



A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON

Communications And The Digital Divide



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Executive Summary

The University of Texas at Austin Staff Council Committee on Communications and the Digital Divide focused on two factors influencing the effectiveness of communication to UT Austin staff:

1. The use of e-mail to disseminate information to staff from various campus departments and officials, and
2. The challenges of communicating information to staff who do not use a computer for the main functions of their jobs.

These two topics warrant separate investigation and discussion, and so our report will be in two parts; Part one will focus on e-mail effectiveness, and part two will cover the digital divide.

In our research, we have reviewed the report, *Communication Practices in University Operations*, released in 2008 and updated in 2009, and our recommendations address some of the communication issues the study documented. Although that study was limited to the University Operations portfolio, the demographic makeup of the survey participants—in terms of the range of job types—is similar enough to the larger population of staff campus-wide to make this report a useful framework for discussion.

Part One: E-mail Effectiveness

The University relies on e-mail to communicate a significant amount of information to staff. Based upon our research and feedback from our constituents, the Committee would like to put forth two proposals to enhance this e-mail communication:

Proposal One: We propose the University convene a committee to discuss updating the Group E-Mail System. We further recommend that this committee consider the addition of a "promotional" category to current group e-mail options.

Proposal Two: We also propose the Staff Council Chair be authorized to send "Official" e-mails to UT Staff.

Part Two: The Digital Divide

Staff in certain jobs may not receive important communications and have barriers to completing computer-based tasks required of the employer-employee relationship. To improve communication to this group—staff who do not use a computer for the majority of their work—and to ensure all staff have the computer skills to perform work-related tasks, we have long-term recommendations in two areas:

Recommendation One: We recommend increasing the access to computers on campus. Potential solutions may include facilitating campus-wide sharing of retired but still usable hardware for staff use in areas with large numbers of non-administrative staff, and exploring other options to put technology in the hands of those who would benefit, including the expanded use of smart phones and tablets.

Recommendation Two: We recommend expanding the availability of basic technology training to staff. Potential solutions may include adding a segment on UTDirect to New Employee Orientation, and increasing access to current technology training for all staff.

Part One: E-mail Effectiveness

According to the University Operations study findings, office workers—including administrative and clerical staff, managers, executives and other professionals—report a desire for fewer e-mails in general.¹ This experience frequently is called “e-mail fatigue.” The Committee’s anecdotal evidence from discussions with our constituents also supports the trend of e-mail fatigue as a growing frustration for office workers.

While the Committee recognizes that e-mail is a necessary and efficient communication channel, we are concerned that a high volume of e-mail messages can cause staff to overlook important information. This sense of e-mail fatigue can also cause frustration, especially if the messages received are of little direct interest to the individual.

Proposal One: Form Committee to Review Group E-Mail System

Electronic communication technology and best practices have evolved at a rapid pace as e-mail has become a standard method of workplace communication. In the years since the Group E-Mail System was developed, our relationship with e-mail communications has changed sufficiently to warrant a review of this system by a group similar to the original committee tasked with developing the Group E-Mail System.

After consulting with Rhonda Weldon, Director of Communications for University Operations, we recommend that the University form a committee with the purpose of examining the existing state of the Group E-Mail System and implementing changes that will better reflect the current needs of staff and faculty and the current usage of the Group E-Mail System.

This committee would be formed under the purview of University Operations, and would consist of stakeholders from key areas University-wide, including representation from the Staff Council.

We have two initial recommendations for this committee, based upon our research. These recommendations can be found on pages 5 and 6.

¹ Communication Practices in University Operations. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Page 2, section 1.2.

Current Categories of the Group E-Mail System

In the existing Group E-Mail System, there are four categories with the following descriptions:²

Informational

Any communication that increases the awareness of campus activities, events, or services. An example would be a message from Parking and Transportation Services announcing parking disruptions due to a major campus event.

Operational

A communication that is a required notification or requires some action on the part of the recipient. An example would be a message from Payroll telling employees how to claim their W-2 form.

Official

An important communication from an executive officer or designated representative. An example would be a message from the University President's Office announcing the President's retirement.

