

# Broadcast E-Mail Policy and Procedures

February 6, 2009

## Introduction

Questions regularly arise regarding the “who, what, and how” of Broadcast Electronic Mail (E-mail) at the University: who can send it? what is permissible to send? how to send it? This document answers those questions.

Before providing these answers, it is important to first establish that Broadcast E-mail, as it is used in the context of this policy, has the following characteristics:

- It is e-mail sent by individuals, organizations and departments within Boston University to other members of the University community, including alumni and parents of current or former BU students.
- In general, the target population is all or a large fraction of any group selected on the basis of one or more shared characteristics, e.g., all freshmen, the undergraduates within a college, faculty at the University.
- The target population is typically large, commonly numbering at least in the hundreds.

In addition to articulating policy, a secondary purpose of this document is to provide guidelines to facilitate effective communication when sending Broadcast E-mail. Central to the evaluation of message effectiveness is the determination that e-mail is the most appropriate means of communicating with a particular constituency. It is worth noting that there are alternatives to e-mail that may be preferable. The final section of this document describes several e-mail alternatives that are available at Boston University.

## Purpose

To establish the University’s basic policy and procedures related to Broadcast Electronic E-mail.

## Applicability

This policy applies to all Boston University Broadcast E-mail and is governed by the [Boston University Conditions of Use and Policy of Computing Ethics](#).

## Policy

### **1. Only messages that directly relate to university business will be allowed.**

### **2. All Broadcast E-mail must be approved before it can be sent.**

Approval is typically provided on a per-message basis, although blanket authorization may be provided. The message audience determines the level of the individual or office from which approval must be obtained. A list of populations and the individuals responsible for approving messages to those populations is provided in [Table 1](#).

### **3. E-mail sent to a population restricted to a single organizational unit requires the approval of the head of that unit.**

For example, a message sent to all faculty in a college would require the approval of the dean of that college. Refer to [Table 1](#) for more information.

### **4. E-mail sent to a population spanning two or more units requires written approval from someone with authority over each unit targeted.**

A message sent to students in two colleges, for example, would require approval from the deans of both colleges or the Charles River or Medical Campus Provost. More broadly distributed e-mail would require approval from a correspondingly higher authority. In the case of a message sent to all staff at the University, the President's approval would be required. [Table 1](#) identifies target groups and the approval required to send e-mail to each.

There are two special cases<sup>1</sup> in which approval can be granted by an office that does not have authority over all members of a recipient population that spans multiple organizational or academic units:

- 1) The target population has a specific relationship – typically a business relationship – with the sender and the message is related to that relationship. To illustrate the approval required, consider two sample cases: (1) e-mail sent by the Office of Parking Services to participants in the MBTA monthly pass program, and (2) e-mail sent by an academic program to all undergraduates. In the first case, the Office of Parking Services has a business relationship with MBTA pass subscribers, i.e., the office administers the pass program, and so approval to send a message related to the program would be required only from the head of Parking Services. In the second case, the academic program has no specific relationship with the target population and therefore would, according to [Table 1](#), require authorization from the Provost and the VP for Marketing & Communications.
- 2) A subscription mailing list is involved. These lists consist of individuals who wish to receive e-mail pertaining to particular topics. By subscribing, list members are granting approval to the list owner to send them e-mail related to the list topic.

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<sup>1</sup> Although they are special cases, they still involve Broadcast E-mail and must therefore adhere to all other elements of the Broadcast E-mail policy.

### **5. Broadcast E-mail addressing issues that are controversial or otherwise likely to attract media attention requires coordination with the Office of Marketing and Communications.**

A message addressing an issue that has already attracted or is likely to attract media coverage should be composed in a manner consistent with the University's news releases and other statements regarding the matter. The Vice President for Marketing and Communications or designee will work with the sender to insure such consistency as well as a fair and accurate representation of the facts and the situation being discussed in the message. Examples of topics requiring this kind of coordination include the announcement of the appointment or departure of a dean, news about labor negotiations, or news that directly affects the surrounding communities.

## **6. Broadcast E-mail must not contain attachments.**

Attachments present problems for several reasons: they may place a significant strain on system resources, thereby affecting other services and subscribers; the application programs necessary to open them, e.g., Word or Excel, are not universally available on recipient systems; and they are a potential distribution mechanism for computer viruses.

