CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

Don't Forward that Mail! Users May be Missing Important GatorLink Mail

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UF Information Technology

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Don't Forward that Mail! Users May be Missing Important GatorLink Mail

University of Florida staff, academic personnel, and students who have their UF GatorLink e-mails automatically forwarded to commercial Internet service providers may be missing some of their messages, including important official university correspondence, UF officials say.

Twice last fall, America Online (AOL) blocked e-mails originating from, or relayed through, addresses that end in "ufl.edu," said Charles Frazier, UF's vice provost for information technology. The first happened in October and lasted four days; the second, at the beginning of January, lasted about three days.

The cause of the blockage is unclear because AOL has declined to discuss its security measures with UF officials. But Frazier said it appears to stem from the efforts of some Internet service providers, or ISPs-certainly AOL and possibly others-to block unwanted e-mail, or spam. When staff, academic personnel, and students opt to have their GatorLink e-mail forwarded, spam is forwarded along with legitimate correspondence.

Unfortunately, Frazier said, AOL identifies the spam as originating from the university, so when enough users mark those forwarded "ufl.edu" e-mails as spam, AOL starts blocking everything from the university.

"In fact, anyone who sends e-mail using 'smtp.ufl.edu' to an AOL account will have their message blocked by AOL. The intended receiver will not get the mail," Frazier said. "This includes not only GatorLink mail, but also mail sent by wireless users, WebMail users, dial-up users, walk-up users and some departmental mail servers.

While that normally would be an annoying inconvenience, it could have much more troublesome consequences. For instance, real problems could occur if someone at the university tried to send an e-mail to a student regarding time-sensitive information about a financial aid deadline and the student missed it because of a block. University records show about 61,000, or 39 percent, of the roughly 157,000 GatorLink accounts are forwarded to another e-mail service. Of those, about 16,000 are forwarded to AOL. Frazier said his office has seen no evidence that other ISPs have blocked UF e-mail, but it could happen. If it does, UF computing officials will know because system log files build up with undelivered-mail notices.

UF isn't the only university to experience the problem. A Web search by UF computing administrators found at least five other universities-Florida State, Michigan State, Mississippi State, Wright State and the University of Colorado-have had similar experiences, Frazier said.

Because UF officials have been unable to learn any specifics about why AOL has blocked "ufl.edu" e-mails, finding a solution is difficult. UF officials are seeking a fix, but in the meantime, staff, academic personnel, and students are advised to "unforward" their e-mail from GatorLink and use UF's free GatorLink service for e-mail until further notice, and always maintain current patches and current virus protection and definitions.

For more information or assistance, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-HELP or helpdesk@ufl.edu [mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu].
Your Comments are Welcome

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