



Communication via Electronic Mail

**Policy Title:** Communication via Electronic Mail

**Policy Type:** Administrative

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**Responsible Office:** Human Resources/Division of Student Affairs

**Responsible Executive:** Vice President for Operations & Chief Strategist for Institutional Effectiveness

**Applies to:** University Community

**POLICY STATEMENT**

Norfolk State University (NSU) considers e-mail the primary mechanism for official communication with students and employees unless otherwise prohibited by law. The University reserves the right to send official communication via email through University supplied email addresses. Students and employees are expected to routinely check, read and when necessary, reply to email communication.

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE NUMBER</b>
Definitions.....	1
Contacts .....	2
Stakeholder(s) .....	2
Communication via Electronic Mail.....	2
Education and Compliance .....	4
Publication .....	4
Review Schedule.....	5
Related Documents .....	5
Forms .....	5

**DEFINITIONS**

**Electronic mail/E-mail:** The electronic transmission of messages, letters and documents through a communications network.



## Communication via Electronic Mail

**University email account:** The University assigned individual account used to access the University's communications network as a part of the NSU domain (e.g. [imuser@nsu.edu](mailto:imuser@nsu.edu) or [i.m.user@spartans.nsu.edu](mailto:i.m.user@spartans.nsu.edu)).

### **CONTACT(S)**

The Office of Human Resources officially interprets this policy as it relates to all employees. The Vice President for Student Affairs interprets this policy as relating to students. The Office of Human Resources is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by BOV Policy # 01 (2014) *Creating and Maintaining Policies* through the appropriate governance structures. Questions regarding this policy should be directed to Human Resources (employees) or Student Affairs (students).

**STAKEHOLDER(S):** University Community

### **COMMUNICATION VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Norfolk State University uses email communication to contact employees and students quickly and efficiently when needed. Official University email accounts are provided to all employees and enrolled students upon hiring and enrollment. These accounts are provided for the purpose of facilitating University business and communication. Incidental personal use is permitted, however abuse of a University email account or transmission of any fraudulent, threatening, intimidating, defamatory, harassing, discriminatory, or otherwise unlawful messages or images is prohibited.

All employees and students have email accounts that are password protected. The passwords must be kept confidential and used in accordance with approved University policies.

Employees and students are expected to check their official NSU email account on a regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications. NSU email for employees can be accessed at <http://www.nsu.edu> and clicking on Web mail, or by using the Microsoft Outlook client software application when the software has been installed on the user's computer. Employees and students experiencing problems accessing the University email account should promptly report the problem to the Office of Information Technology (OIT) Help Desk at 757.823.8678.

Faculty members must use the official NSU email address for official communications with students. Faculty members should determine how email will be used in their classes and should specify email requirements and expectations in course syllabi. The use of non-NSU email addresses for communication with students regarding University business or NSU educational matters is not acceptable. When using such accounts, faculty may unintentionally be in violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).



## Communication via Electronic Mail

### **Employee Out-of-Office Reply Guidance**

The auto-reply (out-of-office) should be set up for emails when NSU employees are unable to respond to emails for more than 24 hours due to leave, meetings, training, and other purposes. The Auto-reply should include the date(s) when the employee will not be available. In addition, NSU employees must notify senders of their plan to respond to the sender's emails and/or provide an alternate contact. A sample message is provided below:

*Thank you for contacting the Norfolk State University Office of Information Technology (OIT). I will be out of the office from Wednesday, December 23, 2015 to Friday, January 1, 2016. I plan to return to the office on Monday, January 4, 2016. I will return your message as soon as possible; however, if you need immediate technical assistance, please contact Client Services at 757-823-8678 or [clientservices@nsu.edu](mailto:clientservices@nsu.edu).*

### **Email Signature**

When employees are not out of the office, emails must be responded to in a reasonable timeframe, typically within 48 hours of receipt during working business days of Monday through Friday, and working business hours of 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Emails received after hours or during weekends and holidays should be responded to within 48 hours of the next business day. All employees are required to identify themselves in their email communications. An appropriate identifying signature that conforms to the Email Signature Policy 50-06 should be included in all emails sent. At least one telephone number is required to be included in the signature. Employees should be mindful that emails from the NSU domain reflect upon the University's image and take care in the preparation of messages to ensure proper decorum, spelling and grammar.

