



CIO's Response to the Report from the Consultation on Student e-Communications Services

The hard work of the consultative committee, complemented by community input and research by I+TS staff, have provided very useful input as Information + Technology Services plans future support of student e-communications. The committee consistently affirmed the primacy of the “what and why” of student communications over its “form”; but understandably, and very helpfully, it also focused much attention on the current state and future requirements of student email offerings.

Reports from I+TS staff have made it clear that UTORmail is near end-of-life. Not only is the open-source software on which it is based no longer supported by its birthing institution (University of Washington), but its extensive hardware frequently fails and requires annual patchwork replacement. To no one's surprise, UTORmail's absurd-by-Gmail-standards storage quota was the first and loudest complaint voiced by students. We must do something soon.

Six options were explored during the consultation. Two low cost alternatives ... collecting students' existing third-party-provided email addresses, or running a forwarding-only service ... were deemed unacceptable because of loss of identification with the University or increased risk to reliable communication. Options based on current service levels were also quickly dismissed, leaving the choices of outsourcing student email or running a new, high functionality solution in-house.

Were money no object, adoption of a new UofT-managed solution, most likely based on a commercial offering that, with additional local development, could extend services and interfaces to our existing systems like Blackboard and Exchange, would be the most desirable route to follow. Student sentiment within the committee tended toward this option. We have not pursued a detailed quotation, but it would obviously cost millions of dollars for hardware, software, system porting and ongoing development staff.

In a period of severe fiscal constraint, would this be the right decision? Numerous projects like the Next Generation Student Information Services (NGSIS), data centre renewal, and both wireless and wired tri-campus network renewal, offer high value service enhancement and reduction of catastrophic risk. They are competing for the same pool of limited resources as would new in-house student email, an increasingly commodity-like service remote from the University's mission. Going further down the in-house road would continue the prospect of playing a never-ending game of catch-up against external standards.

Faced with a possible alternative that might serve us adequately at much lower cost, I cannot justify such expense. The continual improvement and functional extensions of outsourced solutions like Google's Gmail and Microsoft's Live@EDU offer the potential of significant improvement to our status quo as well as support for some of the calendaring, document management and other communications integration aspirations discussed during the consultation. As noted in the Report, outsourcing sparks security and privacy concerns that require thorough investigation. An outsourced solution would likely present a mix of gains and losses over the status quo (e.g. quota gains and reduced costs versus lost ability to audit delivery of individual messages, restore deleted files and control the service development roadmap) but closer analysis is required to determine the balance sheet.

Consequently it is my recommendation that at this point the University actively and aggressively pursue the single course of determining the best features and costs possible in an outsourced solution for student email. The action plan below outlines the activities we will engage over the next weeks to give the University the information it needs to evaluate the viability of an outsourced solution to meet our needs for student e-mail services. Communications and continued consultation with stakeholders, especially students themselves and those whose work requires communication with students, are vital elements of this action plan for analysis.

It is important to note that while the scope of the recent consultation extended only to student e-communications, the fate of more than twenty thousand faculty and staff accounts remaining on UTOReMail must also be decided. Our current expectation is to migrate active users to UTOReExchange, incurring significant one-time-only and ongoing costs. **I recommend that in parallel with the detailed investigation of student email outsourcing we consider the implications of that approach on future options for managing employee e-communications.**

Finally, to address the other opportunities identified through the consultation, **I will sponsor future conversation with a broader University audience about complementary communications channels, services integration and community education on security, innovation and best practices.**

I would like to thank the student, faculty and staff members of the consultation committee, and especially their capable chair, Professor Elizabeth Smyth, for their generous expenditure of time and their collaborative efforts that have revealed our next best steps toward enhancing student e-communications services.

Robert Cook, CIO
February 26, 2010

Action Plan on Student Email

(Complete #1- #8 concurrently by 5 weeks; #9 by 7 weeks; #10 by 9 weeks.)

1. Continue community consultation, targeted as follows:
 - a. Additional student input (CIO Student Forum; Committee on Student Services; online submission form)
 - b. Confirming the requirements of faculty and staff for e-communications with students (Teaching Learning & Technology Advisory Committee; Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Advisory Committee; Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering Academic Advisory Committee; faculty focus group sponsored by Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation; college and divisional registrars forum sponsored by University Registrar)
 - c. General guidance: I+TS Process & Technology Committee; Priorities & Accountability Committee; Provost's Advisory Group
 - d. UTM and UTSC campus focus groups
2. Close analysis of Privacy issues (FIPP Office; privacy impact assessment)
3. Close analysis of peer outsourcing models and experience
 - a. University of Alberta, Lakehead U
 - b. University of Washington, Northwestern U, Arizona State U, USC, U Missouri, Indiana U
 - c. alumni.utoronto.ca
4. Complete technical analysis
 - a. Security and identity management architecture
 - b. Technical architecture, network and systems management requirements
5. Complete cost analysis
 - a. Current email costs (including cost of distributed email systems)
 - b. Costs associated with outsourced solutions
6. Exploratory discussions with outsource vendors
7. Preliminary legal consultation
8. Analysis of policy, guideline and practice implications of outsourcing
9. Start analysis of communications, migration and user-support requirements

10. Specify basic functional requirements of an outsourced service

11. Develop a Request for Proposal through Procurement Services

In parallel, study the issue of migration of employee email away from UTOEmail.