Urgent

An important announcement from an executive officer or designated representative regarding and imminent occurrence. An example would be the announcement of an early University closing due to inclement weather.

Our main concerns with the existing structure relate to the Informational category. This category covers a wide range of types of messages, from parking disruptions to discounts for sporting events and performances. The Staff Council also uses this category for notifications of upcoming meeting and programs. The broad definition of this category and the many types of messages sent under the Informational heading means a higher likelihood that the messages staff receive are not relevant to their jobs or their personal interests.

Between September 1, 2010 and April 15, 2011, we tallied the Informational e-mails sent to our committee chairs. Excluding messages concerning internal Staff Council business, during this timeframe, we counted 246 e-mails with "Informational" in the subject line.

Staff and faculty who may be feeling e-mail fatigue can choose to unsubscribe from the Informational category entirely, and will not receive any messages sent through this channel. These individuals will therefore miss important work-related or otherwise relevant information that does not fit into the Operational, Official or Urgent categories.

Currently 20,788 users have opted out of receiving Informational e-mails, out of approximately 80,000 students, faculty and staff users.³ This means that roughly one quarter of the campus community does not receive messages sent through this channel.

² University Group E-Mail System Help. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <https://utdirect.utexas.edu/gs/oe/help.WBX>

³ Information provided by Information Technology Services staff between March 30, 2011 and April 6, 2011.

Recommendation One: Create Promotional Category

We recommend that the committee reviewing the Group E-Mail System create a “Promotional” category to be added to the current list of four options in the Group E-Mail System. This category would be used for messages promoting events and services that require an out-of-pocket cost to participants.

Currently, e-mails containing promotions, advertisements, and discounts are grouped under Informational. We propose that the Informational category be redefined. This category would be used for non-promotional announcements and other work-related information. Informational would also be used to convey information about programs, services and events that do not involve expenditures of employee money. Volunteer-focused events such as Orange Santa and Mooove-In would still be promoted via the Informational category, but athletic and other ticketed events should be listed under Promotional.

Of the 246 Informational messages we tallied, 86 (35%) would fit into this new Promotional category.

While this committee appreciates the frequent availability of discounts for sporting and art events, and recognizes the value of the income that revenue-generating programs bring to the University, the sheer volume of these promotional e-mails may cause employees to miss important non-promotional information, or worse, opt out of Informational e-mails entirely.

We suggest the following descriptions for Informational and Promotional in the Group E-Mail System:

Informational:

Any communication that increases the awareness of cost-free campus activities, events or services, including volunteer activities. Note: University employees and students may unsubscribe from receiving Informational messages via the University Group E-Mail System.

Examples of topics acceptable for Informational: parking disruptions, game day schedules, Mooove-In, Orange Santa, free holiday music and caroling, passport services, and flu shots.

Promotional:

Any communication that announces an opportunity to attend a ticketed event or visit a retail outlet, such as an athletic competition, museum store, or theatrical entertainment. The announcement must be relevant to current employees by offering a discount or other unique opportunity. Note: University employees and students may unsubscribe from receiving Promotional messages via the University Group E-Mail System.

Examples of topics acceptable for Promotional: sporting event ticket discounts, Erwin Center, Long Center, Bass Concert Hall, AT&T Center events, Broadway discount tickets, museum store discounts, Wildflower Center events and store discounts. In addition, the category would include department-hosted events with any cost associated with them.

There would be no change to the other categories.

Recommendation Two: Modernize Group E-Mail System

We also would like to recommend to the committee reviewing the Group E-Mail System that they consider more substantial changes to the system. Our suggestions include further enhancements to the way messages are categorized and the way staff can choose to subscribe or unsubscribe from certain types of messages, and technology updates that would provide the means to send messages in more dynamic formats.

Current research in digital marketing shows that targeting messages to a receptive audience is a more effective method of communicating. With “permission marketing,” the targeted audience has in some way or another allowed or requested the communication. Best practices for permission-based e-mail marketing include a focus on relevance to the recipient.⁴ Feedback we have received from our constituents supports a growing frustration with the number of messages that they deem are not relevant to their interests.

