Guidelines for Composing E-mail Messages for College-Related Correspondence
(Adopted and updated from guidelines posted in Faculty Handbook and developed by a task force in Academic Affairs in 2004)

General:

● E-mail is a fast, easy, and convenient communication tool but it is not always the best choice – sometimes face-to-face or a phone call is better depending upon sensitivity of information. Whenever possible, discuss sensitive or confidential matters by telephone or in-person.

● Do not assume an e-mail message is private or confidential even if it is marked as such. Remember, e-mail can be forwarded anywhere and saved forever.

● From a liability perspective, e-mail messages are easy to access, mischaracterize and misconstrue; write e-mail messages that you would feel comfortable seeing broadcast to an audience of unintended readers.

● From a legal perspective, e-mail messages are treated as written records and are subject to copyright and intellectual property laws. E-mail may also be evidence in a legal proceeding.

● Include a short but meaningful subject line to inform the recipient what the e-mail is about. Don't leave the subject line blank. Most recipients receive many e-mail messages and use the subject line to browse or sort their inbox.

● Try to keep each email message to one subject for clarity. This also makes it easier to follow a “thread” of replies to a message.

● Compose factual messages that are constructive and professional in tone; avoid subjective comments. E-mail is one-directional – the recipient cannot “hear” your intonations or “see” your facial expressions.

● Use emoticons (smiley faces, etc.) sparingly or not at all in professional correspondence.

● Read e-mail messages you’ve composed at least once for clarity and tone and for spell-checking before the sending. Sloppy writing may require less time for writers but may be misconstrued or require more time to figure out meaning for readers.

● Proof-read the distribution list before sending to ensure that everyone on the list needs to receive the e-mail message. Use “Reply-to-All” judiciously.

● Avoid forwarding e-mail messages to others that are clearly intended as personal or not for broadcast to others.

● Limit tagging an e-mail message as “high priority” or “urgent” unless it really is high priority to everyone on the distribution list.

● It is generally appropriate to copy (Cc) anyone mentioned specifically in an e-mail message.

● Avoid sending personal (non-College related) e-mail messages through the College's e-mail system.
• Avoid opening e-mail messages from unknown sources; never open attachments in e-mail messages from unknown sources.

• If you must print e-mail messages at public printers, pick them up as soon as possible.

• In order to conserve space, any e-mail with an attached file or files, either sent or received, that is greater than 25 MBs is deleted automatically on a nightly basis (even if the e-mail has not been read). Consider compressing large attached files before sending.

• Use the “Out of Office” feature under the Rules menu in Groupwise when you intend to be out of the office for an extended time. Consider providing alternate contact information for yourself or to someone else.

• Our e-mail system is not intended as a long-term storage medium. E-mail messages are automatically deleted (without notification) on a rolling basis when a message become six months old. Users should delete e-mail messages more frequently that no longer have value. To save an e-mail message for longer than six months, users are responsible for archiving e-mail to other medium or printing them out (see IT On-line Help web page or contact the Help Desk for instructions).

About Students:

• Be aware that e-mail messages composed about individual students are regarded as educational records. Such records are not private and may be used in legal proceedings against you or the College. They also may be subject to the same retention requirements as paper documents.

• Sensitive, student-centered matters should not be discussed in e-mail. When in doubt, use the telephone or face-to-face communication.

• E-mail messages you choose to write about a student should be shared with the student either directly or with the copy feature (Cc).

• Avoid putting student names in the subject line of an e-mail message as the subject line may be seen by others for whom the message was not intended.

• Avoid sending e-mail messages about students to professional colleagues unless these colleagues have a clear need to know the content of your message. Do not use the blind copy feature (Bcc) for student-related messages.

• Do not forward messages about students without the permission of the author of the original message. If you must forward a message, copy the original author.

• Compose factual messages and eliminate subjective comments:
  ▪ Avoid predictions, speculations, prognostic statements, comprehensive evaluations and projections about the ultimate prospects for a student.

  ▪ Keep written observations focused on the present, such as: “I am concerned because the student is currently failing the course.”

  ▪ Limit messages to factual information or descriptions of current status, such as: “He has fallen asleep twice during class in the past few days.”
- Exercise good, professional judgment in all contexts in which individual student performance or conduct is discussed.

- Avoid using statements in e-mail messages like these:
  - “I suspect he has a drug problem”
  - “She is headed for trouble”
  - “I’m afraid he must be making poor social choices”
  - “She’s partying every night”
  - “My diagnostic assessment of him is...”

- Keep in mind that most students of high school and college age are not of the “email generation” and often do not choose email as their primary mode of communications (they may check their email irregularly - once per week or less, for example). If you intend to use email as a primary mode of communication with your students, please advise them of this and remind them to check their email regularly.