

Proposal for Alumni Email Accounts

Submitted by the Columbia College Student Council and the Engineering Student Council

Observation:

Alumni are given a nine-month grace period after graduation before their cunix ID expires. During this time, they are advised to find a new Internet Service Provider and to establish a new email account. After this grace period, alumni are given a one-month warning and weekly warnings thereafter to save everything of importance in their Columbia account. Finally, at the end of this period, their cunix account is disabled and users can no longer send out email or access their old email. They are given two options, the first is to set up their account to forward to a different email address, and the second is to set up an auto-reply notifying people of the change in address.

Background:

Traditionally, Columbia University has been viewed by students and alumni as a school with very little sense of community. Many students feel as though the school does not care for its undergraduates, and alumni are stereotyped as feeling detached and neglected by the school. The loss of an alumni email account further compounds and exemplifies this sentiment, as students who graduate are metaphorically cut off from the Columbia world. Email plays a huge part in our daily lives as undergraduates and is essentially a facet of the identity we present to others. The current email situation signifies a break with our college community, almost as if students are now expected to continue their lives independent of the school, even though ideally their post-college years should be an extension of the community they have experienced at Columbia.

A task force was put together a few years ago to determine the costs and benefits of doing such a project. Alumni were questioned and apparently the task force concluded that there was no need or demand for alumni email addresses, thus the project was abandoned. We feel that the poll and subsequent decisions incorrectly reflect the needs of the goals we are trying to achieve. Alumni who graduated twenty or thirty years ago probably feel there is no need for alumni email addresses since in their time email was not as important of a communication tool; it had not yet permeated into their culture as it has into ours today. At the time of polling, they had most likely already been with their current employer for many years with a stable email account and therefore had no need for Columbia. This attitude is precisely the mindset that we are trying to change and prevent. Jobs may come and go, and alumni may pursue interests in different parts of the world, but they should feel that they have a permanent place in the Columbia community.

Research:

In researching others schools, we have found that both Princeton University and Dartmouth College have systems similar to what we are proposing. Princeton is known as having an exceptional alumni relations program, which is reflected in both their alumni donor rates and their turnout at alumni events. Their students feel very much a part of the school community not only throughout their undergraduate experience but in the years after graduation, as well. Princeton alumni have their accounts in the form of userid@alumni.princeton.edu and are

connected to their Alma Mater for the rest of their lives. Dartmouth, another peer university with a substantial alumni relations program, provides its graduating students with permanent emails accounts as well. At any time, you can reach a Dartmouth alum at [userid@alum.dartmouth.org](mailto:user@alum.dartmouth.org). It is no coincidence that two schools known for their superior alumni relations programs in the Ivy League can offer their students an address for life.

Argument:

There is a definite need for alumni email addresses. Recently, the councils have put an emphasis on increasing a sense of community at Columbia University. Through a series of events, including 'Midnight Mania', we have been working to dissolve the image of Columbia as a school with a lack of spirit. This issue is not confined to the present undergraduates of the school. We are essentially changing Columbia culture and history, and we feel that this sense of community needs to be extended to the alumni community, and the recently graduated alumni in particular. We wish to keep the alumni connected to the school without a feeling of detachment or neglect, a goal that although difficult, is entirely possible. Instead of an institution at which we spend four years, Columbia can become a constant and stable presence in our lives through our daily interactions with colleagues. Steps have been taken to improve alumni relations including the launching of an alumni based e-community. We feel that providing alumni email accounts is the next step in establishing a connected Columbia community.

From the school's development perspective, the alumni office will be better equipped to contact graduates with this proposal. Instead of establishing contact via a forwarding address that alums may forget to update, the office will have direct contact to the alumni's primary email accounts. This will enable and ensure better communication between the two groups. This would have other beneficial effects including better feedback and turnout at alumni events. We feel as though the alumni office will be able to keep better contact with more alumni; if even a few decide to donate money to the school, their contributions would more than offset the minimal costs of implementing alumni email accounts.

Proposal:

We ask that graduates of Columbia University are given an permanently given an email address in the form of cunix@alum.columbia.edu or a similar variation depending on what is deemed to be the best. In addition we ask that space be allotted to them on a separate server.

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