



# Washington University in St. Louis

**Andrew D. Martin**  
*Chancellor-elect*

**TO:** University Council  
**FROM:** Andrew D. Martin *adm*  
**DATE:** January 9, 2019  
**RE:** Norms, Expectations and Practices

Happy New Year! I look forward to working closely with each of you as together we advance the mission of Washington University in St. Louis. I am tremendously grateful for your leadership and dedication to this important work, and I am confident that – collectively – we will build upon the strong legacy you have already helped establish here.

In order to most effectively do the important work ahead, it is necessary to implement a clear set of norms and expectations that serve as guiding principles for my position as Chancellor-elect, our collaboration, and our respective roles as leaders of Washington University.

- 1. Lead with Transparency.** Transparency is an essential ingredient for effective leadership. In this vein, we must practice transparency and build trust with our colleagues and constituents whenever appropriate, especially around process.
- 2. Be Available and Approachable.** As Chancellor-elect, I am committed to being open, approachable, and available to concerns, dialogue, and strategic thinking. I urge each of us to model this behavior in order to establish university-wide trust and transparency.
- 3. Practice Confidentiality/Discretion.** While transparency is key, we must also balance the University Council's significant need to practice confidentiality and discretion. We should keep conversations and documents of confidential nature strictly between those who need to know in order to effectively do their work.
- 4. Cultivate a Culture of Mutual Respect and Social Sensitivity.** As we lead diverse teams of people, we must be sensitive to how (and how often) we take turns speaking and listening. We must promote a culture where all colleagues feel safe and are considered valued and included members of the team.
- 5. Foster Critical Thinking and Dialogue.** As an institution of higher learning, we often naturally lean into this norm. However, as administrators, it can become difficult to remove ourselves from the day-to-day "grind," to step back, and to critically discern the best path forward. We must take time and carve out space to do this.

6. **Sacrifice Self for the Sake of the Common Good.** As members of the University Council, it is imperative that we put aside our own personal agendas for the sake of the University's strategic priorities and as we make critical decisions on behalf of the entire institution.
7. **Model Communication Norms.** Due to the growing concern that employees feel pressure to be constantly "plugged in," as leaders and managers we should attempt to model a set of communication behaviors that assuages email/meeting fatigue and promotes work-life balance for our faculty and staff. As dean at the University of Michigan, I instituted a similar set of norms and practices, which I have revised for our purposes here at WashU (see attached article).
- **Respect Staff Working Hours.** We should not expect or request support from professional staff outside the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. window (or flexed hours as you may establish individually with your staff), but for emergent situations, and then from only salaried staff members.
  - **Limit Email Traffic to Working Hours.** Except for emergent situations, we will try to limit sending emails between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Use delayed send to ensure emails arrive only within that window. I plan to follow this religiously.
  - **Communicate in Person When Possible.** When possible, we should communicate with one another and with other professional staff in person or by telephone during business hours, utilizing professional staff to help us find brief "drop in" times or moments for brief phone calls.
  - **Avoid Email Forwarding.** When possible and as appropriate, we will communicate directly to the desired audience and refrain from requesting others to forward our emails to target constituencies.
  - **Limit Meeting Requests.** When calling a meeting, we will work with our professional staff to determine whether the meeting is necessary (i.e., could it be resolved with a phone call, email, or during another existing meeting) and whether each proposed invitee needs to be in the room. If a proposed invitee is not necessary for decision making, then we won't require them to attend.

Once again, I am grateful for your commitment to this extraordinary institution. I hope these norms and expectations only serve to enhance that work and our collaboration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.



## ADVICE

# What Happened When the Dean's Office Stopped Sending Emails After-Hours

By Andrew D. Martin and Anne Curzan | APRIL 12, 2018

"**B**ut nighttime is when I catch up on email," said a colleague, with

some dismay, when we initially proposed our new approach to curbing email communications

within our arts-and-sciences college.

"We're not saying you can't write emails at night," we reassured her. "You just wouldn't send them." You can probably imagine the raised eyebrows and the you-can't-really-be-serious tone of the other comments and questions we heard that day.

After a year of review and discussion, we adopted a new policy on when people in the dean's office should send emails — and, perhaps more important, when they shouldn't.

One of us (Andrew) is dean of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan, and the other (Anne) is associate dean for humanities. When Anne joined the dean's office, in 2015, she — like many professors who take on administrative roles — was overwhelmed by the uptick in email traffic she faced.

It also became clear that the majority of people in the dean's office — including members of the administrative staff — were swimming in email as well, spending hours every evening dealing with messages that had come in over the course of the day.



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Many of us in higher-education administration are managing calendars with long blocks of back-to-back meetings during the week. Meanwhile, the messages pile up. We may find ourselves trying to stay on top of email during meetings (never ideal), or trying to catch up at the end of the day (read: at home in the evenings).

