The Development of the Engineering Technology Listserv over Its First Twenty Years

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Abstract

Twenty years ago the author created a listserv for the faculty and supporters of the engineering technology community as a vehicle to pass on information of general interest to the community. It has since grown to over four thousand members and has become useful to announce academic job openings, information on conferences, opportunities to publish and obtain grants, as well as other information that is pertinent to engineering technology in general. Details on this history and why the listserv has proved useful will be covered.

Introduction

In 1995 most people did not know what a listserv was. The founder of the engineering technology listserv was at the Conference for Industry Education Collaboration (CIEC) that year and as part of his duties as the Engineering Technology Division (ETD) secretary passed around an attendance sheet at the ETD business meeting. Email was just starting to be used in academe then, so he asked everyone to put down their email address. Afterwards he used this list to thank everyone for coming to the meeting. Dave Baker from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) then used this for a distribution list as did others. When the author arrived at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) that summer, the dean of technology at Michigan Technological University said he ought to start a listserv, prompting the question, “What is that”?! Michigan Tech was using Majordomo, but the information technology (IT) person at MTSU suggested Listproc and thus the engineering technology listserv was born with about sixty members. Engineering technology (ET) faculty found it useful and so it grew rapidly at about 500 members per year for the first four years. Since it was unmoderated at the time, it plateaued for the next three years due to extraneous messages causing people to get off at the same rate that others got on. Once the list was moderated it again grew at the former rate reaching 3,500 members by 2005. Since the ET faculty field was then about saturated, growth slowed reaching 4,000 members by 2010. Although slow growth continued, due to conversion to the Listserv platform in 2014, membership dipped to a little over 4,000 since Listserv automatically kicks members off if their mailboxes get full. This article will go into more detail on this history and why the listserv has proved a useful tool.

The Early Days

In the beginning things were much more informal on the listserv. Long discussions took place as well as jokes and even messages that really were not of interest to listserv members in general. This was due to its small size and the fact that the listserv was not moderated. As explained earlier it was finally
necessary to moderate the listserv and so things became much more formal allowing only non-repetitious messages of general engineering technology interest. Of course this took some of the fun out of the listserv, but it also prevented people from becoming irritated on getting non-pertinent information. And this was also necessary as people’s email volume has increased exponentially since the time that email first started to be used widely in the academic community in general.

**Steady State**

It can now safely be said that the ET listserv has reached steady state in both size and content. In content since it is moderated and in size since the market is now saturated. With approximately 26,000 engineering faculty in the United States and approximately fifteen present of those being engineering technology, once you add a few hundred non-academics who wish to follow what is going on in the ET community, you end up with about four thousand members. It was also necessary to switch from the Listproc to the Listserv email software platform since Listproc is no longer supported and security issues become more important. Also, Listserv automatically kicks one off after too many error messages or time with a full mailbox, so only really active email accounts can maintain membership on the listserv.

**Using the Listserv**

Since the listserv is now converted from Listproc to the Listserv Management System, it might be useful to detail its use here. [1] I recommend you save this for future use. Questions can also be emailed to BUCHANANW@NEO.TAMU.EDU. The following gives instructions on how to use the listserv.

* The name of the list: ETD-L

* The LISTSERV host name: LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU

The following email addresses are used for the specified purposes:

* To send an email to the list: ETD-L@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU

* To contact the list owner: ETD-L-request@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU

* To send commands to the LISTSERV server: LISTSERV@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU

* To unsubscribe from the list: ETD-L-signoff-request@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU

The following URLs may also be useful:

* The list home page: http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=ETD-L

* The list subscription page: http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=ETD-L

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* SETTING A SERVER-LEVEL PASSWORD *

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If you do not already have a password for the LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU server, we recommend that you set one now. A LISTSERV password is linked to your subscribed address and is valid for all lists to which you are subscribed on the LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU server. The same password can be used for email commands as well as for access to the web interface for the lists to which you are subscribed.

To set your password for this server, visit:
http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?GETPW1=.

* INTERACTING WITH LISTSERV VIA THE WWW *

Subscription settings and preferences can be set using LISTSERV's web interface. Once you have set a server password as explained above, you may log in and set your preferences at:
http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=ETD-L.

Contributions sent to this list are automatically archived. You can access the list archives at:
http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=ETD-L.

You may need to log in to view the archives.

* INTERACTING WITH LISTSERV BY EMAIL *

You may leave the list at any time by sending a SIGNOFF ETD-L command to:
LISTSERV@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU, or by sending a blank email to:
ETD-L-signoff-request@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU.

You can also tell LISTSERV how you want it to confirm the receipt of messages that you send to the list. To send yourself a copy of your own messages, send a SET ETD-L REPRO command.

Alternatively, to have LISTSERV send you a short acknowledgement instead of the entire message, send a SET ETD-L ACK NOREPRO command. Finally, you can turn off acknowledgements completely with the SET ETD-L NOACK NOREPRO command.

This list is available in digest form. If you wish to receive the digested version of the postings, then issue a SET ETD-L DIGEST command.

You can also set the digest delivery option on the list subscription page at: http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=ETD-L.

Important: This list is confidential. You should not publicly mention its existence or forward copies of information you have obtained from it to third parties.
Please note that it is presently possible for other people to determine that you are signed up to the list through the use of the REVIEW command, which returns the email address and name of all the subscribers. If you do not want your name to be visible, then just issue a SET ETD-L CONCEAL command.

Following instructions from the list owner, your subscription options have been set to "SUBJECTHDR" rather than the usual LISTSERV defaults. For more information about subscription options, send a QUERY ETD-L command to LISTSERV@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU.

You may also check your current settings on the list subscription page at: http://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=ETD-L.

More information on the tools and options available for list subscribers may be found in the official L-Soft online documentation at: http://www.lsoft.com/resources/manuals.asp. The listserv is moderated by the author, who approves acceptable messages.

Summary

This paper has given you a brief history of the development of the Engineering Technology Listserv. More detail can be found in the second reference below. [2] It will be interesting to see if the listserv lasts for another twenty years, and if so, what it will look like then.

Bibliography


Biography

Walt Buchanan is a professor at Texas A&M University. He is a Fellow and served on the Board of Directors of both ASEE and NSPE, is a Past President of ASEE, and is a registered P.E. in six states. He is a past member of the Executive Committee of TAC of ABET, is on the editorial board of the Journal of Engineering Technology, has authored or co-authored over 200 journal articles and referred conference proceedings, and has been a principal investigator for NSF grants.