

Faculty Affairs Committee Report

Report on Privacy Issues with the Email Server.

November 29, 2012

Overview of the Issue:

The Faculty Affairs committee was assigned the following question to investigate: “Can IT@SAM delete all content from faculty mobile devices that are synced to the new exchange server?” The committee has found this statement to be true. Any mobile device that is setup to sync with the email server at SHSU can be cleared of all its data remotely with or without that user’s permission or knowledge. This is true for all mobile devices, including iPhone, Android, and Windows devices.¹

SHSU Remote Wipe Policy:

- From a web browser, connect to www.shsu.edu and select E-mail from the main page. Enter your log-in credentials. This brings you to your main inbox menu. Select the “options” drop-down menu in the upper right-hand corner of the page, and from this menu select the “see all options...” choice. This brings you to an account management page. From the menu column on the left-hand-side of the page, select the “phone” option. From here, select “mobile phones” from the three title choice options (voice mail, mobile phones, and text messaging).

From here, you will notice a list of all your smart devices (phones and tablets) that are setup to access email (sync) from the SHSU exchange server. Notice the “wipe device” option on this page – if selected, this option will delete all information from a selected device. Without a backup of this information, there would be no recovery; all emails, photos, text messages, contacts, calendar appointments, downloaded apps, etc. would be deleted.

This is a powerful function that one might want to use if their device had been stolen. However, the exchange server grants this ability to “wipe” a device to the server administrators as part of its Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync protocol.²

- In correspondence with Katherine Davis of IT@SAM, the committee has been reassured that “IT@SAM will not without the devices owner’s permission/knowledge wipe a personal device.”

Recommendation:

The Faculty Affairs Committee recommends greater disclosure by IT@SAM of the remote wipe function. Beyond that, the committee recommends that faculty be cautious with the devices they allow to sync to the SHSU email server.³

¹ While Android-based devices notify users of this functionality, iPhone/Windows devices do not.

² One alternative would be for a user to setup email with the IMAP Secure protocol instead of the Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync. Reportedly, the exchange server will support this protocol, though it is less convenient and less powerful.

³ For example, it might make sense to allow one’s university-issued iPad sync to the SHSU exchange server, but not one’s personal phone.