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Student Use of Email

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Communicating With Students Via Email

We're all aware that most of our students are heavy and proficient users of e-mail. Despite that fact (or maybe because of it), we sometimes have a hard time figuring out which e-mail address to use to communicate with a class full of students. Should we always use the students' official campus e-mail? The Hotmail, Yahoo, or AOL accounts that many students list for us? Are there tools available that facilitate e-mail communication with students?

Students Required to Read Campus E-Mail

All Western students were informed this year that they are required to read e-mail sent to their campus e-mail accounts. Students can do this by either reading their MyWestern e-mail directly or by choosing to forward their campus e-mail to another account of their choice. The main reason for this policy is so that official campus e-mail (e.g. regarding tuition, enrollment, financial aid, admission) can be sent to students in a manner guaranteed to get to them quickly and efficiently. A fringe benefit is that the campus e-mail address then also becomes a reliable means for faculty to communicate with students.

Campus E-Mail Is Each Student's 'Official' Address

Each Western student is automatically assigned a campus email account at the time they are admitted. Student e-mail addresses are always in the form gandhim@cc.wvu.edu (i.e. based on last name and first initial). These official student e-mail accounts are stored in each student's record in Banner and are then used by Blackboard, Bullseye Targeted Messaging (see below), and other campus e-mail communication systems. Students' alternative e-mail addresses (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo, Comcast) are entirely each individual student's responsibility, with no record of such e-mail addresses kept on campus systems.

Do Students Really Use Their Campus E-Mail?

Most faculty members we're spoken with indicate that they can reliably use the campus e-mail addresses stored in Blackboard to communicate with students in classes. Most students themselves indicate that they do read their campus e-mail. The Western Educational Longitudinal Survey for Spring, 2004 (completed by students who entered in Fall, 2003) indicated that:

- 90% of students use their campus e-mail
- 72% of students read campus e-mail at least weekly
- 62% of students read campus e-mail several times each week

Prior to the start of fall quarter, 2004, 75% of entering freshmen had already activated their campus e-mail accounts. By the end of the first week of the quarter, more than 90% of freshmen had activated their Western e-mail accounts. This means you can be sure that most students will receive e-mail sent to their official e-mail addresses.

E-Mail Tools Available For Faculty

Two easy-to-use tools allow faculty to send e-mail to any student registered for a class:

Blackboard E-Mail Tools: Each Blackboard course is automatically populated with the campus e-mail address of each registered student. Click-on web tools within Blackboard allow instructors to send e-mail messages to the entire class, pre-established groups of class members, select students, or teaching assistants. You can also control other tools that permit students to e-mail each other through Blackboard. In all cases, mail is sent to the students official Western e-mail address. Even if you are not using Blackboard for other purposes, you can still use the Blackboard communication tools for easily e-mailing students – just initiate Blackboard for your course and begin using the communication tools.

Bullseye Targeted Messaging: If you don't want to use Blackboard or if you need to e-mail students outside of the classroom context, a new tool called Bullseye can be a real help (www.wvu.edu/bullseye). Bullseye lets you target e-mail messages at individual classes by CREN number, at groups of classes, or at entire majors (e.g. Psychology). You simply select the group you want to send to, select e-mail as your message type, type in your message, and send. You can also enter specialized lists of students selected from Banner (e.g. all students with more than 100 credit hours) and send e-mail just to them. As with Blackboard, all Bullseye e-mail goes only to students' official campus e-mail address.

Using the above tools, reliably e-mailing students has never been easier. There's no longer a need to ask students to list their e-mail addresses do all the subsequent paperwork by hand. We encourage faculty to request that students use only their Western e-mail address for reading campus e-mail. That way, you'll always have e-mail addresses for your students right at hand.