

CofC Faculty Educational Technology Committee
Meeting minutes
Feb 25, 2010

Committee members present: Bing Pan, Georgia Schlau, Henry Xie, Bob Podolsky, Amy Mecklenburg-Faenger

Committee members absent: Dongmei Cao, Tim Scheett, Bradley Woods

The committee was tasked with recommending possible solutions to the misuse of College-sponsored listservs. The request to the committee came from Joe Kelly, Speaker of the Faculty, in response to a request by Bev Diamond, Interim Provost.

Problems with listserv misuse are of two main types: replies and inappropriate subjects. These are best exemplified by a review of postings to the FACULTYANDSTAFF listserv during calendar year 2009. The description for this listserv indicates that it is intended for official College business and is not meant to receive replies or involve discussion. Nevertheless:

- at least 15% of postings were replies to previous postings (includes only those tagged with “Re:”; could be higher given that many threads change subjects);
- based on a subsampling of 300 of the remaining 2273 posts, approximately 21% were for campus events appropriate for the EVENTS listserv (and many of which were duplicated on the EVENTS listserv) and 14% were appropriate for other listservs (OPENDISCUSSION or CLASSIFIEDADS).
- In summary, at least 50% of posts were inappropriate for this listserv, adding at least 1330 additional messages per year.

These problems exist to varying degrees on other listservs, but the main problems appear to be with the FACULTYANDSTAFF and FACULTY listservs. The committee considers most violations to be out of ignorance, though there is some evidence of willful violations once individuals have been contacted about poor practices.

The goals of trying to reduce these problems are:

- to reduce mailbox and archive clutter by eliminating duplicate postings;
- to create a more reliable set of archives, so that information can be relocated more easily (for example, classified ads, discussion items, and official College announcements can be reliably found in their relevant listserv archives);
- to allow faculty to avoid receiving messages that are appropriate for listservs from which they have chosen to opt out

The Faculty Educational Technology Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Rename the FACULTYANDSTAFF and FACULTY listservs to more clearly indicate that they are intended for official College business only. Currently they are treated as a way to reach faculty and/or staff with any information. We recommend using OFFICIALBUSINESSFACSTAFF and OFFICIALBUSINESSFAC as the new listserv names. Another possibility is OFFICIALFACSTAFF and OFFICIALFAC.
2. Clearly define what qualifies as “official College business.” If relevant, limit posting privileges on the official business listservs to those who convey official business.

3. Create a new listserv called COFCDISCUSSION as a forum for the College community to discuss College issues. These discussions currently show up on FACULTYANDSTAFF (where they are inappropriate) or on OPENDISCUSSION (where they are not seen by the large number of people who have opted out). We feel that many who are not interested in discussing current events as covered on OPENDISCUSSION might want to know about discussions of campus issues.
4. Redefine or clarify definitions of some listservs. For example, CLASSIFIEDADS (which would be better called CLASSIFIEDS) should be described as a forum for all discussion about or offers of goods or services (commercial, religious, animal adoption, etc.).
5. Create a mechanism for reporting violations of listserv policies, along with a mechanism for banning repeat offenders. We recommend a system where complaints must originate from faculty or staff. The complaint would be sent to a designated individual or committee, to evaluate whether the complaint is valid. Violators would be warned for a 1st offense and banned for one year from posting on that listserv for a 2nd offense. We hope that our other recommendations will help to reduce the need for enforcement.
6. To further reduce this need, include a footer on all listserv postings that provides a brief description of the purpose of the listserv. For example, the footer for posts to the OFFICIALBUSINESSFACSTAFF listserv could say something like, "This listserv provides official announcements of College business. It is not intended for other postings or for replies. Repeat offenders will be banned from posting."
7. As part of new faculty orientation, and as a reminder at the start of each school year, an email should be sent by IT listing the purpose of each of the College-sponsored listservs and a reminder about enforcement of rules.

Bob Podolsky
Chair, FETC

Additional notes on above recommendations in response to questions sent by Bev Diamond
Apr 21, 2010

1) Currently, we allow faculty to opt out of the Facultyandstaff or the Faculty listserv, I believe. Because people aren't always aware of this, and because most people don't have access to the FacultyAdmin listserv that people cannot opt out of, College messages do not make it to all faculty. Are you proposing that as we rename these to Officialxxx, that we continue to allow opting out or prevent it?

It seems to me that the administration should be assured of reaching all faculty and/or staff with particular kinds of information. The only way I can think of doing so is to require that faculty/staff belong to the "OFFICIAL" listservs, which is a reasonable requirement since the email account is provided by the College. So, I would recommend mandatory official FacAdmin, FacStaff, Fac, etc. listservs, as many combinations as are needed for official announcements to reach the right people.

2) Currently, we allow people who subscribe to any of the unmoderated listservs (and there are very few moderated listservs) to post as well. I am not familiar with the technology, but it makes sense to me that either a listserv is unmoderated, and any subscriber can post, or it is moderated, and IT would have to update the list of faculty and staff every time someone was hired in order to allow them to post, clearly a

cumbersome procedure. Do you have an enforcement mechanism in mind for offenders of protocol, knowing the technology better than I do? It's possible that some of your other suggestions and some education will get rid of the need for enforcement.

Unfortunately I don't know the technology much better than you do. This is the kind of suggestion that needs to be put to IT to see how feasible/time consuming it would be to control who can post to a college listserv. It would take someone's time, but not much. It could work easily if an employee's job classification put them on a list that automatically made them eligible for posting to an administration listserv. As for starting with an open list and then banning offenders, this would likely involve someone adding names to a list, but again I think the frequency should be low. Yes, here's hoping that education will reduce the need for enforcement.

3) Regarding complaints originating from faculty or staff—everyone who works here is faculty or staff. Could you elaborate on who you thought ought not to originate a complaint, or the sense of what you were after here? Do you mean classified staff?

I should have been clearer. What I meant is that an employee would actually have to register a complaint as a first step in enforcement, as opposed to someone in IT monitoring for non-compliance.

4) The EVENTS listserv is supposed to be for the posting of College events. Should this be renamed COLLEGEEVENTS or should its purpose be broadened? My concern with it being broadened is that people opt out and we lose the ability to reach people with College events. Or would the Committee recommend allowing these events on the OFFICIALxxx listservs, something that doesn't fit with current instructions?

Currently, EVENTS is broadly used for all events. I see a couple of options. (1) We could allow the broad practice to continue and change the official description. A quick look at the EVENTS archive suggests that fewer than 5% of posts are for outside events. So, it seems unlikely that people are opting out of the EVENTS listserv because of the posting of outside events. Keeping EVENTS all inclusive is the easiest way to make sure that events are not posted inappropriately to other listservs. (2) As you suggest we could have a listserv for College events and perhaps one for other events. If so, I would abandon EVENTS and replace it with COFCEVENTS and OTHEREVENTS. It might even be useful to have the discussion listservs be named in parallel, COFCDISCUSSION and OTHERDISCUSSION. I could ask George Hopkins how he would feel about changing the name from OPENDISCUSSION.

So, to summarize a possible revamped collection of listserv names:

OFFICIALFAC
OFFICIALFACSTAFF
OFFICIALADMINFAC

CLASSIFIEDS

SPORTS

COFCDISCUSSION
OPENDISCUSSION (or OTHERDISCUSSION if we use OTHEREVENTS)

EVENTS
or
COFCEVENTS
OTHEREVENTS