

On NYU's replyallcalypse

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[This](#) is a pretty ridiculous story:

It is the nightmare that virtually all email users dread: accidentally hitting "Reply All".

This week, one student at New York University took the all-too-simple error to the next level, when he inadvertently discovered a bug in the school email system that allowed anyone to "reply all" to a generic university email, bombarding nearly 40,000 people with his answer.

The resulting 24-hour flurry of emails - later dubbed by university officials as "replyallcalypse" - saw every NYU student's inbox quickly fill with replies ranging from the jokes ("does anyone have a pencil I can borrow?") to pleas for the mass emails to end ("SHUT THE F*** UP PLEASE").

The first sentence is odd: in my experience, it's not true that anything close to all e-mail users dread accidentally replying all. A sizable group of folks I get e-mail from seem to use the "reply all" option more or less exclusively.

For instance, at the seminary where I'm a student, people would not use replyallcalypsic language to describe this sort of incident. People basically use the school e-mail system as a bulletin board. Why send something to ten people when you can send it to a couple hundred? There may be a relevant 11th in there somewhere. If you have a message for all the second-year M.Div. students, might as well send it to the third-year doctoral students, too—maybe one of them knows somebody and will pass along the message. I've gotten e-mails inviting full-time, resident, M.Div. students to events geared specifically toward that group. I am a part-time, commuter, M.A. student.

And if someone accidentally replies all to an all-school e-mail, it does not produce a flurry of responses highlighting the absurdity of such an IT loophole. We just roll our eyes because once again we are all privy to one student's question about schedule or bill or grades.

That is, if we read the message at all. I assume many others respond to this widespread breach of e-mail etiquette as I do: by generally ignoring my school e-mail altogether. Which of course makes having a school e-mail address a net negative, because it's hard to get professors to use my personal e-mail address for the rare message I actually need to see.

Obviously, a seminary is a lot smaller than NYU, and its tech protocols are likely simpler, less formal and harder to enforce. Yet despite my [deep affection](#) for e-mail, there are times when I daydream about some plugin that routes all senders to the [E-mail Charter](#) (though I don't agree with every word) and requires them to pass a quiz on it before it will deliver their message to my inbox.