## **7. It is recommended that Broadcast E-mail contain only unformatted text.**

Despite the increasingly common usage of HTML e-mail, it is important to understand that sending formatted messages may result in problems for some message recipients. This is true because not all e-mail programs can process HTML messages. Even among those that do, the display results are not necessarily the same from one program to another. While the number of people at the University who use e-mail clients that are unable to display HTML is small, the number is not zero.<sup>2</sup> If special formatting or graphics are a requirement, one solution that avoids e-mail display problems is to send a plain text message that references an existing Web page via a link in the message body. Refer to the Guidelines for more information about including Web addresses in e-mail addresses.

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<sup>2</sup> A system analysis performed in late 2004 indicated that, during one 24-hour period, 4-5% of ACS e-mail users were reading their mail with a program incapable of interpreting HTML content.

## **8. Institutionally-generated recipient lists should be used whenever possible.**

Institutional recipient lists are based on information stored in the University's central databases.<sup>3</sup> Lists are frequently created and/or updated; new lists are created on an as-needed basis, while existing lists are refreshed on a daily or weekly schedule. Locally-controlled lists, e.g., Outlook or Eudora mailing lists, can fall out of date if they are not diligently maintained. If this happens, a message's effectiveness can be reduced because it does not reach its intended audience.

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<sup>3</sup> Some selection criteria may require data that is not contained in the central University databases. In such cases, it will not be possible to build an institutional list and a local list should be used instead.

## **9. Broadcast E-mail must be sent during off-hours.**

To minimize impact on the institutional e-mail system, broadcast messages processed by the Link or the University's Office of Information Technology (OIT) are normally sent at non-peak times (weekday afternoons from 1:00 to 6:00 are considered to be peak times).<sup>4</sup> Emergency messages, or those of extremely high importance, can be accommodated at other times as required. When they involve a target population larger than 100, messages sent via locally-controlled recipient lists must adhere to the same timing considerations.

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<sup>4</sup> More detail about the Link and OIT e-mail mechanisms is contained in the [Procedures](#) section of this document.

## **10. Broadcast E-mail must not display the names/addresses to which the message is sent.**

Recipient lists are automatically suppressed for e-mail sent through institutional channels. E-mail sent using a local mailing list must not display the recipient names/addresses, either.<sup>5</sup> This is a matter of convenience for the recipients – messages prefaced with a list of hundreds or thousands of e-mail addresses are difficult to read and may be ignored. A second consideration is the issue of confidentiality; many users are sensitive to not having their e-mail addresses broadly distributed.

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<sup>5</sup> A method commonly used to suppress recipient names is to enter list names and individual addresses in the BCC field.

**11. The sender and the approver share responsibility for evaluating both the appropriateness and the form of a message.**

The individual or office with approval authority will make the final determination regarding whether or not an e-mail message may be sent. That determination should take the [Broadcast E-mail guidelines](#) into account. A primary criterion for approval is that the message must be directly related to university business.

**Table 1 –Target Constituencies and Required Written Approvals**

<b>Target Constituency</b>	<b>Requires written approval from</b>
<b>University-wide</b>	
Students or faculty	Provost (B) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
Staff	President (A) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
Faculty, staff, and students	President (A) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
<b>Medical Campus-wide</b>	
Faculty and/or staff and/or students	Medical Campus Provost (C) or Associate VP for Business Affairs (G) or Director of Corporate Communications (H)
<b>College-wide</b>	
Faculty or staff or students in a single college	Dean of College
Faculty or students in two or more colleges	
Charles River Campus	Deans of each targeted college or Charles River Campus Provost (B)
Medical Campus	Deans of each targeted college or Medical Campus Provost (C)
Staff in two or more colleges	
Charles River Campus	Deans of each targeted college or President (A)
Medical Campus	Medical Campus Provost (C) or Associate VP for Business Affairs (G) or Director of Corporate Communications (H)
<b>Other</b>	
Alumni	VP for Development & Alumni Relations (E) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
Parents of current BU students	VP for Enrollment & Student Affairs (F) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
Parents of former BU students	VP for Development & Alumni Relations (E) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)
Prospective BU students or their parents	VP for Enrollment & Student Affairs (F) and VP for Marketing & Communications (D)