One idea we discussed to improve the relevance of messages sent through the Group E-Mail System would be to build a longer list of more granular categories, or create various tags that could be associated with each message. These categories could include, for example, “Parking & Shuttles,” “Athletics,” “Kids & Family,” “Arts & Humanities,” “Health & Wellness,” “Training & Education,” and so on. Staff could opt in to receiving the specific types of messages that interest them or opt out of the types they do not wish to receive. With this format, individuals interested in sporting events could choose to receive messages advertising upcoming games, and individuals with no children could opt out of receiving messages about summer camps.

We also discussed the challenges of communicating messages in plain text. When the Group E-Mail System was initially developed, plain text was the format of choice to be most readable in the e-mail software used on campus. Software innovations since then make this concern less relevant. The vast majority of on-campus users access e-mail via programs that accept a wider range of e-mail formats.

A more dynamic message format that would allow graphics and text variations can make complicated messages easier to read and can bring more power to promotional messages. We suggest exploring possibilities for allowing more dynamic (rich) message formats to be sent through the Group E-Mail System.

⁴ Wertime, Kent and Fenwick, Ian. *DigiMarketing: The Essential Guide to New Media & Digital Marketing*. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd, 2008.

Proposal Two: Allow Staff Council Chair to Send Official Messages

Finally, our committee has concerns that important information from the Staff Council Chair does not reach staff who opt out of receiving Informational e-mails. We discussed this concern with Ms. Weldon. She understood our concerns and suggested that the UTSC Chair be given authorization to send Official e-mails to UT Staff using the Group E-Mail System.

We propose this authorization for the Chair alone, not for individual representatives. The Chair would only use the Official category for messages concerning events open to all staff and information relevant to staff campus-wide. The Official channel would not be used for internal Staff Council communications.

Part Two: The Digital Divide

Differences in type of work and socioeconomic status result in a gap between how different individuals interact with technology, both in terms of skill level and physical access to technology at work⁵. This discrepancy between office workers and labor workers in terms of computer access and skill levels is often called the “digital divide.”

The Committee explored the two major challenges in communicating information to staff who do not use a computer for their job functions: access and skill level. These barriers prevent affected staff from receiving critical employment information, from completing computer-based tasks necessary for all University employees, and from fully participating in the University’s online community.

The University Operations study supports our concerns that the information is not reaching staff in these non-office jobs at the same rate it is reaching office workers. The participants in the study who were categorized as labor workers—including technical/paraprofessional staff, service and maintenance workers and skilled crafts workers—reported a desire to receive more information from the University on all topics, and a desire for more e-mail communication. The study also found that these individuals have significantly less access to computers, both at work and at home, and they self-report lower computer skill levels.⁶

Our recommendations in this section are made with the intention of working toward the long-term goal of eliminating the digital divide on campus so that all staff members, regardless of their jobs, have the skills and access to the technology needed to fully participate in the University’s digital community.

These recommendations will require additional research and development, and we encourage the 2011-2012 Staff Council to continue work on this topic, in partnership with divisions and departments on campus that have a larger population of affected staff. The ideal solutions may not be entirely feasible given the current budget climate; however, we would encourage the leadership of the University to remain open to creative solutions.

⁵ Campbell, D. (2001). Can the digital divide be contained? *International Labor Review*, 140(2), 119-141, and Rodino-Colocino, M. (2006). Laboring under the digital divide. *New Media and Society*, 8, 487-511. (As cited in Communication Practices in University Operations. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Section 4.4, pg. 8)

⁶ Communication Practices in University Operations. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Section 5, pgs. 13-26.

How the Digital Divide Affects UT Austin Staff

Over the last several years, the University has required staff to complete more and more business electronically. Forms, notifications and informational resources that were paper-based just a few years ago are now primarily—or only—offered online. The University has benefitted from the cost-savings resulting from digitizing these business processes and communications. As we continue in this direction, the digital divide will become more of a barrier unless we work to bridge the skills and access gap.

