Sympa (Mailing List Manager) Overview

Overview

The purpose of this guide is to provide a general overview for Sympa users (Subscribers) including some Montclair State University specific information. It is not intended to cover Listmaster (site owner), list owner, or moderator functions. Please see the Support section for more information on accessing the built-in documentation and FAQ in the Sympa web interface.

What is Sympa?

Sympa is an open-source mailing list management solution. It allows for the easy creation and management of e-mail distribution lists. By using these lists, groups of users can communicate more efficiently via e-mail. Users who post to the list do not even need to know who else is subscribed to the list. The list manager (Sympa) distributes posted/moderated messages to all of the subscribers.

How does Sympa provide list services and management?

For most list members, interaction with Sympa is as easy as sending and receiving messages to the correct list address.

Sympa also has a web-interface that provides users with access to the mailing lists they are subscribed to and/or are authorized to manage (if they are a list administrator/ owner or a moderator). Users can search for a particular list, change their subscription preferences for lists they are subscribed to, and change configuration parameters for the lists they might manage.

How is the user authorization handled in Sympa?
(How does Sympa knows who can view and manage what?)

Sympa manages the services provided by the interface based on pre-defined roles. Every user in Sympa has at least one of the following roles: list master, list owner, moderator or subscriber.

List Master is a system administrator who is responsible for management and maintenance of the Sympa system or individual site. The List Master defines who will be allowed to request list creation and what will be the available options for list management. The List master also decides on the interface and the template files.

List Owner is a user who has a control over the configuration of a list. There are two types of list owners: "privileged" and "normal". A privileged owner is usually someone who requested the list initially. A list can have multiple owners. All the subscription/un-subscription requests are handled by the list owner as well as permission assignments.

Moderator or "editor" is someone who approves or declines messages sent to the moderated lists. If the list is moderated the moderators are the only users that can post directly to that list. For the regular users who post to a moderated list, the messages are kept in a queue and the moderator receives a notification. It is up to the moderator's decision if the content will reach the subscribers of the list or it will be declined. There can be more than one moderator per list.

Subscriber is a user who receives the e-mails posted to the list he/she is subscribed to. There are few instances when the subscriber might not receive the e-mails sent to the list: if the list is moderated and the moderator does not approve the content of the posted e-mail; the user's address is invalid; or the subscriber set his user preference to not receive e-mail. One user can be subscribed to multiple lists and each list can have a large number of subscribers.

Roles are uniquely defined in Sympa and are not inherited. Being a list owner or moderator does not make the user a subscriber by default. Every user needs to be explicitly added as a subscriber to receive messages posted to the list no matter what additional roles the user might have.

Sympa sites and List masters at MSU
There are currently seven independent Sympa sites at Montclair State University. Each site has a separate home page as well as its own List master. The following table lists the current site names and List masters. (This list is subject to change.)

Site name	Description	List master (Site owner)
lists.montclair.edu	General/Administrative MSU mailing lists	OIT (Help Desk x7971)
cart.lists.montclair.edu	College of the Arts	Brian Carter
cehs.lists.montclair.edu	College of Education and Human Services	Jason Francis
chss.lists.montclair.edu	College of Humanities & Social	Jacklyn Novak
csam.lists.montclair.edu	College of Science and Mathematics	Joe Youn
library.lists.montclair.edu	Sprague Library	Steve Shapiro
sbus.lists.montclair.edu	School of Business	Roger Salomon

For inquiries regarding list creation, use, and management please contact the appropriate List master for the list in question.

General user FAQ

Are there any lists that I am subscribed to automatically?
Yes, as part of receiving an MSU NetID, users are auto-subscribed to the following lists depending on if you are a Faculty/Staff or Student. A user may choose to unsubscribe from these lists unless noted (See question #2)

Faculty/Staff
allusers - For important campus announcements. Posting allowed by members of the Administration only. **You may not choose to unsubscribe from this list.**

campus - For all general announcements such as lectures, programs, seminars, etc. Posting allowed by all members of the list.

discuss - A non-announcement list used to discuss a variety of topics. Posting allowed by all members of the list.

forsale - For posting personal items for sale or to request items needed. Posting allowed by all members of the list. NOTE: *This list is offered exclusively for use by employees of the University for small matters of convenience. It is not intended as a medium to support money making ventures. Please refer to the University's ethics guidelines.*

Students
allstudents – For important student related information like registration announcements, weather related closings, etc. Posting allowed by members of the Administration only. **You may not choose to unsubscribe from this list.**

academic-opportunities - For announcements related to new course offerings, new course sections, or special opportunities. Posting allowed by moderators only.

Can I unsubscribe from these lists by myself?
With the exception of the lists noted as mandatory you can unsubscribe. (See question #4)

You can also re-subscribe to them later (see next question) but you must do so using your <netid>@mail.montclair.edu address as all non-NetID e-mail addresses will be rejected.

How do I request subscription to a list?
User can request to be subscribed to a list by sending an e-mail to the Sympa site address: sympa@<sitename>.montclair.edu
(See "**Sympa sites and List masters at MSU**" above for the list of Sympa sites.)

