MASFAA ELECTRONIC DISCUSSION GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of people on the Internet participate in electronic "discussion groups," also referred to as on-line conferences or LISTSERVers. The Financial Aid Office and Computing and Information Services at the University of Montana – Missoula are please to sponsor such a conference for the Montana Association of Student Financial Aid Advisors. We will be using a program called listproc, which is similar to the LISTSERV software. Procedure for participating in the MASFAA group are described below.

The moderator for the group is Terri Gruba, UM-Missoula, and the name of the discussion group is MASFAA (oddly enough!). You will use your favorite e-mail program to join the group, send messages to the group, and read messages from other members. The specific commands for e-mail are not shown here and you should follow the conventions of your own mailing program. What's important here is to learn the commands for joining the group, exchanging messages, searching for old messages, etc.

JOINING THE GROUP

Before you can participate in the discussion for your group, you must be added to the list of members by sending an e-mail message to the following address:

masfaa-request@majordomo.umt.edu

Use lower case letters in the address, as shown above. Do NOT put anything in the subject line or any other header lines, such as addresses for carbon copies or attached documents. The body of the message contains only one word (nothing else, no signature lines or any other comments), as follows (the case of the characters is not important in the body of the message):

subscribe

Send the message as you would send any mail message. Follow the instructions carefully. If you depart from these procedures, you won't be added to the membership list (and you will receive an error message to indicate that your message failed).

When you send to the address shown here, you are actually mailing to a software program, not a human being (that's why you must follow the directions so precisely). The software program keeps track of the membership list, the mailing preference of each member, and some other details. It usually responds very quickly to your request to become a member by sending you an e-mail message to say that you have been added to the group. That message usually contains guidelines for conduction the business of the group and you should save that message for future reference.

LEAVING THE LIST

When you are finished participating in the group (e.g. you change jobs), be sure to unsubscribe. If you computer account is closed while you are still a member of an online discussion group conducted through e-mail, problems will result for the other members of the group (messages that they send to the group will be returned to them because of your defunct account and every member of the group could get several "bounced" messages as a result).

The procedures for unsubscribing are very similar to the procedures for subscribing, except that you do NOT include your mane. Again, you are interacting with the software program; send your message to

masfaa-request@majordomo.umt.edu

There is not subject line or any other text or header lines. The body of the message contains only:

unsubscribe

You should receive confirmation that you were removed from the list.

PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSION

Once you have become a member of the group by subscribing as shown above, you will begin to receive mail from the members. Use your favorite mailing program to read the incoming mail.   You may want to sort it into folders, delete messages you no longer need, etc. For with any of those procedures, contact the computer support personnel at your campus (the UM Help Desk Number is 243-2974),

When you want to send a message that all members of the group can read, again use your favorite mailing program. Now you should address your message to the actual list name, i.e.,

masfaa@majordomo.umt.edu

Your message will automatically be mailed t every member of the group. It is helpful to include a subject line of the message to help members know what you will be discussing.

REPLYING TO A MESSAGE

The messages you receive from an online discussion group can generally be treated as any other mail. That is, you can delete messages, forward them to someone else, print them, etc. However, there is one procedure that you should pay very special attention to, i.e., the procedure for replying to a message.

Remember that there may be dozens or even hundreds of people on the membership list. Most mailing programs give you the option of replying only to the person who originated the message or to the entire group that received the original message. If you really want the whole group to see your reply, though, be careful how you respond. If your mailing program doesn't ask for your preference, proceed with caution (for example, the vanilla-flavored unix mail program may require uppercase R to respond to one person and lowercase r to respond to the whole group; be sure to know the conventions of your own program).

Another important consideration when replying is whether to include the original message in your response. On a mailing list it is usually helpful to provide some context because members may have read 50 messages from your group in the past couple of days. If your mailing program doesn't automatically give you the option of including the original text, consult your computer center personnel for procedures.

SETTING YOUR MAILING PREERENCES

There may be times when you want to change your mailing preferences. For example, you may prefer to get mail from the group in digest form, rather than receiving numerous separate messages. Or you may prefer that you always receive an acknowledgement when you have sent a message to the group (the

normal mode of operation is that you receive no acknowledgment of messages you send; this mode is known as "noack" in the listproc software).

If you prefer the digest, several messages will be linked together and sent as one after a certain period of time or a certain number of lines. Use the following command (send to listproc address):

Set mail digest

To set the acknowledgment feature, send the following message to the listproc address:

Set mail ack

TO STOP MAIL TEMORARILY

Suppose you are going on vacation for a few weeks (not very likely if you work in financial aid). You may not want to unsubscribe to the list and then have to subscribe again when you return. However, you probably don't want messages piling up in your mailbox while you are gone either,. You can set your preferences so that your mail is temporarily suspended and then resume delivery when you return from vacation. note that mailing preferences are ALWAYS set by sending a message to the listproc address, not the masfaa address.

To turn off mail delivery temporarily while you are on vacation, send to

masfaa-request@majordomo.umt.edu

The body of the message says

Set mail postpone

TO RESUME MAIL DELIVERY

When your mail has been turned off temporarily, resume mail delivery by mailing to the listproc address again. The body of the message says the following (assuming you were operating in "noack" mode before you postponed your mail):

Set mail noack

NOTE: If you had been in ack mode or digest mode before you postponed your mail, you may want to return to that same setting when you get back from vacation. For example,

Set mail ack   - OR -   set mail digest

Of course, you could use the occasion to switch to a different setting. For instance, you may have been in "ack" mode before vacation and want to be in"noack" mode when you come back. Just send the command that sets the feature you now want.

FINDING OUT WHO ELSE BELONGS TO YOUR GROUP

You can receive a list of members in your group by mailing to the listproc software one of the following commands (either should work):

Who

The moderator can set up the conference so that all members are concealed (no one can see a list of members). However, even if the moderator leaves the list open, you can set your preference. Your e-mail address is not concealed to begin with; to conceal it, send the following command to the listproc address:

Set concealed yes

SEARCHING ARCHIVES

Many lists keep old messages on file and you can search through the archives for messages on a topic you're interested in. First, get a list of what's in the archive by addressing a message to the listproc software as shown in several previous examples. The boy of the message should read as follows:

Index

Once you examine the list of files in the archive, obtain a specific file with the message

Get file

Where "file" is a specific file name you saw in the archive list. The information in the index message can be hard to follow. Basically stick with the commands shown here or in the FAQ file (see below).

To search for a particular subject in the archived files, try the search command (again the message goes to the listproc address):

Search –all pattern

Where "pattern" is a particular string you are interested in and "-all" ensures that all files will be searched (even if subdirectories, if there are any). If the pattern contains spaces or odd characters, enclose the phrase in single or double quotation marks, e.g., search masfaa –all 'annual meeting'