While we do not have exact measurements of the total number of staff on campus who have significantly limited computer access and skills, we do have some idea of the number of staff without a valid e-mail address on file. We can extrapolate that digital divide issues assuredly affect this set of employees. We believe the numbers of staff who struggle with computer access and skill is actually somewhat higher.

University of Texas at Austin Payroll Services sent out a federally mandated notice concerning the Earned Income Tax Credit in February 2011 to 26,244 employees (staff, faculty and student employees) who received a payroll payment this year. Most received this notice via e-mail, but 1,639 notices were sent via paper to employees with no valid e-mail address on file.⁷

Since all faculty and students receive an e-mail address automatically, we can assume that most, if not all, of the 1,639 paper notifications went to staff. Based upon current HRMS data reflecting that the University employs approximately 11,800 staff members⁸, we calculate that roughly 14% of staff members do not have a valid e-mail address on file.

In addition to the staff with no valid e-mail address, the Committee's anecdotal evidence from our constituents indicates that there is a population of staff who have valid e-mail addresses on file, but who do not receive e-mail communications consistently. These individuals have established e-mail addresses, but because of skill and access barriers, they are not able to check these e-mail accounts with any regularity. These individuals do not receive paper copies of official communications, because the default is to send most messages electronically to anyone with a valid e-mail address.

Further, much of the information the University provides via University and departmental web pages is no longer available in paper format. Our constituents who work in non-office jobs report difficulty in obtaining information on topics such as benefits and policies. They report asking for information from various campus departments and being referred to the web because paper versions are no longer available. Even if these individuals can find a way to access and print out information from the web, much of the University's web content is not designed to be print-friendly, but rather is intended to be experienced electronically. One example our constituents have shared is the list of items for which employees can use their medical Pay-Flex account. This list is easily searchable for computer users, but is not formatted to be printed.

We do not wish to recommend that the University return to a paper-based communication strategy, because we appreciate the increased efficiency, accuracy and cost-savings of electronic channels. We want to make electronic communication accessible for more staff.

⁷ Information provided by Payroll Services staff on March 30, 2011.

⁸ Information provided by Payroll Services staff on March 30, 2011.

Recommendation One: Increase Access to Computers and Technology

Computer access is the first barrier to effective electronic communication. The University Operations study found that there was a significant discrepancy between office and labor workers in terms of access to computers. Labor workers in general reported lower access to computers both at work and at home. Among service and maintenance staff specifically, 30.5% of respondents reported no access in either place.⁹ In contrast, office workers reported very high access at home and at work, and virtually all of the respondents in these categories had access to computers in at least one place.

To communicate effectively through electronic channels with labor workers on campus, the University will need to improve access to computers, especially in areas with larger populations of this category of staff.

To this end, we recommend facilitating campus-wide sharing of retired but still usable hardware, especially desktop computers, for staff use in areas with large numbers of labor workers. We further recommend exploring other options to put technology in the hands of those who would benefit, including an expanded use of smart phones and tablets.

We offer the following ideas and suggestions for how these programs may work, based upon our research and discussion so far. Developing and implementing these programs will require additional work, which may be an appropriate task for the Staff Council during the 2011-12 term, or may be best handled by a separate University-wide committee including members from the units most affected by the digital divide. These and other solutions to the computer access gap will also require funding, which presents an additional challenge during the current budgetary climate.

⁹ Communication Practices in University Operations. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Section 4.6, pg. 11.

Potential Solution One: Redeploy Retired Computers

First, our committee considered redeploying retired desktop computers from University of Texas Surplus to work areas on request. The idea would be to have additional desktop computers set up in staff common areas, such as break rooms, for use by staff who do not sit at a desk with a computer for their main duties. However, the current surplus and inventory procedures may prove too cumbersome for this idea to be practical. Before such a program could be implemented, the following concerns would need to be addressed:

1. **Quality of equipment available:** Current policy does not allow testing before claiming an item, and requires departments to keep equipment taken from Surplus on their inventory for a year whether it works or not. These policies may be appropriate for office equipment such as desks and file cabinets, but are too restrictive for computer equipment. There would need to be a way for departments to differentiate—before claiming the equipment—between computers that are merely a bit too slow for heavy office users’ needs but would still be appropriate for redeployment, and the machines that are simply non-functioning.
2. **Ownership of the equipment:** Would the redeployed computer equipment be listed on individual departments’ inventory, or would a central unit—such as the University of Texas at Austin Information Technology Services (ITS) or University of Texas at Austin Human Resource Services (HRS)—retain inventory control of the equipment?
3. **Tech support and software licensing:** Would individual departments need to support these machines, or would ITS staff maintain, update and troubleshoot the equipment? This might depend on how a given department provides tech support to their office computers, as some departments contract with ITS and others employ a dedicated IT staff.

This idea may be feasible, but these and other logistical concerns must be resolved.

An alternative we considered would be to facilitate and encourage the “handing down” of machines within a department to staff that do not normally have computer access, i.e. a custodial services unit within a building or department. If the need exists within a department, that department could re-locate machines from office settings to a break room or common area when the office upgrades equipment. The equipment would remain on that department’s inventory rather than going to surplus. With this plan, whoever provides tech support and maintenance for the machines in that department’s office settings would be responsible for updating the software/hardware on the machines in common areas.

This already takes place to a certain extent in many departments; the goal would be to identify the areas with the greatest need and to increase the number of computers redeployed in this fashion.

Potential Solution Two: Increase Use of Smart Phones and Tablets

The other idea we have considered would be to develop a program that would make it easier for staff without computer access to use smart phones or tablets to send and receive University electronic communications and to conduct University business electronically. Our vision for putting these devices in the hands of those who would most benefit includes two possible paths:

1. Facilitating a method by which staff without desktop computer access could check out University- or department-owned tablets, such as iPads, to conduct University business and to send and receive e-mail.
2. Subsidizing employee-owned smart phones and data plans for staff who may have a semi-regular need to send and receive electronic communication throughout the work day. These would be staff who are not currently served by a Communication Device Allowance, and who do not have a desktop computer assigned for their regular use.

Our main concern with both of these plans at this point is the considerable cost associated with either option. As beneficial as it would be to the staff in some jobs, we do not wish to propose any initiative with a significant funding requirement when the University is facing intense budgetary challenges. Our committee strongly believes that the priority in these difficult economic times should be to minimize staffing cuts and to prevent layoffs.

We include these ideas with the intention of recommending further research and development. We have consulted with Custodial Services Training Manager, Bobby Moddrell, and he has indicated that Custodial Services would be happy to collaborate on the development and testing of these types of programs. Rich Bredhal, Division of Housing and Food Service Information Systems Manager has indicated that his team would also be interested in exploring these ideas further.

We recommend that the FY11-12 Staff Council work in partnership with campus stakeholders to explore these and other ideas, with the stipulation that funding requirements would need to be addressed.

In the meantime, we recommend advertising existing services available to staff, such as the laptop checkout available at the Flawn Academic Center, Walter Geology Library or the Fine Arts Library as well as the locations of computers throughout the campus that staff can use. ITS maintains a list of computer labs on campus that are open to staff,¹⁰ but that list is online, and therefore may not reach the audience who would benefit the most from these services. Additional marketing of existing services could help expand these programs and pave the way toward additional funding and opportunities such as the two we have described here.

¹⁰ List of computer labs is available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/campus-labs/>

Recommendation Two: Improve Computer Skills

The other major barrier to effective electronic communication is a lack of computer skills and a lack of comfort with technology. According to the University Operations study, labor workers reported having low levels of computer skills especially when compared to office workers. The study authors found the combination of lack of computer access and low skill levels to be evidence that “many people [in these jobs] are likely not getting information distributed via electronic channels (e-mail, internet, etc.)”¹¹

This lack of computer skills also presents a challenge to managers and supervisors of staff in non-office jobs. These managers frequently must assist their employees with searching for information online and with other computer-based tasks required of the employer-employee relationship. Departments with a higher population of non-office staff would likely save on labor hours if their staff could complete these tasks on their own.

Further, staff with minimal computer skills and a low level of comfort with technology cannot participate fully in the University’s online community, including The Ideas of Texas.