**Approval Contacts**

- A President’s Office: Joseph P. Mercurio, mercurio@bu.edu, 353-6500 and “cc” both Ursula Linsky, ulinsky@bu.edu, 353-6500, and specmail@bu.edu
- B Provost’s Office (Charles River Campus): Randy Rubenstein, rrubinst@bu.edu, 353-6578 and “cc” specmail@bu.edu. When a University-wide constituency is involved, also "cc" the Medical Campus Provost (C)
- C Medical Campus Provost: Karen H. Antman, busmdean@bu.edu, 638-5300
- D VP for Marketing and Communications: Stephen Burgay, burgay@bu.edu, 353-1168 and “cc” both Joel Seligman, joels@bu.edu, 353-6191, and specmail@bu.edu
- E Alumni Relations: Meg Umlas, mgoldber@bu.edu, 353-2251
- F Vice President for Enrollment and Student Affairs: Laurie Pohl, lpohl@bu.edu, 353-9814, with “cc” to Patricia Vlachos, pvlachos@bu.edu
- G Medical Campus Business Affairs Office: William Gasper, wgasper@bu.edu, 638-4590 and “cc” Patricia Duggan Greene, pdgreene@bu.edu, 638-4590
- H Corporate Communications: Ellen Berlin, elberlin@bu.edu, 638-8491 and “cc” Lisa Brown, lisa.brown@bmc.org, 638-8491

## Broadcast E-mail Guidelines

At present, arguably the greatest influence on a message's effectiveness is its resemblance – or lack of resemblance – to unsolicited and unwanted e-mail, or spam. E-mail from University departments to members of the community is understood not to be spam. However, it is important to realize that most e-mail users have a heightened sensitivity due to the volume of spam that they receive. This potential “guilt by association” with spam can result in legitimate e-mail being ignored, regardless of its origin. This section contains information to help senders manage audience selection, message format, and frequency of mailings in order to avoid their messages having the appearance of spam.

### Appropriateness

#### *Delivery choice*

Two questions about message delivery should be answered before electing to send a large electronic mailing: (1) is e-mail the best way to communicate the given information (see Alternatives to E-mail) and, if it is, (2) which of the delivery channels – available institutional tools or local distribution list – is best suited to the task?

#### *Originating address*

An unfamiliar “From” address triggers an immediate suspicion among many users that a message may be spam. To avoid this, we recommend specifying an easily recognized name, e.g., a department name, as the originator of a message instead of a valid but obscure BU e-mail address. For example, it is preferable to send a message that reads “From: Department of XYZ” rather than “From: obscure-user@bu.edu.” It is possible to specify an alias by using the syntax in the following example (quotes and angle brackets are required):

“Department of XYZ” <validaddress@bu.edu>

This associates the alias “Department of XYZ” with an actual e-mail address, in this case validaddress@bu.edu.

#### *Target audience*

Selecting an appropriate audience to receive particular information is an important part of insuring a message's effectiveness, so care should be taken to identify a collection of recipients that is neither too narrow, in which case some who should be receiving that information are excluded, nor too broad, which can result in the perception among those erroneously included that the message is irrelevant or, worse, annoying.

#### *Frequency*

If an audience perceives that it is receiving unsolicited messages too often from a particular source, the effectiveness of those messages may be reduced. In general, frequency of mailings should be determined by the messages' relevance and importance to the recipients. Alerts or warnings, for example, would merit higher frequency messages than would notices of a more general nature.

### Message Form

#### *Message brevity*

E-mail messages should be no more than a few reasonably short paragraphs in length. Concise messages are typically much more effective than long notes that contain a lot of detail. When it is necessary to communicate a large amount of information, send a brief message that includes the main point(s) and a reference to a Web page that contains the bulk of the detail. This is preferable to a multi-page e-mail and, because Web pages allow the use of graphics and formatted text, information presentation is potentially simpler and more powerful.

#### *Inclusion of Web page addresses (URLs)*

Specify no more than one or two URLs. If an e-mail message refers to information on more than one Web page, best practice is to specify a single, top-level URL in the message. The page referred to can in turn point to the other pages, as required. This simplifies navigation for the message recipient and makes it easier for them to refer back to the Web information later.

A short URL is preferable to a long one. While most e-mail programs recognize a URL as a link to a Web page, some have difficulty handling long addresses that span more than one message line. This forces some recipients to cut and paste the page address into their Internet browser, a sometimes tedious process.

If a Web reference is to be included in a message, the preferred form of the address includes “http://” or “https://”. This is suggested because not all e-mail programs recognize addresses that do not contain “http://” as Web addresses. Adding the HTTP prefix insures that most e-mail programs will correctly interpret the address. For example, use <http://www.bu.edu/eng> instead of [www.bu.edu/eng](http://www.bu.edu/eng)

## Procedures

There are currently four mechanisms available to send Broadcast E-mail, each of which is described below. The first two are institutionally-supported and are recommended because they adhere to all of the policy elements outlined in this document. The third mechanism, also recommended, is used exclusively for sending e-mail to entire Boston University Medical Campus (BUMC) constituent groups, i.e., all faculty and/or staff and/or students. Use of either the BUMC procedure or the fourth mechanism, local distribution lists, is governed by the Broadcast E-mail Policy.

### Using the Institutional Distribution System

The process managed by the Office of Information Technology (OIT) offers considerable flexibility in selecting e-mail recipients. All stages of message creation and delivery are monitored by OIT personnel. Requests to send via this channel should be submitted at least two days before the required mailing date in order to allow sufficient time for setup and delivery of any message. This two day minimum does not include the time required for securing approval to send the message.

*Recipient population:* faculty, staff, students and/or alumni from one or more colleges

*Advantages:* flexibility in selecting diverse recipient populations; direct assistance from OIT staff makes this method attractive to users unfamiliar with the process of sending Broadcast E-mail.

*Process:*

- A. No message can be sent without prior approval, so the first step in the process of sending a message is to secure the requisite permission. Compose your message and send it to the appropriate office or individual for approval (refer to Target Constituencies for specific information about recipient populations and who may approve e-mail to them).
- B. When you receive approval, do the following:
  1. Forward a copy of the approval to [specmail@bu.edu](mailto:specmail@bu.edu).
  2. Send the approved message to [broadcastmail-sample@bu.edu](mailto:broadcastmail-sample@bu.edu). Note that the message body and the Subject field should be specified *exactly* as you want them to appear in the mailing.
- C. An automated reply to your message will be generated and returned to you. This auto response will contain a unique identifier that serves as a tracking number for your message. The response will also request that you provide the following information:
  1. **Date:** the date on which you want the message to be sent.
  2. **From:** the e-mail address or alias, e.g., a department name, which will be displayed as the sender of the message. Using an alias can make it easier for recipients to identify the sender, and we recommend it for that reason. Refer to the [Guidelines](#) for more information on using an alias.
  3. **Reply-to:** the e-mail address to which undeliverable mail and replies to your broadcast mailing should be sent (can be the same as the From field). Which address you select may be influenced by the number of responses you expect the e-mail to generate.
  4. **Recipients:** a list of e-mail addresses or the standard group, e.g., crc-students, that you wish to send the mail to.
  5. **Approval:** the name of the individual or office from whom you have obtained approval to send this broadcast e-mail.
  6. **Your phone number:** a daytime phone number at which we can reach you if questions arise
- D. Once your reply containing this information is received, your e-mail message will be processed and a sample of the message – exactly as it will be distributed to the specified target audience – will be sent to you for your approval.

- E. You can modify the message text any time before you give your final approval. To do so, edit the text and send it to broadcastmail-sample. The body of the message should contain only the revised message text and the subject field should contain the unique identifier that was returned to you when you initially submitted your message for distribution. For example, if the subject line of the confirmation message was

Broadcast Mail Request id=20060124.07:00:57

the subject line of your revised message would read

20060124.07:00:57

Only the identification number should appear in the subject field; no other text should be included. When you send the message, a confirmation message indicating that the "e-mail message body has been successfully updated" will be returned to you. Following that, a test message will be sent to you for your approval.

