

# Guidelines for Communications with Students

## PURPOSE

- Define communication goals and channels
- Help ensure clear and effective use of communication channels
- Foster consistent communication channel usage across campus

## GOALS

- Produce focused, coordinated, consistent, and relevant communication that builds upon the student experience
- Reduce email and media fatigue
- Support student success by setting and meeting student expectations for communication

## SCOPE

These guidelines apply to all faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other internal stakeholders when communicating with students regarding news and information, activities, and/or events at Sam Houston State University (SHSU).

**Exclusions:** Communications from instructors and/or departments about academic courses or coursework; emergency communications.

## DEFINITIONS

- **IMC:** Integrated Marketing Communications houses Marketing & Branding, Athletic Ticketing, Fan Engagement, Athletics Media and Broadcasting, Athletic Sponsorships, Executive Communications & Media, Digital & Analytics, Content Communications, Creative Design, and Production (Print Services).

- **Brand Guidelines:** SHSU's [brand guidelines](#) ensure that the SHSU brand is represented consistently in terms of style, tone, and messaging, in online vehicles as well as print.
- **SHSU News:** Articles about SHSU students, faculty, and staff published on the SHSU website, through IMC, for external audiences.

## COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OVERVIEW

Communication channels are shown below, with examples of platforms/tools provided in parentheses within the headings.

### Mass Email (Emma)

| Best For                                                                                                                                  | Advantages                                                                                                     | Disadvantages                                                                                                                          | Considerations                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminating information needed by many students; official university communications</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easily disseminate info to all students or specific groups</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approvals needed; emails are not instantly sent</li> <li>• Limited personalization</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed by IMC. See <a href="#">IMC Policy</a></li> <li>• Training required in Talent Management prior to access</li> </ul> |

### Targeted Email (Emma, Outlook)

| Best For                                                                                                                                                                         | Advantages                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                          | Considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalized recruitment &amp; outreach</li> <li>• Student support &amp; retention</li> <li>• Event promotion and engagement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reach mass audiences fast</li> <li>• Consistent and controlled message</li> <li>• Good for information awareness or instruction</li> <li>• Can be tracked</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be overused and cause information overload</li> <li>• Impersonal and open to misinterpretation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use subject box to get key message across</li> <li>• Use headings and bullet points to break up text and get key messages across</li> <li>• Keep it short and simple</li> <li>• Include a call to action (CTA) if the recipient should take a specified</li> </ul> |

|  |  |  |                                        |
|--|--|--|----------------------------------------|
|  |  |  | action (e.g., Apply Now, Request Info) |
|--|--|--|----------------------------------------|

### Text Message (Campus Connect)

| Best For                                                                                                                                              | Advantages                                                                                                                          | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                  | Considerations                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time sensitive information</li> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Course or class communication</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High open rate</li> <li>• Immediate delivery</li> <li>• Direct &amp; Convenient</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Content</li> <li>• Potential overload</li> <li>• Privacy Concerns</li> <li>• Not ideal for long-form communication</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent</li> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Clarity</li> <li>• Compliance – adhere to <a href="#">FERPA</a> when sending texts</li> </ul> |

### Social Media (Instagram, X, Facebook; Sprout Social)

View [Social Media Guidelines](#).

| Best For                                                                                                                                                  | Advantages                                                                                                                                                                      | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Brand awareness &amp; reputation</li> <li>• Recruitment &amp; retention</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad reach</li> <li>• Real-time communication</li> <li>• Cost effective marketing</li> <li>• Encourages community building</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misinformation risks</li> <li>• Time intensive</li> <li>• Potential for negative publicity; public comments cannot be deleted</li> <li>• Algorithm changes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See <a href="#">IMC Policy</a></li> <li>• Content strategy</li> <li>• Engagement monitoring</li> <li>• Platform selection</li> <li>• Compliance &amp; privacy</li> </ul> |

### Learning Management System (LMS; Blackboard)

| Best For                                                                                                                                                    | Advantages                                                                                                      | Disadvantages                                                              | Considerations                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course management delivery</li> <li>• Performance tracking and assessment</li> <li>• Student engagement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centralized learning hub</li> <li>• Flexible and accessible</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement limitations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Content relevance</li> </ul> |

