- Unless an e-mail message is signed with a digital signature, there is no assurance of the validity of the message content
- Only digitally signed e-mail should be used for contract and formal agreements. Unsigned e-mail may easily be forged or misrepresented
- Individuals should have no expectation of privacy in e-mail using state information resources. The Attorney General has determined that most e-mail is a public record, therefore, the privacy of e-mail cannot be assured. Extreme caution should be exercised when using unencrypted e-mail to communicate confidential or sensitive items.
- Users should keep in mind that unencrypted e-mail messages can be easily printed, forwarded to others, or could even be delivered to the wrong recipient
- Confidential or sensitive information sent by e-mail should be encrypted using the public key of the message recipient
- Faculty and staff having encrypted information must decrypt information in order to satisfy statutory obligations under the provisions of the Texas Public Information Act (TPIA). Failure to comply with this requirement will result in disciplinary action and/or criminal sanctions
- E-mail users should be aware that when sending an e-mail message of a personal nature, there is always the danger of the user's words being interpreted as official UTHSC-H policy or opinion. Therefore, when an individual sends a personal e-mail especially if the content of the e-mail could be interpreted as an official agency statement, the user should use the following disclaimer at the end of the message: "This e-mail contains the thoughts and opinion of (user name) and does not represent official UTHSC-H policy."
- All e-mail and Internet usage can be recorded and stored along with the source and destination. Management reserves the right to review user's e-mail
- Management reserves the right to review user's Internet usage patterns and take action to assure that agency Internet resources are devoted to maintaining the highest levels of productivity
- Although e-mail is often used in place of a phone call or voice mail message, it is closer in nature to a letter, lacking both the visual and auditory content that comprise face-to-face communication. Thus, great care should be taken in crafting the "tone" of an e-mail message, and in providing the recipient with the information needed to appropriately interpret the emotional nature of the contents



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON