

Policy 1209 Electronic Messaging

Date of Current Revision: March 2021

Responsible Officer: Assistant Vice President for Information Technology and CIO

1. PURPOSE

A variety of electronic communication mechanisms are available to individuals and groups at James Madison University. These electronic messaging systems are an alternative to paper-based letters, memos, posters, fliers, and notices. They currently include such systems as electronic mail (email), mailing lists, social media sites, news and instant messaging services, and web sites that are used for communication.

The university's electronic messaging systems provide a medium for information exchange in support of its teaching, research, service, and administrative activities.

This policy sets forth responsibilities and principles that shall direct the use of JMU's electronic messaging systems, both internally and as part of the global electronic community.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

STATE OR FEDERAL STATUTE AND / OR REGULATION

Laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act (§ 2.2-3800 et seq.), the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (Pub. L. No. 105-304, 112 Stat. 2860 Oct. 28, 1998), the Virginia Public Records Act (§ 42.1-76 et seq.), and the Freedom of Information Act (§ 2.2-3700 et seq.) require the university to enforce this policy.

Use of electronic messaging systems commits individuals to all applicable university policies and procedures and Department of Human Resource Management Policy 1.75 ([Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media](#)), communications mechanisms such as email, instant message, social media, electronic list services, and web sites, etc. to deliver, exchange, or circulate information electronically.

3. DEFINITIONS

Mass Messaging

Distribution of electronic communications to large numbers of students, faculty, staff, or a combination thereof that utilizes JMU messaging systems. The bulk email service is one specific type of mass messaging. Others include listservs, group messaging, web pages, etc.

Official Communication

Communications that include content related to the conduct of university business. Examples may include information about student enrollment, grades, financial responsibilities, etc.; employee salary/progress information; financial accounts and records; administrative inquiries and records; audits; and academic or administrative decisions, reviews, reporting, notices, etc.

Official JMU Email Addresses/Accounts

Email addresses/accounts assigned by the university to employees, students, affiliates, or others in affiliation with the jmu.edu domain.

For employees/affiliates, these addresses take the form of eID@jmu.edu and for students they are eID@dukes.jmu.edu.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all individuals and/or technical mechanisms that use the university's information technology resources for electronic messaging functions.

5. POLICY

All members of the JMU community are encouraged to use its electronic messaging resources and expected to do so in a manner consistent with the university's mission. The university is committed to using resources efficiently, and email is a cost-effective means of communication. This policy establishes email as the university's official means of communication with students and employees, regardless of their status, and sets forth obligations members of the university community have regarding email use for this purpose.

5.1 Official Communication

The university will send official communications to students and employees by email addressed to their official JMU email addresses. Students and employees are expected to check their official JMU email addresses on a frequent and consistent basis to remain informed of university communications, as certain communications may be time sensitive. Those who fail to check their email on a regular basis are responsible for any resulting consequences.

To meet compliance obligations and maintain appropriate controls, employees/affiliates shall conduct all university business from their official JMU email address/account.

Students have the option of automatically redirecting email sent to their official JMU email address/account to another email service. By making another delivery choice students are accepting responsibility for 1) selecting an email service(s) they frequently use to ensure they receive and read official university communications in a timely manner, 2) the additional security/privacy risk that may be introduced through forwarding, and 3) any consequences resulting from unavailability of external services or any email which is not received. Students shall also recognize that to help assure identity of the requester, certain types of requests for information or services from the university may require they be initiated only from their official JMU email account.

Employees/affiliates may not automatically redirect email sent to their official JMU account to another email service.

5.2 Instructional Uses of Electronic Messaging

Faculty members will determine how email or other forms of electronic messaging will be used in instruction. Faculty may expect that students are checking their email regularly and may use email for their courses accordingly.

5.3 Appropriate Use

The university encourages all members of its community to use electronic communications in a manner that is respectful of others. Individuals must remember that information distributed through the university's messaging systems may be subject to other university requirements under freedom of information, legal discovery, etc. When using university messaging systems, individuals should consider themselves as

representatives of the university and appropriate language, behavior, and style is warranted. Refer to Policy [1207](#) - Appropriate Use of Information Technology Resources.

5.4 Constraints

To help assure availability and functionality of the university's messaging systems, individuals shall be aware of the technical constraints and functional limitations of the various messaging technologies they choose to use and abide by security and appropriate use principles governing their individual and common use. General [Electronic Messaging Guidelines](#) are also available.

