



Privacy Fact Sheet

Privacy of Email Systems

Introduction

1. The purpose of this Privacy Fact Sheet is to answer some common questions about the application of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) to UBC work email systems, such as FASmail. This Fact Sheet does not apply to email systems intended for personal use, such as the Student and Alumni Email System.
2. This Fact Sheet is intended to assist UBC staff and faculty members to understand their obligations under the FIPPA. It is not a substitute for legal advice. If you have questions about the FIPPA, contact the Legal Counsel, Information and Privacy in the Office of the University Counsel.

Are Emails Subject to the FIPPA?

3. The FIPPA restricts how UBC collects, uses and discloses “personal information”, which is defined as recorded information about an identifiable individual other than business contact information. All information about students is personal information, but the names and work contact information of employees are not. For more information, see the Privacy Fact Sheet [What is Personal Information?](#)
4. When UBC work email systems are used to transmit personal information, this personal information is subject to the protection of privacy requirements of the FIPPA.
5. In addition, the FIPPA allows members of the public to request access to “records” held by UBC, subject to limited exceptions. Emails are considered to be records. Therefore, individuals should be aware that there is a possibility that work-related emails may be disclosed in response to an access request under the FIPPA. For more information about access requests, see UBC’s [Access and Privacy Webpage](#).

Are Email Addresses Confidential?

6. Work email addresses (e.g. john.smith@ubc.ca) are not confidential (because they are business contact information, which is public information). Many work email addresses are published on the directory on the UBC website.
7. Personal email addresses (including all student and alumni email addresses) are considered to be personal information and are therefore confidential. Personal email addresses must not be shared with others without the recipient’s written consent. If you need to share personal email addresses for legitimate purposes (e.g. for a class project) you should ask the individuals for their consent, and give them an opportunity to create a temporary email address for that purpose.
8. When sending emails to multiple personal email addresses, you must not place those email addresses in the “To” field because you will expose the email addresses to the other recipients. To hide the email addresses, you must place them in the “Bcc” (blind carbon copy) field.

Is Calendar Information Confidential?

9. For work accounts, free/busy information is not considered confidential, provided that no information about the appointment is visible. However, you must not disclose the contents of the calendar entries unless you are certain that they do not contain confidential information.

Can I Include Personal Information in my Emails?

10. Emails sent between UBC work email accounts are relatively secure. It is acceptable to include small amounts of personal information (and other information of a confidential or sensitive nature) in the body of these emails. However, when you are sending large volumes of personal information, or when the information is highly confidential (e.g. personal health information), you should place this information in an encrypted attachment to the email. Encryption is a process of “scrambling” information to make it unreadable to anyone who does not possess a key. Instructions for encrypting Word and Excel attachments are available on the Information Security [website](#).

An administrator sends an email to a faculty member alerting her that a student will be absent from classes for the next month. It is acceptable to include the name and student ID of the student in the body of the email. If it is necessary to share details of the student’s medical condition, this information should be placed in a separate encrypted attachment.

11. Emails sent from UBC work email accounts to external email accounts are not a confidential and secure method of communication. Therefore, you must exercise extreme caution when emailing personal information (and other information of a confidential or sensitive nature) outside UBC.

Can UBC’s Email System be Hosted Outside Canada?

12. The FIPPA prohibits UBC from storing personal information outside Canada or allowing it to be accessed from outside Canada, unless consent has been obtained from the person the information is about.¹ Because UBC’s work email system is used to send personal information, it must be hosted in Canada.
13. The majority of third party email providers (Hotmail, Gmail, etc.) cannot be used for UBC business purposes because they store data outside Canada. Consequently, UBC’s work email system is hosted on campus to ensure compliance with privacy and security requirements.

Can I Check My Emails When I am Travelling Outside Canada?

14. Yes. While the FIPPA prohibits UBC from allowing personal information to be accessed from outside Canada, it makes an exception for faculty or staff who are temporarily travelling outside Canada.²

How do I Respond to Emails from Accounts Hosted Outside Canada?