### Newsletters (Outlook, SharePoint)

| Best For | Advantages | Disadvantages | Considerations |
|----------|------------|---------------|----------------|
|----------|------------|---------------|----------------|

|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing campus updates</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent communication</li> <li>• Customizable content</li> <li>• Engagement tracking</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming to produce</li> <li>• Risk of low engagement</li> <li>• Can be overlooked</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content relevance</li> <li>• Design layout</li> <li>• Frequency</li> </ul> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Intranet

| Best For                                                                                                                                          | Advantages                                                                                                                                                          | Disadvantages                                                                                      | Considerations                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal communication</li> <li>• Document management</li> <li>• Collaboration and networking</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centralized access</li> <li>• Secure info sharing</li> <li>• Improved Efficiency</li> <li>• Collaboration tools</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access</li> <li>• Requires maintenance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User friendly interface</li> <li>• Regular updates</li> <li>• Security and access control</li> </ul> |

## Face-to-Face Marketing

| Best For                                                                                                                                                                         | Advantages                                                                                                                                                                             | Disadvantages                                                                                                        | Considerations                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing awareness of campus resources</li> <li>• Driving student engagement and involvement</li> <li>• Community building</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate feedback and response</li> <li>• Students are more likely to engage</li> <li>• Creates meaningful conversation and trust</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for low engagement</li> <li>• Time and staffing issues</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic location and timing</li> <li>• Interactive and engaging approach</li> <li>• Have a follow-up strategy</li> </ul> |

## Indoor Advertising (Digital Signs, Posters, etc.)

| Best For                                                                                                      | Advantages                                                                                                                                                                               | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                       | Considerations                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event and service promotion</li> <li>• Targeted messaging</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible and easily updated</li> <li>• Cost effective</li> <li>• Highly targeted</li> <li>• Can reach students in high traffic areas</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may overlook or ignore messages</li> <li>• Ad placement restrictions- and/or approvals</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use engaging content</li> <li>• Utilize call to action (QR codes or social media handles)</li> <li>• Brand alignment</li> </ul> |

## Outdoor Advertising (Yard Signs, Sandwich Boards)

| Best For                                                                                                                                                        | Advantages                                                                                                                  | Disadvantages                                                                                                                              | Considerations                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event and service promotion</li> <li>• Targeted marketing</li> <li>• Includes messaging to broader audience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7 exposure</li> <li>• High visibility</li> <li>• Localized targeting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to track ROI</li> <li>• Ad clutter – competes with other ads or distractions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic placement</li> <li>• Simple designs</li> <li>• QR codes can aide in driving engagement</li> </ul> |

### Area/Unit Website

| Best For                                                                                                                                         | Advantages                                                                                                                                                        | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                         | Considerations                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official info hub</li> <li>• Marketing and recruitment</li> <li>• Faculty and staff resource</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7 accessibility</li> <li>• Broad reach</li> <li>• Customizable</li> <li>• Supports a variety of multimedia</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance required</li> <li>• Navigation challenges</li> <li>• Too much information on page can be overwhelming</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User experience</li> <li>• Search engine optimization</li> <li>• Accessibility compliance</li> </ul> |

### Survey Distribution (Qualtrics, Microsoft Forms)

| Best For                                                                                                                           | Advantages                                                                                                                                                                       | Disadvantages                                                                                                                   | Considerations                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student feedback and experience evaluation</li> <li>• Event/program evaluation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data informed decision making</li> <li>• Customizable and scalable</li> <li>• Cost effective</li> <li>• Anonymous capability</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low response rate</li> <li>• Possibility for bias</li> <li>• Survey fatigue</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey design</li> <li>• Timing and frequency</li> <li>• Incentives and engagements</li> </ul> |

## RECOMMENDED COMMUNICATIONS USAGE

View the **Communications Channel Matrix (Pages 8-9)**.

## COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

Clarity and Audience Focus

- **Know your audience.** Tailor messages to specific audiences (prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, etc.) with appropriate tone and content. Be as specific as possible.
- **Use clear, accessible language.** Avoid jargon and complex terminology unless communicating with specialized audiences who understand it. Avoid acronyms.
- **Prioritize information:** Lead with the most important information and organize content in a logical flow.
- **Focus on one goal per communication.** Avoid confusion and long emails by focusing each message on one goal. This goal should be evident in a clear, concise call-to-action (i.e., Register now, RSVP, etc.).

