# LCC’s Email Retention Guidelines

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## Purpose

### Why we have email retention guidelines

In an era where digital communication is pervasive, emails often serve as a primary means of correspondence about the on-going business at Lansing Community College (LCC), containing valuable information, agreements, and records. The persistent, ongoing accumulation of emails creates risks and challenges for individuals and for the College as a whole.

Email retention guidelines are crucial for the College, establishing a structured and systematic approach to managing our electronic communication. As the College’s reliance on email communication is not going away any time soon, the implementation of email retention guidelines becomes essential for:

1. Maintaining data integrity
2. Protecting against potential litigation, and
3. Fostering a secure and efficient digital communication environment.

Most LCC employees’ mailboxes consists of 20% messages that are valuable and 80% messages that are not. This email retention guidelines document will provide guidance for addressing the risks and challenges of email accumulation so that all LCC employees are able to:

* Save the right information (the 20%) for the right length of time.
* Reduce the amount of time spent looking for information in their mailbox.
* Appropriately delete the low-value, unneeded 80% while not allowing the redundant, outdated or trivial (ROT) information to accumulate.

## Scope

### To whom do these email retention guidelines apply

These guidelines apply to all employees that have an LCC.edu email address. Every employee is responsible for the retention and deletion of all LCC emails in their mailbox.

Email of employees that leave the College are also subject to these guidelines.

## Email Retention

### A. Email Categories

| **Email Category** | **Definition** | **Retention** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| (1) Transitory Emails | An email that is of short-term value that can be deleted immediately or after meeting its transitory need. | Should be retained no longer than 30-90 days (according to LCC’s Retention Schedules). |
| (2) General Emails | An email that is routine in nature and is not related to a specific project, function, matter, or case being handled by the department. | Should be retained no longer than 2 years (according to LCC’s Retention Schedules). |
| (3) Emails that are Official Records | Email messages may be considered records if they verify, authenticate or otherwise support other significant documents or transactions. | Should be saved outside of the email system, and retained according to LCC’s Retention Schedules. |
| (4) All Other Emails |  | All other non-record emails are subject to the uniform retention period of 7 years. |

#### Important Note:

Even though Transitory Emails and General Emails are non-records they do fall under the Transitory Correspondence and General Correspondence record series, respectively, found on multiple LCC Retention Schedules. These non-record record series exist on the LCC Retention Schedules in order to ensure that both records and non-record materials are included and managed within LCC’s disposition practices. Having comprehensive disposition guidelines that include non-record materials is important because the volume of non-record materials often exceeds that of official records.

#### (1) Transitory Emails

**An email that is of short-term value that can be deleted immediately or after meeting its transitory need.** These emails are non-records (see [Important Note](#_Important_Note:) above). They should be retained according to the appropriate Retention Schedule which means you have permission to delete them according to their retention period of no longer than 30 to 90 days.

##### Examples of transitory messages:

* Meeting invitations, appointment schedules, and other calendar items after they are accepted and entered on an employee's calendar.
* Action items once the indicated action is taken or the event to which the action pertains has passed, including messages that report actions taken.
* Travel schedules, reservations, and related information for business trips previously taken or canceled, assuming that the messages do not contain information needed for expense reimbursement, to document the circumstances in which travel was authorized, or to arrange similar trips in the near future.
* Messages that merely acknowledge the receipt of other messages or confirm the content of previous messages, such as messages that confirm that a meeting time is acceptable.
* Messages that merely thank a recipient for taking a particular action.
* Messages that convey an attachment that is saved elsewhere, provided that the message does not include significant information about the attachment, such as comments about the circumstances in which the attachment was created or interpretations of the attachment's contents.
* Messages that are printed for retention or saved electronically elsewhere, including messages that are transferred to a content management system like Banner, Concur or PageUp Portal.
* Messages that replicate information that is available in other records, including other email messages. This category includes "threaded" messages, which replicate all responses to an initial message dealing with a specific topic. A given mailbox may contain a series of such messages, each replicating the entire contents of its predecessors. In such cases, the final message in a thread is considered the official copy. The predecessor messages can be discarded.
* Messages that are sent to many employees and have no future reference value or that are known to be readily available elsewhere when needed.
* Any message that instructs the recipient to delete after reading, provided that such deletion does not violate LCC’s Retention Schedules.
* Announcements of social events or other activities that may involve LCC's employees but that do not directly relate to the College's business.
* Unfiltered spam and other unsolicited email not related to the College's business.
* Personal email, which is defined as any message that is unrelated to LCC business, including email that is exchanged between College employees about non-business matters. According to LCC’s [Acceptable Use Policy](https://www.lcc.edu/about/board-of-trustees/policies.html) (6.010), “employees are permitted brief and occasional personal use of College technology resources.” Email is a part of “College technology resources” so any personal email sent to or from your College email should be treated as transitory email and should be deleted accordingly.

