

Campus Life email research produces action items to increase staff productivity

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During summer 2020, Emory Campus Life conducted a review of the volume and frequency of email messages disseminated to staff via its all-staff listserv and its senior staff listserv. The goal of the research, which employed the CampusLabs platform, was to develop recommendations to enhance staff efficiency and productivity – and it has produced action items to do just that. The Emory Campus Life Email Communications Report describes the results of that research and the associated recommendations, which are highlighted below.

Campus Life sent a total of 305 email messages via the two listservs to more than 300 staff members from August 1, 2019, through July 31, 2020. The messages were distributed fairly evenly across the 12 months, with a substantial spike in March that corresponded with the university’s move to remote learning. The monthly average for the year is 25, slightly more than one email per workday, a small fraction of the total emails that most employees receive daily.

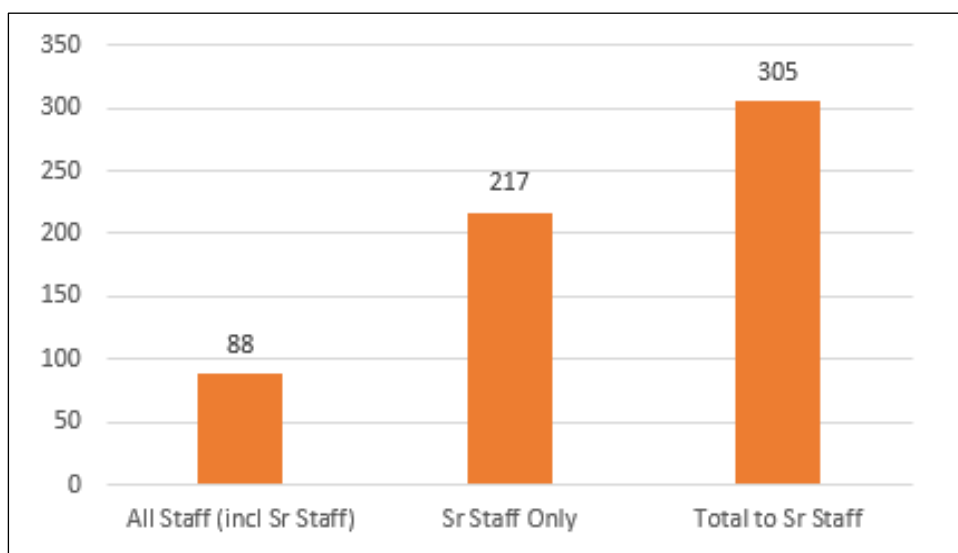
The research report, including findings and recommendations, was presented to Campus Life’s Executive Leadership Team (ELT) in October. ELT identified three findings that had been anticipated based on pre-research observations. ELT also designated three related recommendations as immediate action items. Other recommendations await further consideration and/or research.

The three action items designated by ELT are concerned with distribution of email messages via the Campus Life all-staff listserv and senior staff listserv. The action items are: 1) Clarify the types of messages that should be sent to all staff vs. senior staff. 2) Reduce the number of email messages sent during evenings, especially to senior staff. 3) Conduct further research to elicit feedback from staff on the impact of all emails they receive from all sources, including the Campus Life listservs that are the subject of this report. Detail on each action item follows.

Key findings, recommendations, and action items

Key finding 1. Senior staff received on average 3.5 times as many emails as non-senior/all-staff (305 vs 88). Notably, one in six emails (50) sent to senior staff requested that the contents be shared with subordinates, requiring senior staff members to forward such emails.