### **Email Notifications**

University administrative offices routinely send selected official communications to students via email. Such communications may include individual or group messages such as Financial Aid award letters, Residential Life room assignments, advising appointments, or University-wide surveys. These will be sent to the NSU email accounts.

### **No Expectation of Privacy**

As specified by the Commonwealth of Virginia, users should have no expectation of privacy in any message, file, image or data created, sent, retrieved, or received through the use of Norfolk State University's systems and equipment (see Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Human Resources Management Policy Number 1.75). Furthermore, electronic communication should never be considered private, confidential, or secure. Once sent, copies of e-mail can be forwarded to other parties and unintended recipients without the sender's knowledge or permission. E-mail should be prepared with the same level of care and discretion as paper-based correspondence.



## Communication via Electronic Mail

However, users should be aware that the University will make reasonable attempts to maintain the confidentiality and security of electronic communication. The University reserves the right to monitor the use of electronic communications.

### **University Records**

E-mail can be considered as public records in some situations. However, the University regards electronic mail as a vehicle for delivery of information and not as a mechanism for the retention and/or archiving of information. It is the responsibility of the senders and receivers of e-mail and attached documents to determine which information must be retained and for how long.

### **Violations**

Employee violations of this policy will be addressed in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia Policy Number 1.75. The appropriate level of disciplinary action will be determined on a case-by-case basis, by the appropriate Vice President or designee, with sanctions up to or including termination or expulsion from the university depending on the severity of the offense.

Student violations will subject the student to disciplinary action as provided for in the Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct.

### **EDUCATION AND COMPLIANCE**

Human Resources shall make available to all employees the requirements of this policy. Information about this policy will be listed on the website under Human Resources. To ensure conformity to the requirements of this policy, the Office of Human Resources will distribute biannual reminders via Campus Announcements. Violations for faculty and staff should be reported to the Office of Human Resources immediately upon disclosure or discovery. Violations for students should be reported to the Vice President of Student Affairs immediately upon disclosure or discovery.

### **PUBLICATION**

This policy shall be widely published and distributed to the University community. To ensure timely publication and distribution thereof, the Responsible Office will make every effort to:

- Communicate the policy in writing, electronic or otherwise, to the University community within 14 days of approval;
- Submit the policy for inclusion in the online Policy Library within 14 days of approval;



### Communication via Electronic Mail

- Educate and train all stakeholders and appropriate audiences on the policy's content, as necessary.
- Failure to meet the publication requirements does not invalidate this policy.

### REVIEW SCHEDULE

- Next Scheduled Review: 08/02/2024
- Approval by, date: Board of Visitors, 03/02/2021
- Revision History: 09/22/2004; 03/06/2008; & 3/2/2021
- Supersedes: Policy 60.203 and Policy 60.204, Administrative Policy 50-05 (2014)

### RELATED DOCUMENTS

Administrative Policy 32-01(2014) Acceptable Use of Technological Resources  
<https://www.nsu.edu/policy/admin-32-01.aspx>

Administrative Policy 50-06 (2014) Email Signature  
<https://www.nsu.edu/About/Leadership-and-Initiatives/Office-of-the-President/NSU-Policy-Library/Policies/Administrative-Policy/policies/50-06-Email-Signature.aspx>

DHRM Policy 1.75  
[https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hrpolicy/1-75-use-of-electronic-communications-and-social-media-update.pdf?sfvrsn=a4a4469f\\_2](https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hrpolicy/1-75-use-of-electronic-communications-and-social-media-update.pdf?sfvrsn=a4a4469f_2)

### FORMS

*There are no forms associated with this policy.*