Even office workers with average skill levels may be out of touch with emerging technologies and ways to incorporate these technologies in their jobs. These technologies can lead to innovations and process improvements that will result in cost savings.

Therefore, the Committee recommends increasing the availability of basic technology training to staff in non-office jobs. We further recommend increasing options for current technology training available on campus.

Again, these solutions will require additional development, and will have funding requirements that may not be feasible given the current budget situation. Through our preliminary research and discussion, we have identified the potential solutions described on pages 15 through 17. We encourage the Staff Council to continue working with interested stakeholders to further this discussion in the 2011-12 term.

To be successful, efforts to expand computer skills among labor workers must have the support of UT Austin administrators, managers and supervisors who may be concerned that these skills may not directly apply to their employees’ main job duties as currently constructed. Already, many functions of employment at the University require a certain level of technological competence. In the coming years we expect that technology will reach even farther into the work lives of this group of staff. Any programs to address the skill gap will also need to resolve barriers to participation that staff may face, including support from supervisors and permission to use staff time for training.

¹¹ Communication Practices in University Operations. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Section 4.6, pg. 11.

Current Computer Training Availability

The University currently has 953 active classes listed in TXClass. An “active” class is defined as any class that has been offered within the last 12 months. Of these classes, we classify only three as “basic technology” training, and these were only open to employees of Facilities Services, the department hosting the class:

PP405-Computer Basics

Course Description: Teaches basics of keyboard and mouse. Covers how to use Web pages and search engines. Teaches basic terminology and functions of computer. Introduces Word and Excel. Prepares user for FAMIS or Outlook training, if that is needed.

PP337-Windows and Outlook Basics

Course Description: Teaches current Windows operating system (if needed) and Microsoft Outlook Basics. The student **MUST** have a PC to take this class, as well as a CPFM or AUSTIN logon.

PP2249-Evolution of Technology

Course Description: This session will focus on new technologies (blogs, social networking, podcasts, etc.) and touch on how to use them at work.

PP405-Computer Basics and PP2249-Evolution of Technology were each offered 3 times in 2010. Available class sizes (capacity) ranged from 6 to 20 and they averaged 51-55% full. PP337-Windows and Outlook Basics was offered only once in 2010 and had 2 attendees—25% of capacity.

The Division of Housing and Food Service lists one inactive class titled “Introduction to Computers” in their course offering (HF3567). This class appears to be similar in content and audience to PP405. It was last offered in January and February 2009, and was only available to Housing and Food employees. The January class was at 100% capacity (8 of 8). However, the February 2009 class was only at 50% capacity (4 of 8).

Neither ITS nor the University of Texas at Austin Professional Development Center currently list any active or inactive “basic technology” classes in their course offerings.

Beyond the basics classes, schools and departments throughout the University offer a large variety of “Intro to” classes. They are usually only open to the schools or departments hosting the classes. Many resources exist for on-line training for various software packages, but these computer-based opportunities require a certain level of skill and comfort with technology to be accessible.

Potential Solution One: Expand Eligibility for Existing Classes

The need for technology training does not necessarily require the University to expend a large amount of funding to develop a brand new training program. With a few process adjustments, existing resources for basic computer training may be able to meet most needs.

We propose exploring ways to allow staff from other departments to enroll in below-capacity classes offered by individual departments. To make this work, we would need an upgraded enrollment system with the ability to prioritize enrollees based upon whether the individual is from the host department or an outside department.

We have consulted with Facilities Services Director Mike Miller, and he has indicated that the Facilities Services Training Team would welcome the greater University community into their computer, language, and cultural/social training classes—if the enrollment system could handle this prioritized sign-up procedure. Gloria Allen, Division of Housing and Food Service Assistant Director for Organizational Diversity and Development has indicated that her team would be willing to discuss this possibility further.