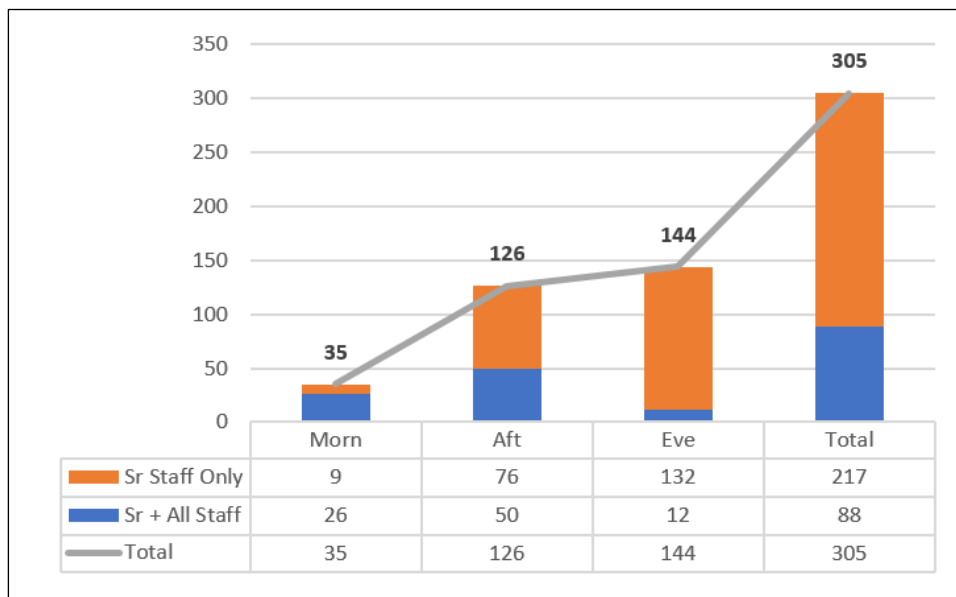
Chart 1: All staff compared with senior staff email volume



Recommendation/action item 1. Listserv senders with information to be shared with all staff should use the all-staff (CLSTAFF-L) email listserv rather than directing messages to the senior staff listserv (CLSENIORSTAFF) and requesting that their recipients relay the information to their teams. This will save time as well as help to ensure that such messages reach the wider audience for which they are intended in a timely manner. Of course, when emails are intended for subordinate staff with specialized roles, e.g., budgeting, in senior staff organizations, senders should clearly designate with whom such messages should be shared. In addition, when content must be shared, senders should increase efforts to clearly designate that request in the message, such as in bold text at the beginning of the message.

Key finding 2. Almost half of all emails (47%) to all Campus Life staff were sent during evenings (133) and weekends (11), with senior staff 12 times more likely (144 vs. 12) to receive these after-hours messages. Slightly fewer (41%) were sent during afternoons and only 11 percent during mornings.

Chart 2: Messages to all-staff and senior staff by time of day



Key recommendation/action item 2. Listserv senders should distribute more messages during morning hours and fewer during evenings and weekends. While the best time to send emails may vary by a number of factors, it seems likely that staff productivity will benefit from a more even distribution.

Key finding 3. The 305 email messages that Campus Life sent via listserv to staff during the one-year study period averaged 25 per month or barely one per workday. Obviously, these figures represent a small fraction of the total email messaging that impacts staff daily. It is likely that most employees receive hundreds of emails each week. As one report notes, the average worker worldwide sends and receives well over [100 email messages](#) each day and the number is increasing by 3 percent annually.

Key recommendation/action item 3. Campus Life should conduct additional research, including focus groups and survey(s). This research would elicit feedback from staff on emails they receive from all sources, including Campus Life listservs, and examine volume, frequency, content, delivery day of week, time of day, etc. Equally important, it should assess survey respondents' perceptions of the impact of email on their productivity. Given the disproportionate amount of messaging to senior staff, further research should continue to distinguish between this group and other Campus Life staff, as appropriate.

Closing

The Email Communications Research Working Group includes four Campus Life staff members: Sandra Edwards, Mekeshua L. North, Bruce Covey, and John Baker Brown. In addition, Brandy Noelle Hughes of the Office of Academic Affairs and Provost provided invaluable assistance with developing the charts that appear in this article and the full report. Tomika DePriest, senior director for communications, provided overall guidance for the working group.

The Campus Life Email Communications Working Group and the Office of Communications welcome feedback on the findings and recommendations of the Email Communications Research Report. A draft of the complete [report](#) may be viewed online. Send comments and corrections to ECLEditorial@emory.edu.