Management of Emails

Guidelines

PURPOSE

This document provides guidelines and advice in the management of emails created, sent, and received by Athabasca University team members as part of university business.

OVERVIEW

Athabasca University's physical and electronic records and information assets are its corporate memory. Emails are a type of electronic record - they are the evidence of how the University performs its functions and why decisions were taken. Email has also become a part of daily workflow, and as a result, controls must be applied to the creation, maintenance, and disposal of emails. Proper email management:

◊   Ensures key information is not lost, inaccessibly, or accidentally deleted
◊   Ensures information is accessible by all who need it, and that it can be found quickly
◊   Minimizes the chances of information being accidentally accessed, forwarded, or sent
◊   Lessens the burden when information is requested via FOIP Access Request or in the event of litigation

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY ACT (1995)

Personal Information

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1995), which supports an open, accessible and responsible university structure. Under the purposes and principles of the FOIP Act, individuals have the right:

- To access to information under the custody and control of the university (with some limited and specific exceptions).
- To control of how their personal information is collected, used and disclosed.
- To request corrections to personal information.
- To have personal information protected.
- To have an independent review of decisions made by the university by the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner.

This includes emails sent and received by AU team members; as a result, proper consideration should be given to the creation, organization, and retention of emails to ensure compliance with the FOIP Act.

Under the FOIP Act, the University also has a responsibility to ensure the protection of privacy of those who work and study here. In the event that personal information has been collected, disclosed, used, or disposed of in a manner inconsistent with the FOIP Act, the University has a duty to address it immediately. It is therefore critical to ensure that proper attention is given when sending emails.

Sensitive or Confidential Information

When sending an email that contains sensitive or confidential information, consider including a statement at the beginning of the message to alert the receiver that the information in the message is sensitive or confidential. You may also wish to include direction on what the receiver may do with the message.

Examples

This message contains information that is considered to be sensitive or confidential.

This message is intended only for the addressee(s) and contains information that is considered to be sensitive or confidential.

This message contains information that is considered to be sensitive or confidential and may not be forwarded or disclosed to any other party without the permission of the sender.

This message contains information that is considered to be sensitive or confidential and may not be forwarded or disclosed to any other party without the permission of the sender. If you have received this message in error, please notify me immediately so that I can correct the error and delete the original email. Thank you.

Protecting Personal or Confidential Information

When there is a need to communicate personal or confidential information, think carefully as to whether email is the proper medium. Unfortunately, there is always a risk that an email is accidentally sent or forwarded to the wrong individual. This would be considered a privacy breach under the FOIP Act. Always double check that the address or addresses are correct. The occurrence of emails being sent to a wrong address is becoming more frequent and senders of email must be more cautious especially when the email contains sensitive or confidential information.

If you have any doubts about an email address, verify the address first before sending the email. Sending email messages to an unknown address is also becoming more common. Again, if an email contains sensitive or confidential information, check or confirm the address(es) before clicking the send button.

AU EMAIL ACCOUNT

Always use your AU email account of university business. If you use a personal or non-AU email address to create, reply to, or store work-related information, you are increasing the risk of causing an inadvertent privacy breach by using a non-authorized service provider. Those emails are also still subject to the FOIP Act.

TRANSITORY EMAILS

Most emails are considered Transitory Emails - routine emails with short term value that are approved for destruction either immediately or after a short, specified retention period. Some examples include:

- Emails about routine administrative tasks, such as scheduling a meeting, notices of events, etc.
- Emails from outside the AU community used only for reference purposes
- Emails on which you were cc'd or bcc'd
- Emails that are for your information only and no action or decision is required

If you are not sure if the record is Transitory or not, use our Transitory Decision Tree to help you to decide.

TIPS

- Use descriptive subject lines
  - ◊ This will help you easily identify emails and make them easier to search
- Use a system of folders and subfolders to sort and temporarily store your emails
  - ◊ If possible, match it to your file structure on your Sharepoint, etc.
- If an email is privileged or confidential, state so in the subject
- Minimize duplication by deleting emails you no longer require (See Transitory Emails section)
- Take time regularly to clear out old emails that are no longer required (i.e, those that have reached their retention date)
- Do not combine topics in a single email. This makes it difficult to file and may result in keeping information longer than necessary.
- When managing a series of emails within the same thread, keep only the most recent message, as it should contain previous messages within

Microsoft Outlook is not a recordkeeping system – it is a communication system. Any emails that are required to be retained should be saved in the appropriate shared drive and managed from there rather than Outlook.