Title: Evaluation of the Volume of Emails Received by a Student in a Semester

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Introduction: Colleges struggle to communicate effectively with their students as their enrollment grows. Many people have attempted to discover how to communicate with college students in a manner where they will see the communications and absorb the information. It is important that students receive and read communications from their university in order to stay up to date on campus events. This analysis records the number of emails received by a student on a weekly basis and categorizing them based on the sender and subject. Email is the official communication method of most universities, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that students don’t pay attention to their student emails. This analysis aims to evaluate the volume and types of email students receive as a first step to understand the congestion of information that may hinder students from learning about information vital to their academic success.

Methods: Data collection began during the first day of fall semester 2016 (August 22) and ended the last day of winter break in 2017 (January 8). Each email received was saved and logged by date, source, and subject. Each week emails were tallied by source and subject. Data analysis includes descriptive statistics of these tallies and their visual presentation.

Results: Over the course of the semester and winter break, a total of 971 emails were received, resulting in an average of 57.1 emails per week. The most frequent source of email was class emails and college-specific, with 376 (41%) and 175 (19%) of the emails, respectively. The most frequent subject of emails was Academics and Extracurricular Activities, with 531 (47%) and 233 (21%) of the emails, respectively. These totals and distributions, however, varied by week. Peaks in email receipt were weeks 4, 12 and 13. In only 3 weeks, the most frequent subject of emails was not academics, instead it was extracurricular activities.

Conclusion: Overall, the emails received were usually information, with little spam received from the University. However, there were times when the number of non-academic emails overwhelmed the academic emails, which might make it difficult for a student to receive the information they need during critical points of the semester. These non-academic emails did not necessarily outnumber the academic emails, but they were all received in clusters, making it difficult to differentiate between the email types and the important and unimportant information.

Recommendations: It would be beneficial to ensure that students have the opportunity to opt-in to the emails they want to receive at the beginning of their college careers, rather than universities automatically opting students in to receive every communication when they enroll. This option would help reduce the clutter in the emails of students, ensuring they see important academic information when they check their emails rather than emails for the entire university.

Limitations: This survey of emails was conducted by one student, and is not generalizable to the whole University, or colleges in general. This student also opted in to receive email updates from iCollege, which partially influenced the number of emails received, due to most students not knowing, or choosing, this option.
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