There are several problems with the catch-up-at-night strategy. One is the blurred line between work and personal time. Andrew felt strongly that we all needed sustained, significant, meaningful time away from administrative work. That's a priority for us, and key to our commitment to building a positive place to work.

Also at the top of our list of concerns: the pressure that staff and faculty members can feel to respond promptly to emails from the dean's office. We might just be trying to clean out our inboxes, but to the recipient, a late-night message from one of us can feel like an imperative to respond immediately.

Even if we tell faculty or professional staff members to just "ignore" emails they might receive at 11:30 p.m., not only does that put our colleagues in an impossible situation, but it also creates the impression that dedicated leaders are those who are available around the clock and tied to their electronic devices.

The email problem, we decided, couldn't be as intractable as it seemed. Since we were part of the problem at times, we made a commitment to model the change we wanted to see. In addition to sending late-night emails, we also recognized that the two of us would be sitting in our offices *right next to each other* writing emails back and forth, rather than popping over to talk or just picking up the phone. We also were guilty of creating unnecessary email traffic when we, for example, sent an email to someone else to forward to another group.

What if we experimented with a policy that set some limits in the dean's office? Here's what we came up with:

- **Limit email traffic to working hours.** Except for emergencies, work emails are to be sent between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Use the delayed-send function to ensure that emails to and from people working in the dean's office arrive only within that window.
- **Try to communicate in person.** Whenever possible, associate and assistant deans should communicate with one another and with other

professional staff employees in person or by telephone during the business day. Our administrative assistants can help us find quick drop-in times.

- **Avoid email forwarding.** Refrain from forwarding an email to chairs and directors and asking them to forward it to others. When possible, send it yourself directly to the audience you want to communicate with.
- **Respect working hours.** The dean and the associate and assistant deans should not expect — or request — support from professional staff employees outside of the 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. window. An exception is for emergencies, and then only from salaried staff members.

When we first brought the policy to the dean's cabinet, there was a great deal of skepticism. Colleagues were concerned about how they could do their jobs responsibly with email curfews at night or on weekends. After some back and forth, and a promise that this was just a pilot, all senior administrators in the dean's office agreed to abide by the policy. Without a doubt, some remained very skeptical that it would make any difference.

It has. We would go so far as to say it has been transformative — so much so that some people who manage their own teams have adopted these norms within their offices.

"I used to sign on after dinner and feel already behind, if not downright irresponsible, because I had missed 20 missives in a rapidly unfolding conversation," one associate dean reflected. "Now when I sign on at night, or on the weekend, I feel this palpable sense of relief to see that dean's-office business has not been barreling along while I was spending time with friends and family."

Many of us are still catching up on reading and drafting emails at night or on weekends, but we're using email programs that allow us to delay sending the messages until 7 a.m. the next (or Monday) morning. That's made a difference in three key ways:

- First, it has sharply reduced the amount of new mail coming in at night, which means that we are not trying to process new situations in the evening. (The more obsessive among us use snooze or batch functions to keep emails out of our inboxes until the following morning.)
- Second, because we're not beginning email conversations in the evenings (or on weekends), we are not getting embroiled in rapid after-

hours exchanges with colleagues who are on email at that hour, while we're also trying to catch up.

- Finally, we're actually talking to one another much more during the workday as part of our problem-solving efforts.

Those three effects have contributed to the final important consequence of the policy: It is usefully slowing down email communication.

Very few issues cannot wait until morning, and that is an important message for any dean's office to emphasize. It gives everyone the benefit of perspective that comes with more time to process a response. Problems often resolve themselves when they're left alone for a little while. The new policy also clears time so that in a true emergency, we can quickly and effectively communicate with one another.

We have left the pilot phase behind, and these norms are now embedded in how the dean's office operates. The change has been significant to everyone in the office — especially the skeptics — and has, in fact, helped us to do our jobs and live our lives more effectively.

This is by no means a uniform policy "enforced" across the college. Still, our approach to email in the dean's office has been voluntarily taken up by some of the college's other offices and departments. Having the support of leadership in the dean's office to thoughtfully curb email has empowered department chairs, directors, and other administrators to feel comfortable encouraging a similar approach in their own units.

We certainly wouldn't (and shouldn't) mandate this for faculty and staff members across the college. We realize fully that this approach may not work for everyone (on occasion, we find it hard to adhere to it ourselves). But we've seen the difference this one straightforward intervention can make and we are enthusiastically advertising the policy whenever we have the chance.

*Andrew D. Martin is dean of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan and a professor of political science and statistics. Anne Curzan is associate dean for humanities and a professor of English.*

1255 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20037