In the subject line of your message, type in: subscribe <listname>

Replace <listname> with the name of the list you wish to subscribe to and send the e-mail. If your request is going to an open list, you will receive confirmation. If the list is moderated, you should receive a response from the list moderator.

If you have any problems subscribing yourself to a list, you can contact the list owner at: <listname>-request@<sitename>.montclair.edu

How can I unsubscribe from a list?
If the list settings allow for you to unsubscribe yourself there is usually a link in the footer of the list messages. Or you can login into the Sympa web interface directly and use the "Unsubscribe" link that will be displayed on the left side of the page for the specific list.

You can also unsubscribe from a list that allows it by sending an e-mail to the Sympa site address: sympa@<sitename>.montclair.edu
(See "**Sympa sites and List masters at MSU**" above for the list of Sympa sites.)

In the subject line of your message, type in: unsubscribe <listname>

If you are subscribed to a list with more than one e-mail address you have to specify which address you wish to unsubscribe: unsubscribe <listname> <address>

If you have any problems subscribing yourself to a list, you can contact the list owner at: <listname>-request@<sitename>.montclair.edu

Another way to unsubscribe from a list using the Sympa interface is to click on Home- ->MyLists . This will display a list of all of the lists you are subscribed to or you own/moderate. You can click the "Subscriber" link next to the lists you want to unsubscribe from and then click the "Unsubscribe" link on the left side of the page displayed. Note that certain lists you can't unsubscribe from.
They will not have the Unsubscribe link on the list page and you will not be able to unsubscribe.

Can I suspend my subscription from a list while on leave, vacation, etc?

Yes, you can choose to suspend your subscription to a list during given time period.

First, login to the sympa interface with you NetID and password. Click on the "My Lists" icon. This will display a page where you can select the list(s) you wish to suspend and define the time period of how long you want your subscription(s) to be suspended. You can also mark the check box to suspend your subscription indefinitely. Please be aware that by unsubscribing from the list you will stop receiving the posts to the list but you may also lose some of the other privileges that subscribers have for that list. For example, if only subscribers can post to the list you have suspended you will not be able to post to the list yourself until you remove the suspension. If the review or visibility of the list is set to subscribers only you will also not be able to perform these tasks.

To resume your subscription (remove the suspension) to the list, you may do so on the same page by selecting the list(s) you want to remove the suspension for and click on "Subscription Options" link followed with a click on "Resume List Subscription" button.

How do I know what lists already exist?

Each Sympa site (see "**Sympa sites and List masters at MSU**" above for the list) maintains its own collection of lists. You can review the names of the lists by going to the "Search for lists" tab and selecting "Index of Lists" after logging into any one of the individual sites.

NOTE: Be sure to login to the site first in order to see all lists. The "Index of Lists" that appears on each site's default page is **only** a subset of public lists. Also note that some list owners may choose to conceal their lists unless you are a member.

If a description of a list is not provided, please contact the List master (site owner) for more information.

How can I request a new list be created?

Administrative users and users not covered by a College or School site (see "**Sympa sites and List masters at MSU**" above for the list) should use the form available within the Sympa interface under the top tab called "Request a list". This wizard style form will walk you through the list creation options and submit the request to the Site Administrator for approval.

How can I search a list's archive?

To see if a list maintains an archive, login to the Sympa web interface for the site: <sitename>.montclair.edu/sympa

If the list maintains an archive and you are allowed to search it there will be an "Archive" link on the left side of the page. This link will take you to a page that has a search box. Enter the text you want to search for and click the "Search" button. Use the "Advanced Search" for more advanced searches (see page for details).

What commands can be submitted via e-mail?
In addition to some of the commands noted above, you can send a message to the Sympa address: sympa@lists.montclair.edu

In the subject line of your message, type in: help

Sympa will reply via e-mail with a help guide that covers the available commands.

Why can't I post to a subscribers-only list to which I'm subscribed?
If your postings are being rejected by the list and returned to you, it is very likely that you're posting using an address that's not on the list.

Mail clients like Outlook, Thunderbird, or Mac OS X's Mail are usually configured to use a "From:" address that is associated with the account/profile you are using. However, if you client is configured to use multiple or alternate "From:" addresses you have to be sure the correct "From:" is being used that matches the address you are subscribed to the list as. Consult your client documentation for more information.

Users are not receiving their own posts. Can the privileged owner of the list change that?
Gmail has a filtering set up that based on the message ID does not deliver the message to the sender. So, for lists that subscribers can post to will deliver the message to everyone but the one who posted the message. This can be changed by updating one of the configuration fields of the list.

The privileged owner of the list should click on the Admin link for the list. Then go to "Edit List Config" -> "Sending/Receiving Setup". Under the block "Incoming SMTP header fields to be removed (remove_headers)" should add "Message-ID" and save the settings. This will remove the message ID from the message headers and allow the message to be delivered to the sender as well.

Additional Help
Sympa has extensive online documentation that goes well beyond the scope of this overview. You can access this documentation via the Sympa web page:
https://lists.montclair.edu/sympa/help

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