Potential Solution Two: Develop Ongoing Program of Out-Of-Class Practical Exercises

The skills barrier to electronic communication also includes an aspect of comfort-level.¹² Office workers have had many years to build computer skills gradually and to become comfortable experiencing information electronically. Concepts such as strong passwords and digital signatures are familiar, and conducting business electronically has become routine. In working with our constituents who are not regular computer users, we have observed a level of discomfort with—and even, to an extent, fear of—technology. For these individuals, accessing UTDirect to complete an on-line form is unfamiliar territory and can cause undue stress.

The obvious solution to build comfort with technology is through regular use—the way office workers have developed this comfort. This kind of learning takes place over a longer period than a few hours in a basic technology class.

The University already communicates information extensively through electronic channels; the preferred means for conducting many employment-related tasks is electronic. This means that staff who complete basic technology training have opportunities to practice the concepts introduced in these classes. However, developing a structure for this practice would ensure greater success.

To maximize the learning outcomes, we encourage the facilitators of basic computer training to develop a structured practice protocol for participants in entry-level computer classes to complete after the in-class instruction. A series of brief, weekly activities during the first three months after a class, for example, would allow participants to practice what they have learned. These exercises could be as simple as looking up the trainer's e-mail address on the directory and sending a short message.

Class participants would need to be allowed brief and regular opportunities to complete these practice exercises during their work shift. Comfort levels will increase with regular practice of these newly acquired skills during the weeks immediately following the class.

¹² Cornfield, Rainie, & Horrigan, 2003 Untuned keyboards: Online campaigners, citizens, and portals in the 2002 elections. *Pew Internet and American Life Project.*; Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stransbury, 2003 *Virtual inequality: Beyond the digital divide*: Georgetown University Press.; Rodino-Colocino, 2003 *Laboring under the digital divide*. *New Media and Society*, 8, 487-511.; Stanley, 2003 Beyond access: Psychosocial barriers to computer literacy. *The Information Society*, 19, 407-416.; van Dijk & Spoorenberg, 1999 *The network society: Social aspects of new media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.. (As cited in *Communication Practices in University Operations*. Keri K. Stephens, Ph.D. 2008, rev. 2009. Section 4.4, pg. 8)

Potential Solution Three: Add Section on UTDirect to New Employee Welcome and Orientation

We also suggest that HRS add a section on UTDirect to the New Employee Welcome and Orientation (NEWO). This would introduce new employees to the various functions of UTDirect, including timesheets, annual enrollment, and payroll and tax information. While we don't expect NEWO to fulfill the need for the most basic computer training, we would recommend that the UTDirect section be designed for a wide range of skill levels.

Alternatively, NEWO could offer an optional additional section after the main program that would cover UTDirect, designed for new staff in non-office jobs. Again, this would not replace the need for basic computer training for staff with virtually non-existent computer experience. However, identifying staff in non-office jobs for this UTDirect overview would allow facilitators to teach toward a more basic-level user. For example, a section for this audience could cover in more depth issues such as each employee's responsibility toward computer security, which would be more familiar already to workers in an office setting.

Summary

Part One: Email Effectiveness

Our committee's research and discussion, which focused on the use of e-mail on campus and the challenges that labor staff face in communicating digitally, has led us to recommendations outlined above.

As a result of our work on the topic of E-mail Effectiveness, we make the following two proposals:

Proposal One

We propose the University convene a committee to discuss updating the Group E-Mail System. We further recommend that this committee consider the addition of a "promotional" category to current group e-mail options.

Proposal Two

We also propose the Staff Council Chair be authorized to send "Official" e-mails to UT Staff.

Part Two: The Digital Divide

Our discussions on the topic of the Digital Divide show that much work remains to develop long-range solutions to this challenge. In order to best communicate with and support staff who do not use a computer for their daily job duties, the University will need to continue this discussion and explore creative solutions. We put forth these recommendations, and encourage the 2011-12 Staff Council to further the work we have begun.

Recommendation One

Increase the access to computers on campus. Potential solutions include facilitating campus-wide sharing of retired but still usable hardware and exploring other options to put the technology in the hands of those who would benefit.

Recommendation Two

Expand the availability of basic technology training to staff. Potential solutions include adding a segment on UTDirect to New Employee Orientation and increasing access to current technology training for all staff.