- F. If you agree that the message is ready to be sent, confirm this via an e-mail message sent to [specmail@bu.edu](mailto:specmail@bu.edu). When this step is complete, your message will be queued for release on the date that you specified.

Valerie Keane is the primary contact person for all Broadcast E-mail requests sent to OIT. She can be contacted via e-mail ([vkean@bu.edu](mailto:vkean@bu.edu)) or by phone (617-353-8190). In the event that Valerie is not available, contact Marguerite Marr ([mpmarr@bu.edu](mailto:mpmarr@bu.edu); 617-353-1316). If neither Valerie nor Marguerite is available, contact Jim Stone (e-mail: [jim@bu.edu](mailto:jim@bu.edu); 617-353-6262).

### **Using the Link – [www.bu.edu/link](http://www.bu.edu/link)**

The Link is a set of fully automated Web tools that enables faculty (and authorized staff) to send messages to their advisees or to students registered in any courses they teach, or have recently taught. The recipient list population can therefore be composed of students in one or more colleges, depending upon the selection criteria used.

*Recipient population:* student advisees or students registered in a particular course

*Advantages:* automated; entire process can be completed using a Web interface

*Process:*

#### *Faculty/Staff Link*

Authorized faculty and staff employ a set of Web tools to build student distribution lists which the Link then uses to send e-mail. A broad set of available selection criteria allow fine-grained control of students to be included or excluded during mailing list construction.

#### *Faculty Link*

Faculty employ Web tools to build distribution lists which can be used by the Link to send e-mail to their advisees and/or students registered in their courses. Selection is enhanced by the ability to include students from courses currently being taught as well as from courses taught during recent semesters.

### **Using Boston University Medical Campus-Wide Distribution Lists**

The Medical Campus has established the following lists for broadcast emails:

- All-medical campus faculty & staff
- All-medical campus students
- All-medical campus faculty
- All-medical campus staff

*Recipient population:* all BUMC faculty, staff, and/or students

*Advantages:* this is the sole mechanism used to send mail to all members of the faculty, staff and/or student populations. As such, all address lists are carefully maintained to insure they are up to date.

*Process:*

- A. This mechanism is subject to the approval requirements in [Table 1](#) and described in the following protocol:

The Provost's Office or the Office of the Associate Vice President for Business Affairs may originate and send a broadcast email to any of the above lists. Other Medical Campus offices that wish to send a Medical Campus-wide broadcast email must contact the Boston University Medical Center Office of Corporate Communications (OCC). Ellen Berlin (638-8491, [elberlin@bu.edu](mailto:elberlin@bu.edu)), Director, is the primary contact for Medical Campus broadcast email requests that are not originated by the Provost's Office or Business Affairs Office. Another OCC approval contact is Lisa Brown (638-8491, [lisa.brown@bmc.org](mailto:lisa.brown@bmc.org)). OCC will review, and if appropriate, approve and/or modify the message and execute its transmission to the target group.

- B. Each of the following questions must be addressed prior to sending an e-mail message:

1. To: what population will receive the message?
2. From: who will appear as the sender in the message? For example, should a department e-mail address be used, or is an individual's address preferable? Refer to the [Guidelines](#) for more information on using an alias.
3. Reply-to: should replies to your e-mail message (including notices of undeliverable e-mail) be sent to an address other than that specified in the "From:" field? If so, what address should be used? When answering that question, consider the number of responses you expect the e-mail to generate.
4. Subject: what should appear in the subject line?
5. Has the message grammar and spelling been checked?
6. Is there a date/time by which the message must be sent? If so, has enough time been allowed to meet your deadline? Remember that it takes time to secure approval, create the mailing list, and format the message before the e-mail can be sent. Remember, too, that with few exceptions, messages should be sent only at non-peak times (weekday afternoons from 1:00 to 6:00 are considered to be peak times).

### **Using a Locally-Controlled Distribution List**

Locally-controlled distribution lists provide flexibility when selecting a recipient population but their primary disadvantage is that they must be manually created and maintained. They are therefore subject to error due to mistyped e-mail addresses and they can fall out of date.

*Recipient population:* diverse constituency

*Advantages:* well-suited for smaller or narrowly-focused populations.

