

Monday, May 19, 2008

Faculty and staff e-mail moving to Webmail Powered by Google

Following a successful student transition to Webmail Powered by Google, University Technology Services (UTS) will migrate all faculty and staff e-mail accounts to the new e-mail system on Wednesday, August 13. The move is preemptively designed to transition faculty and staff accounts before the existing system slows down again.

"After consulting with faculty and staff, we feel there is a strong need to change existing systems before they become obsolete," said Terrie Rowe, OU's Chief Information Officer. "Even with the student accounts off our servers, the existing e-mail system is quickly reaching the end of its lifespan. It would cost millions in upgrades to keep our faculty and staff e-mail internally housed at the level of service and capacity Google can provide for free."

UTS will constantly monitor Webmail Powered by Google to ensure it is meeting the needs of OU's faculty, staff and students.

"We can't expect any technology-based system to last more than five years. Systems become obsolete and that is just the nature of the game," said Rowe. "By going with Google, we can leave the upgrades to them while also saving the resources we'd need to manage an in-house system. Any in-house system we implement today, no matter how cutting edge, will be in serious decline five years from now."

Faculty and staff will be responsible for importing their old e-mail and contacts from the existing system. Representatives from UTS will be available to assist faculty and staff who need help importing their mail or using the new system, and training will be available through University Human Resources (UHR) on transitioning to the new Google calendar environment.

"Webmail Powered by Google solution is not only cost effective, it is also a more robust and user friendly application than other systems we evaluated," said Rowe. "For example, Google provides each account holder with 6GB of storage space, and you can exchange significantly larger files. Google also allows the use of labels instead of folders, which means you can file a single e-mail under more than one label. This allows for a broader range of search options."

The transition will also include the existing calendar system, which will be replaced by Google's calendar tool that is integrated within the e-mail system.

Rowe said, "OU may hire professional staff who were previously or still are students at the university. These newly hired staff will not have access to the Mirapoint calendar. Instead, they will immediately begin using the Google calendar. Unfortunately, these new hires will not have group calendar scheduling access until mid-August, when the rest of the faculty and staff are transferred to Google. We apologize for the inconvenience."

Webmail Powered by Google users will be able to take advantage of features like Google Chat, a robust calendar system, and Google Docs for file sharing. No advertisements will appear in the e-mail screens of Oakland University faculty, staff and current students, and users will benefit from Google's enhanced spam protection and the same level of security an in-house e-mail system would provide.

"Google is as secure as any e-mail system. Google's software is sometimes misunderstood as literally 'reading' e-mails, which is simply untrue. Information stored on Google is only scanned by a machine for viruses and such, just as any other e-mail program would do," explained Rowe. "As employees of the state, all Oakland University faculty and staff e-mails — regardless of whose servers those e-mails reside on — are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), subpoenas, the Patriot Act and so on, and e-mail should always be written with that in mind."

Full documentation will become available on the UTS Web site just prior to the transition. To view the weekly Google Transition Tips that have been shared via weekly e-mails over the past months, follow the links below:

- [Security of data on Webmail Powered by Google](#)
- [Importing old e-mail and contacts](#)
- [Updating Outlook and Entourage](#)
- [Timeline and to-do list](#)
- [Adapting to Webcal Powered by Google](#)
- [Training dates](#)
- [Documentation](#)

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