



Northeastern University

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Northeastern Voice Electronic Edition

Office of Marketing and Communications

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January 23, 2008

## Northeastern Voice: January 23, 2008

Northeastern University - Division of Marketing and Communications

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### Recommended Citation

Northeastern University - Division of Marketing and Communications, "Northeastern Voice: January 23, 2008" (2008). *Northeastern Voice Electronic Edition*. Paper 7. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d10014718>

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# Northeastern Voice

Electronic edition, Vol. 1 No. 3, Jan. 23, 2008

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**Let your voice be heard on diversity**

**University moves quickly in wake of accidental data release**

### University moves quickly after accidental data release

Northeastern technology experts have been working to mitigate any potential fallout from the inadvertent posting of some students' personal data on the Internet. [More >](#)



## Featured Article

### Let your voice be heard on diversity



When the results of the last campus diversity survey were released, more than 70 percent of respondents found Northeastern's climate "respectful" and "not racist."

Donnie Perkins, dean of affirmative action and diversity, found those 2001 survey results "gratifying," showing a marked improvement from a 1995 survey.

Now it's time to see if the trend continues, Perkins said. Over the next several weeks, the Office of Institutional Research will conduct a comprehensive survey of faculty, staff and students on diversity at the university. The dean is asking everyone to respond. [More >](#)

### Professors muse on the campaign (an ongoing Voice project)

#### Faculty in the news

- Law professor Wendy Parmet authors a piece in The Jurist about how the [Bush administration's pandemic planning efforts](#) are designed.
- Physics professors John Swan and Stephen Reucroft [answer science questions](#) weekly in The Boston Globe as "Dr. Knowledge."

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Now it's time to see if the trend continues, Perkins said. Over the next several weeks, the Office of Institutional Research will conduct a comprehensive survey of faculty, staff and students on diversity at the university. The dean is asking everyone to respond.

Said Perkins: "By taking 15 minutes to complete the online survey, you will provide information to benchmark the university's progress toward fully embracing diversity — one of our five core values in the new Academic Plan — and help us build a stronger campus community, and model for what our society can be."

President Joseph Aoun, whose oft-repeated mantra about universities providing models, not mirrors, Perkins was quoting, instituted a university-wide Committee on Community, Harmony, Inclusion and Justice shortly after his inauguration. He charged the committee to help "find better ways to live up to our own expectations of a campus community respectful of all its members."

Perkins said his office surveys the campus roughly every five to seven years. "The ultimate goal here is, of course, to help build a stronger community for everyone," he said. "We're encouraging everybody to participate. The stronger participation level we have, the better the results will be — better representing our thinking, our feeling, regarding our campus."

The last part of the survey, he said, allows for personal comments.

There will be a drawing, for "great gifts," from among those responding, Perkins noted.

The survey will go out by email to faculty and staff, and through the MyNEU portal to students. Results will be available later this year, research officials said.

(pictured Dean Donnie Perkins)

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A spreadsheet with the names, Social Security numbers and mid-term test scores from an undergraduate physics course for students in the class of 2008 was accidentally posted on an obscure but publicly accessible site at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in spring 2004.

Northeastern's IS security office was notified of the posting this month, and within hours worked to confirm all the information had been removed from the Fermi site and Internet search engines. Within days of that, the university notified the 410 students whose names and numbers were on the spreadsheet.

Officials have also informed the Massachusetts attorney general's office and Office of Consumer Affairs, in compliance with state law.

"This was a human error," said Glenn Hill, director of information security and identity services at Northeastern.

The university stopped using Social Security numbers as student identifiers in 2007, to minimize the potential damage from any such occurrence, he said.

He said Northeastern's quick response stemmed from practices established in 2001. "We do have a security-minded culture at Northeastern, and people know to call us" he said.

There have been no reports of misuse of the data, Hill noted.

In letters to the students, the university noted individuals' options for response, including requesting a "security freeze" on one's credit report, which prevents anyone from establishing credit, loans, insurance and many other services in an individual's name, and checking credit reports regularly.

Northeastern is reviewing security procedures and has communicated with faculty and staff on safeguarding protected information. For several years Hill has sent out quarterly security reminders to faculty and staff, and his office provides monthly security awareness training classes open to all members of the community.

Hill is available to answer questions by writing [privacy@neu.edu](mailto:privacy@neu.edu).