### Consistency and Brand Alignment

- **Maintain visual consistency:** Follow institutional brand guidelines for logos, colors, fonts, and imagery.
- **Align with institutional voice:** Ensure all communications reflect your institution's values and personality. See the [SHSU Brand Guidelines](#) for more information.
- **Coordinate across departments/divisions:** Work with other campus units to prevent contradictory or redundant messaging.

### Release Forms

- **Avoiding legal concerns with photos and video.** Do not promote events, departments, or other things on campus with photos of individuals unless you have a model release form on file. You can use photos of people from public events where there is an assumption of no privacy, but for headshots or photos of an individual in a private setting (like a classroom), those individuals would have assumed their photo was private unless otherwise stated.

### Reminders and Follow-ups

- **Add variety with message vehicle choice.** To be as effective as possible, information should be presented across a mix of vehicle options to provide additional opportunities for your target audience to engage with the information. Consider all of the communication channels at your disposal that are appropriate for your message and audience.

- **Continue to hone your audience.** Remove recipients who have already completed your call-to-action, when possible, to avoid them receiving redundant or irrelevant information.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT & RESOURCES

- [IMC Policies](#)
- [LinkedIn Learning](#)
- [SHSU Department of Compliance & Insurance](#)
- [Accessibility Best Practices](#)
- Divisional contacts:
  - Marlee Bird, IT
  - Jessica Collier, Strategic Enrollment & Innovation
  - Morgan Enriquez, Student Affairs
  - Becca Griffin, Academic Affairs
  - Jamie Fails, IMC
  - Kelly Presley, Strategic Enrollment & Innovation

# Communications Channel Matrix

## RECOMMENDED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS BY MESSAGE TYPE

|                                                       | Campus-wide event information | Event info for specific group | Announcements needed by a large group | Announcements needed for a specific group | Significant institutional news and announcements | Planned change in policy, procedure, or practices for a large group* | Planned change in policy, procedure, or practices for a small group** | Information requiring urgent action | Student news, In-depth storytelling |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mass Email                                            | ●                             |                               | ●                                     |                                           | ●                                                | ●                                                                    |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| LMS (Blackboard)                                      |                               |                               |                                       | ●                                         |                                                  | ●                                                                    | ●                                                                     |                                     |                                     |
| Social Media                                          | ●                             | ●                             | ●                                     | ●                                         | ●                                                |                                                                      |                                                                       | ●                                   |                                     |
| Newsletters                                           | ●                             | ●                             | ●                                     |                                           | ●                                                | ●                                                                    |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| Targeted emails                                       |                               | ●                             |                                       | ●                                         |                                                  |                                                                      | ●                                                                     | ●                                   |                                     |
| MySam/Intranet                                        |                               |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| Text messages (Campus Connect, Gecko/Salesforce)      |                               |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      | ●                                                                     | ●                                   |                                     |
| Face-to-face marketing (Tabling, info sessions, etc.) | ●                             |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  | ●                                                                    |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |

Division, college or department\*

Department, program or organization\*\*

# Communications Channel Matrix ctd.

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|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Indoor signage (digital signs, flyers, posters, etc.)   | ●                             | ●                             |                                       |                                           |                                                  | ●                                                                    |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| Unit website                                            |                               | ●                             | ●                                     | ●                                         | ●                                                | ●                                                                    | ●                                                                     |                                     | ●                                   |
| University calendar (Localist)                          | ●                             |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| Survey (Qualtrics, MS Forms)                            |                               |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| Outdoor advertising (Yard signs, sandwich boards, etc.) | ●                             |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  | ●                                                                    |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |
| KatSafe Emergency Alert                                 |                               |                               |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       | ●                                   |                                     |
| Today@Sam, news release                                 |                               |                               |                                       |                                           | ●                                                |                                                                      |                                                                       |                                     | ●                                   |
| Outlook Invitation                                      |                               | ●                             |                                       |                                           |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       |                                     |                                     |

Division, college or department\*  
Department, program or organization\*\*