

Date: April 22, 2002

To: College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Faculty, Staff and Graduate Students

From: Brian Atkinson, Computing Manager
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Re: Computer Privacy

While the computers on our desktops belong to the University of Arizona, most of us feel a strong degree of ownership to the files and information contained on them. For those of us who regularly use the file server (which I hope is the majority) most of the files generated are securely inaccessible. Some files, typically email downloaded by Eudora or Outlook, or those files that are purposely stored on the local machine, are still resident and accessible by anyone with physical access to those desktops. This is one of the reasons that I argue for the use of Webmail. Without a password, there's no possibility for access.

Individuals need to be aware of the privacy issues relating to computers in our offices and respect the rights of others. SBSTech, as an example, routinely asks permission to work on individual desktop computers if the owners are not present. I want to ensure that we don't invade or violate anyone's sense of privacy. The desktop metaphor is extremely appropriate in this case. Hunting around in someone's computer is analogous with searching through their desk.

There are university regulations covering these issues, but this is a friendly reminder and citing those would make this much too authoritative for these purposes. If you take one message away from this monologue make it this: "People feel that their computers are proprietary, even extensions of their personal intellectual property. Please be respect this ideal and them."