5.5 Message Content

The content of any electronic message is the sole responsibility of the individual sending the message.

Harassment, obscenity, forgery, and other illegal forms of expression are not acceptable use of university resources. Restrictions on content of electronic messages are generally the same as those that apply to verbal or written communication (slander, harassment, etc.). When such restrictions need to be enforced, the same administrative, judicial, and criminal processes as for non-computer communication may be invoked. Use of electronic messaging systems does not change what is and is not an illegal communication. Barring illegality or violation of university policy including, but not limited to, Policy [5101](#) - Fundraising - Private and Policy [1207](#) - Appropriate Use of Information Technology Resources, the university will not regulate messages based on content or views expressed by the sender or implied by the receipt. Individuals who use resources such as electronic forums, social media sites, newsgroups, email lists, etc. shall decide for themselves whether the forum and content are appropriate to their needs. The university will treat these services as an educational resource. Transmission of information by electronic means does not negate intellectual property rights, copyrights, or other protections.

5.6 Privacy

At university management discretion, files, data, or communications may be reviewed as necessary; therefore, individuals are entitled to no expectation of privacy with regard to their files, data, or communication.

5.7 Occasional Personal Use

Since electronic messaging systems may, on occasion, carry information in the form of incidental personal or casual communication, care must be taken that such use does not compromise security of university data resources, the integrity of university business functions, or the appropriate use of university messaging systems.

5.8 Messaging Guidelines

[Electronic Messaging Guidelines](#) provide for appropriate use of university resources, to help assure proper management of email addresses and other contact addresses of university constituents and to avoid conflict or confusion. These guidelines help individuals/departments choose the means of communication most appropriate to a particular need. Specific procedures may apply to the different types of messaging services JMU provides.

In addition, since mass email and other distributions to university constituents through the web or using JMU's other computing and messaging facilities may constitute an electronic publication of the university, additional standards may apply. Such electronic publications must be approved by the Division of University Advancement Office of Communications and Marketing and meet the standards outlined in Policy [1502](#) - University Communications and Marketing.

6. PROCEDURES

Additional procedures and other requirements related to bulk email, list services, and other electronic messaging services mentioned in this policy may apply. Specific criteria and details for using JMU's various messaging services are available on the [Information Technology website](#).

In compliance with JMU's [Computing Policies and Standards](#), email must meet certain criteria and those interested in distributing mass messages must follow procedures specific to the service being used. For example, procedures for use of JMU's bulk email service vary according to the group being addressed and the type of content being communicated. Specific details are available on Computing's [Bulk Email](#) site.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

Electronic messaging systems by their very nature depend on the shared effort and responsibility of all who participate in and manage their use. Disruptions, whether by technical or behavioral means, can impact availability and usefulness for an entire community of users.

Information Technology (IT) is responsible for ensuring reliable, secure, and efficient operation of the university's electronic messaging systems. IT will also assure access to messaging services for all members of the university community in keeping with the university mission and will instruct and assist users in choosing among various messaging options. Messaging servers cannot be established in the *jmu.edu* domain nor can third-party messaging vendors (such as email service providers) be contracted without specific permission from IT.

University employees have additional responsibilities by virtue of their access to a variety of institutional data. Since JMU is a state institution maintaining personal information about individuals, special care is required. Laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 USC 1232g et. seq.), the Virginia Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act (Code of Virginia § 2.2-3800), the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (Code of Virginia § 2.2-3700) and others apply to data use and transmission within electronic messaging systems. University employees shall obey university policies and applicable laws and regulations regarding data use and information security as they use electronic messaging systems. Of particular note:

1. Email must not be used to communicate highly confidential data as defined in JMU Policy [1205](#) - Data Stewardship Policy.
2. Email must not be the sole method for notification where another method of communication is required by law.
3. Certain types of message content may constitute public records and/or be subject to records management requirements, including records retention. See JMU Policy [1109](#) -Records Management for additional guidance.

8. SANCTIONS

James Madison University reserves the right to manage its electronic messaging resource (medium and services) to ensure overall utility and common accessibility in support of the university mission. This includes, but is not restricted to, suspension or revocation of computing and telecommunication services, including electronic messaging capability.

Regarding employees, sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include termination of employment.

Regarding students, sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include suspension or expulsion.

9. EXCLUSIONS

None.

10. INTERPRETATION

Authority to interpret this policy rests with the president and is generally delegated to the assistant vice president for information technology and CIO.

Previous Version: October 2014

Approved by the President: December 2017