

Field Guide to Culture and Norms

Organizational customs, rituals, and expectations are shaped by the values and principles of the group. These are not rules, but norms, and because they don't appear in employee handbooks, they can lead to misunderstandings and confusion, especially for new team members. This document describes some of these cultural aspects of UCR Advancement. This list is not exhaustive; it represents a snapshot in time and a starting point for negotiating expectations with each other. As team members come and go, some of these assumptions will necessarily evolve. We hope that they stimulate discussion about how individual work groups within advancement can engage in ways that are respectful, mutually supportive, and collegial.



- We are generally accessible on business days between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Pacific Time
 - Given the extraordinary demands caused by COVID-19, we offer as much flexibility to each other as possible
 - It is okay to take time during the workday for meals, exercise, errands, and child/elder care needs as long as our work gets done well and on time and we aren't creating hardship for the rest of our team
- For emergencies or other time-sensitive situations (requiring an immediate or same-day response) we do not use email – we use phone calls or text messages
- We do not expect that an email sent after hours will be read or responded to until the next business day at the earliest
 - When appropriate, we use the “Do Not Deliver Before” or “Send Later” feature in email clients to schedule delivery on the next business day
 - We *can* work outside of typical business hours, and some choose to do so for convenience or to meet deadlines, but we seek to achieve and support balance for ourselves and others
 - We strive to respond to emails within 1-2 business days except when a response requires research or input from others, in which case we acknowledge receipt and if possible, indicate when we will be able to respond
 - We are judicious about copying others on emails, attempting to balance a need to know with an understanding that the volume of communications we receive can be overwhelming

- We do not expect responses from people who are out of the office on vacation or other leaves
 - Before we take planned time away, we ensure colleagues have what they *reasonably* might need while we are gone and identify others who can help in our absence
- We are explicit if we are requesting a response, and specific and reasonable about when we need it
 - We support and encourage use of subject lines that include phrases like “RESPONSE REQUESTED BY XX” or “FEEDBACK NEEDED BY XX”
 - If we cannot meet a colleague’s deadline, we negotiate a new one as soon as we are aware that we need more time
- We assume good intentions and approach conflict with curiosity and empathy
 - A lack of nonverbal cues can create misunderstandings, so emphasize quality, clarity, and professionalism in our written communications
 - We ruefully accept that we are not mind-readers
 - We ask questions when we do not understand
 - We listen for comprehension
 - We offer and receive feedback non-judgmentally and graciously
 - We do not send harsh emails when we receive a message that hits us the wrong way
 - We reach out to request a real-time conversation (phone call, video meeting, or in-person once that is safe and possible) to discuss the issue with the benefit of two-way dialogue
 - We believe it is respectful to resolve conflicts or differences of opinion directly with each other, escalating to supervisors only when we encounter an impasse or require additional clarity
 - If there is doubt about the tone of a potential message or how it might be received, we do not use email to address differences of opinion
- Phone meetings are acceptable alternatives to video meetings
- We are respectful of others in video meetings
 - Turning off our camera is okay as long as we are present and able to participate; if we have to step away, we afford the courtesy of a note in the chat when we leave and return so others don’t assume we’re there

- We are mindful of what is in our backgrounds, but we know that family members and pets will make occasional cameo appearances and that is fine
- We know that in video meetings, some speak up more readily than others, so we share discussion time and invite those who have not commented to do so
- Advancement does not exist in a vacuum; we seek clarity and respect others' norms when engaging with others outside our organization, especially for those of us with feet in different worlds
 - Institutional deadlines (UCR publications, administrative timelines, etc.) are not always within our control and require accommodations to meet campus partner needs
 - To honor our commitment to accountability, we thoroughly review institutional communications issued by the Chancellor/Provost/VCUA before formulating and posing comments or questions

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