#### (2) General Emails

**An email that is routine in nature and is not related to a specific project, function, matter, or case being handled by you or by the department.** These emails are non-records (see [Important Note](#_Important_Note:) above) and for various reasons are worth hanging on to for longer than transitory emails. These emails should be retained according to the appropriate Retention Schedule which means you have permission to delete them according to their retention period of no longer than 2 years.

##### Examples of general emails:

* Facility and space scheduling requests and logs (including conference rooms and classrooms).
* Office supply requests and logs.
* General departmental communications and emails.
* Messages used as reference or templates for regularly occurring correspondence.

#### (3) Emails that are Official Records

Some email messages, or information contained within them, are considered records and need to be identified as such. **Email messages may be considered records if they verify, authenticate or otherwise support other significant documents or transactions.**

Because the email system is not an acceptable storage system for College records, emails that are official records should be stored in a separate system (such as a shared workspace folder on the N:\ drive) alongside like records, and should be retained according to LCC’s Retention Schedules.

##### Examples of official records in email:

* Emails that contain valuable, unique information about significant policies, decisions, financial matters, legal issues, or regulatory matters.
* Emails that interpret, clarify, or amend contracts, legal agreements, or purchase orders that are in effect for multiple years.
* Emails that contain valuable, unique information about major projects, programs, initiatives, and events at the College or within divisions, departments or programs.
* Certain messages that deal with employment matters in general or with personnel issues related to specific employees.
* Emails relevant for legal matters.

#### (4) All Other Emails

If an email is not transitory correspondence or general correspondence and is not an official record then it falls into the “all other emails” category. **Emails in this category are subject to the uniform retention period of seven (7) years** and you have permission to delete them once they have passed this seven (7) year retention period.

LCC’s uniform retention period is seven (7) years because:

* Seven (7) years equals or exceeds most statutes of limitations for audits and civil litigation.
* Seven (7) years satisfies the operational and reference requirements of most employees.

### B. Email of Employees that Leave the College

Employees “are responsible for making available to their supervisor or designated coworker all public records in their possession or under their control **before leaving the College**...” ([6.100-Records Management Policy - Procedure #4-Retaining Records of Separating Employees and Employees on Temporary Leave](https://www.lcc.edu/about/board-of-trustees/policies.html)) This means that **any emails that are records in an employee’s possession or under their control should be made available before their departure**.

When an employee leaves the College the current procedure concludes with their email being deleted approximately 30 days after their last day at the College.

If Human Resources (HR) or the Office of Risk Management and Legal Services (ORMLS) makes the determination that an employee’s email should be retained beyond 30 days after the employee leaves the College, an exception is made and the email is retention for a longer period of time, according to the approved extended retention. Such exceptions can only be made when approved by HR or ORMLS.

## How to Handle Attachments

Attachments sent with email messages are generally assumed to be a duplicate or a working draft of documents and therefore not considered records. This assumption also assumes each person sending attachments has stored the authoritative version of the attachment in their designated electronic storage area.

If an attachment is considered the official copy for retention purposes, it should be saved outside of the email - in a content management like Banner or Concur, for example - or printed for filing.

If a message contains contextual information that is essential to an understanding of the attachment, the message and the attachment should be retained for the same amount of time.

## Definitions:

**Email (electronic mail)** -Any message, image, form, attachment, data, or other communication sent, received, or stored within an electronic mail system.

**Non-Record** - These are documents (or emails) that do not possess administrative, legal, fiscal or archival value and may be destroyed by College employees as soon as they have served their intended purpose.

**Personal Email** - Any message that is unrelated to LCC business, including email that is exchanged between College employees about non-business matters.

**Record** - Recorded information prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in pursuance of legal obligations, in the performance of an official function or in the transaction of business. (Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (MCL 15.231- 15.232, as amended))

**Retention** - The length of time records, non-records, data or other information must be kept to meet administrative, fiscal, legal, or historical requirements.

**Retention Schedule** - A legal document that defines how long each record, regardless of its physical format, should be retained. (Also referred to as a *Records Retention and Disposal Schedule*.)

**ROT** - Redundant, Outdated, Trivial - Digital documentation that continues to be retained even though the information that is documented has no business or legal value. It includes having multiple copies of the same information, outdated information and extraneous information that does not help the College or individual meet their goals.

**Transitory** - A record (or email) of short-term value that can be deleted immediately or after meeting its transitory need.

**Uniform Retention Period** - A single predetermined retention period which applies to most email messages with exceptions for certain messages that need to be retained for a longer or shorter amount of time as determined by legal, operational, or historical considerations.