15. Many students use Hotmail or Gmail accounts, which are hosted outside Canada. If a student or another party initiates contact with you using such an account, it is acceptable for you to respond to their email and to discuss the individual’s personal situation if the individual requests you to do so³. However, you cannot disclose information about anybody else.

¹ Section 30.1 of the FIPPA

² Section 33.1(1)(e) of the FIPPA

³ Section 33.1(1) of the FIPPA

Can I Use my UBC Email Account for Personal Purposes?

16. While work email accounts are intended for official use, UBC policy authorizes the incidental personal use of these accounts, provided such use does not interfere with the user's job performance and is not otherwise an inappropriate use under relevant policy or legislation.⁴ An example of an "incidental personal use" of your UBC email account would be sending a short message to a friend inviting him to lunch. You should not use your UBC email account for long or sensitive personal communications.
17. If you use your UBC email account for personal uses, keep in mind that your communications may not remain private. While the University does not, as a routine matter, inspect personal emails stored on UBC email accounts, it may need to access these emails under certain circumstances, e.g. responding to lawful subpoenas or court orders; investigating misconduct and determining compliance with University policies; and searching for electronic messages, data, files, or other records that are required for University business continuity purposes.

Can I Auto-Forward my UBC Email Account to a Non-UBC Account?

18. Automatically forwarding or redirecting UBC email accounts to outside service provider accounts ("auto-forwarding") is only acceptable for UBC faculty and staff members who have appointments at other institutions and have difficulty managing multiple work email accounts. Under these circumstances, it is acceptable to auto-forward the UBC email account to the email account at the other institution, provided that:
 - a. the other institution is a public sector institution located in Canada;
 - b. the other institution's email system is at least as secure as UBC's email system; and
 - c. the staff or faculty member ensures that copies of emails of business value are returned to a UBC system, so that they are managed in accordance with UBC's Records Management Policy.
19. For example, UBC faculty members who work at Vancouver General Hospital generally use email accounts supplied by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH). It is acceptable for these individuals to auto-forward their UBC email accounts to their VCH accounts. Most emails do not have to be retained because they are transitory in nature, or are copies of records that exist elsewhere. However, any emails which are considered to have evidential value must be retained so that they are secure and accessible to other UBC employees in the event they are needed. This may require printing them to paper, transferring them into UBC email, or capturing them in an electronic record keeping system.
20. Except as provided above, auto-forwarding is prohibited, for the following reasons:
 - a. Privacy: Many UBC emails contain personal information, and the FIPPA requires UBC to ensure that this information is stored and accessed in Canada and is adequately protected from unauthorized access. For example, forwarding work emails to Gmail or Hotmail accounts would violate the FIPPA because these services are hosted outside Canada and are not secure.
 - b. Security: Some UBC emails contain confidential or sensitive information, e.g. passwords. This information may not be adequately protected if it is stored on an external account.
 - c. Records management: UBC's Records Management Policy requires staff and faculty members to manage and preserve records of value, which includes email messages. Emails that are stored on external email accounts may not be preserved as required under that policy.

⁴ Policy #104

21. UBC's [Information Security Office](#) can provide more advice about whether an institution's email system complies with the above requirements.

Can I Link my UBC Email Account to a Non-UBC Account?

22. Linking is a process where you give an external service provider your UBC CWL username and password so that it can download new emails on your behalf. You are not permitted, under any circumstances, to link your UBC email account to an outside service provider account. Sharing your CWL credentials with a third party is a serious violation of UBC security policy.

Can I Access my UBC Email Account Using a Mobile Device?

23. You may only use a mobile device, such as a smartphone, to access your UBC email account if proper security controls are in place. If emails or other sensitive documents are stored on your mobile device, they should be encrypted. For more information about the security of mobile devices, see the Information Security [website](#).

How Long Do I Have to Retain Emails?

24. There is no special retention period for emails. Each email is a separate record that must be retained for the length of time prescribed in the applicable [Records Schedule](#) issued by the University Archives under UBC's Records Management Policy.
25. For more information, contact the Records Manager in the University Archives.

What are the Consequences of Breaching the FIPPA?

26. A breach of the FIPPA may constitute an offence and may be subject to investigation and sanctions by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. In addition, it may result in disciplinary action by UBC.