Process:

- A. The recipient list must be maintained locally. This includes insuring that e-mail addresses are up to date and have been correctly entered into the list.
- B. Authorization to send the message must be secured before sending the message. Refer to Table 1 for information on target populations and required approval sources.
- C. Each of the following questions must be addressed prior to sending an e-mail message:
  1. To: what population will receive the message?
  2. From: who will appear as the sender in the message? For example, should a department e-mail address be used, or is an individual's address preferable? Refer to the [Guidelines](#) for more information on using an alias.
  3. Reply-to: should replies to your e-mail message (including notices of undeliverable e-mail) be sent to an address other than that specified in the "From:" field? If so, what address should be used? When answering that question, consider the number of responses you expect the e-mail to generate.
  4. Subject: what should appear in the subject line?
  5. Has the message grammar and spelling been checked?
  6. Is there a date/time by which the message must be sent? If so, has enough time been allowed to meet your deadline? Remember that it takes time to secure approval, create the mailing list, and format the message before the e-mail can be sent. Remember, too, that with few exceptions, messages should be sent only at non-peak times (weekday afternoons from 1:00 to 6:00 are considered to be peak times).

## Alternatives to E-mail

There are some cases in which e-mail may not be the most effective method of communicating with a particular constituency. The following alternatives are available at Boston University:

### Web pages

As mentioned previously, Web pages allow the use of formatted text and graphics. Well-designed pages have the potential to be very effective in communicating information, regardless of how detailed or complex that information may be. A drawback to this medium, however, is that it requires a user to take the initiative to visit a site and view the information displayed (additionally, it requires that a user remember to return to the site to view any information that may have been updated). E-mail, on the other hand, delivers information directly to a user's inbox and demands no more of that user than opening the e-mail message.

### Web-based Bulletin board

*Forums@BU* is a Web-based bulletin board system that academic and administrative departments can use to post messages and announcements to communicate with the community. The utility can also be used as a discussion board, where people reply to posted messages. Departments might set up multiple forums dedicated to discussion on specific topics, for example.

A Web browser must be used to view the *Forums@BU* Web pages. Unlike mailing lists, message content posted to a forum does not appear in someone's e-mail inbox. However, it is possible to request e-mail notification when someone has responded to a message that you posted.

### BU Today

Marketing and Communications publishes BU Today for students, faculty, and staff on most weekdays throughout the year. This is the primary source of news and information for the BU campus and is an excellent way to share information with these internal audiences. Announcements and news should be sent to [today@bu.edu](mailto:today@bu.edu) for consideration by the editorial staff. Event information can be submitted online at [www.bu.edu/calendar](http://www.bu.edu/calendar) or by sending e-mail to the manager of the Calendar at [calendar@bu.edu](mailto:calendar@bu.edu). You can also contact the Executive Editor, Art Jahnke.

BU Today publishes a daily broadcast email for faculty, students, and staff members, Monday through Friday when school is in session. This email is the preferred method of sharing announcements and event information with the BU community. Except in rare instances of extremely high impact information, the BU Today daily email will be used to meet most requests for broadcast email to the University community.

### Mailing lists – a primer

Mailing lists, or recipient lists, can be dynamic, static, or a combination of each. The dynamic lists considered in this document are institutionally-generated and are based on data stored in the University's central databases. The lists are updated regularly or are created on an as-needed basis for mailings and, because they contain data that is current, they are generally the most effective means to reach a particular University population. In some cases, a recipient group must be derived from data that is not contained in University central databases. In these situations, a dynamic list cannot be constructed and the sender must rely on a static list.

Static lists are built manually and are updated only as often as the list maintainer chooses to modify them. Common examples of static lists are those managed by locally-installed e-mail programs like Outlook or Eudora.

A third type of mailing list is one that can be created and managed via institutionally-maintained list manager software called "Majordomo." While faculty, staff and students can create general mailing lists that must then be manually maintained, authorized faculty and staff can, in addition, create hybrid lists which support both automatic updating (based on changes in course registration or the personnel database, for example), as well as manual updating. For more information, see [www.bu.edu/computing/maillinglists](http://www.bu.edu/computing/maillinglists).