

# California State University, Sacramento

## Student Email Guidelines

### Email Guidelines for Communication with Students

These guidelines are intended for institutional offices, departments, and staff who send formal communications to students on behalf of Sacramento State. Examples of institutional offices include the Registrar, Student Accounts, Student Advising, college student success centers. They are representative of major divisions including Enrollment, Student Affairs, ABA, IRT, Academic Affairs and the colleges. The guidelines are designed to promote consistency, professionalism, and responsible use of the institutional email system when reaching students for official or administrative purposes.

These guidelines are not formal policy and are not intended to govern or restrict faculty use of email for instructional or academic communication. Faculty members retain full discretion in communicating with students.

Offices are encouraged to use good judgment, consider the student experience, and apply these guidelines as a framework for effective and appropriate email communication.

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**Guideline Title:** Use of Institutional Email for Student Communication

**Responsible Offices:** Office of the Provost / IRT

### 1. Purpose

This document establishes guidelines for the appropriate use of institutional email when communicating with students at Sacramento State. It ensures that email communications uphold institutional integrity, protect student privacy, support student success as well as the educational mission of the university.

### 2. Scope

This guideline is recommended for all faculty, staff, and authorized institutional affiliates who use official institutional email accounts (e.g., @csus.edu) to send messages to currently enrolled students.

### 3. Guideline Statement

The university recommends that all communications to students via email adhere to the following guidelines:

### **a. Official Communication Channel**

- The institutional email account (e.g., [firstname.lastname@csus.edu](mailto:firstname.lastname@csus.edu)) should be used for all official communications with students.
- Non-CSU email accounts, including personal or third-party email accounts, should not be used to send academic, administrative, or advising information.

### **b. FERPA and Privacy Compliance**

- Emails must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#)) and other applicable privacy laws. See also “Data Security Introduction and FERPA (Module 1)” found in CSU Learn and available in your My Sac State portal.
- Email can be used to notify students of updates to academic or financial data with links to the appropriate gated system (e.g. MySacState or Canvas) for students to review the details of this information.
- Do not include confidential student information in the email itself (e.g., grades, health or financial data) unless the email is sent securely (e.g. via Secure File Transfer/GoAnywhere) and the student’s identity is confirmed.

### **c. Content Recommendations**

- Structure communications to be professional, respectful, and relevant to the student’s academic or administrative experience.
- Use clear subject lines and identify the sender’s name, title, and contact information.
- Use clear terminology and language that are easy for students to understand.
- Avoid acronyms, jargon or academic language not commonly understood by students.

### **d. Email Subject Lines**

To help students quickly identify the importance and purpose of university emails, communicators are encouraged to use standardized subject line labels consistently and sparingly. Subject line indicators should accurately reflect the level of action or attention required and should not be overused.

Recommended subject line conventions include:

- **[ACTION REQUIRED]** — Use when a student must complete an important administrative task to avoid disruption to enrollment, registration, financial aid, billing, housing, or other essential university processes.
- **[URGENT]** — Reserve only for emergency or critical communications requiring immediate attention, such as campus safety notifications or imminent deadlines with significant consequences.

- **[TIME SENSITIVE]** — Use for communications tied to a specific date, deadline, or limited-time opportunity where awareness is important, even if no direct action is required.
- **[INFORMATIONAL]** — Use for general updates, events, announcements, reminders, or optional opportunities that do not directly affect a student's standing or ability to remain enrolled.

Communicators should select the lowest appropriate level of urgency to maintain student trust and ensure that truly critical messages receive prompt attention.

#### **e. Mass Emailing**

- Mass emails to large groups of students should be approved in advance by the Division of Student Affairs, Division of Enrollment Management, the Office of the Provost, the Information Resources and Technology Division, the Division of the President or the designated representative from University Communications.
- Submissions for mass emails should first be approved by the designated communications office for your department, division or college. Check with your college or division contact regarding communication workflows and approval processes specific to your area.
- Use mailing lists or distribution groups provided and maintained by IRT to ensure accuracy and proper segmentation.
- Exceptions will be made for emergency notifications and considered for a Division such as IRT communicating a mass system outage impacting all current students.

#### **f. Targeted Emailing**

- Ensure the sub-population is well-defined and that the message content is directly relevant to that group. Examples of sub-populations include major, class year such as first-year freshman, academic standing, program participation or administrative characteristics relevant to billing, payments or account management. Use existing mailing lists or distribution groups when possible.
- Targeted emails to sub-populations of students do not require the same level of approval as mass emails to all current students. It is recommended that the sender gain approval from the designated communications office for your department, division or college.
- Avoid broad or generic messages that could be sent to the entire student body.
- Send targeted emails only when necessary and avoid excessive communication.
- Group related information into a single message, when possible, to reduce inbox fatigue and ensure students recognize the importance of each email.

As with other email communications, all targeted communications should come from an official university address and follow branding and tone guidelines. Include a clear subject line, a summary at the top, and contact information for follow-up or questions.

### **g. Email Retention**

As a reminder, emails sent to students may constitute official university records and should be retained in accordance with the institution's records retention standard.

### **h. Prohibited Uses**

- Do not use institutional email to promote personal business, political campaigns, or unauthorized events.
- Do not send spam, chain letters, or unsolicited mass communications unrelated to university business. A chain letter is a message that asks the recipient to copy and send it to others, usually to avoid bad fortune or to gain a promised reward.

## **4. Questions**

For questions about this guideline or guidance on appropriate use, contact [the IRT Service Desk](#) and your questions will be relayed to the appropriate division administrator.

## **5. Resources**

For more information, please see the additional resources included below.

- Sacramento State [Email Account Policy](#)
- [Hornet Weekly](#)
- [SacSend Powered by Emma](#)