

CUNY Academic Commons - Feature #2880

RBE Group Post New Topic Shortlink Addresses

2013-11-08 01:29 PM - Matt Gold

Status: Resolved	Start date: 2013-11-08
Priority name: Normal	Due date:
Assignee: Raymond Hoh	% Done: 0%
Category name: BuddyPress (misc)	Estimated time: 0.00 hour
Target version: 1.11	
Description I think that RBE would be much, much stronger as a group communication tool if there was an easy way for people to send messages to an easy-to-remember email address in order to start new threads in their groups. Right now, the address is pretty convoluted; here, for instance, is the address one needs to write to to start a new thread in the CUNY DHI group: cunyacademiccommons+983b057f999b34eda61f174761898b1d-new@gmail.com Is there any way to create an easier-to-remember, more user-friendly version of that, a kind of shortlink of sorts that could be as easy to remember as posting to a listserv??	
Related issues:	
Related to CUNY Academic Commons - Feature #4331: Improve visibility of forum...	Resolved 2015-07-24
Related to CUNY Academic Commons - Feature #8929: Editing group forum email a...	Resolved 2017-11-21
Related to CUNY Academic Commons - Feature #8976: Package RBE new topics post...	Assigned 2017-12-04

History

#1 - 2013-11-08 01:33 PM - Raymond Hoh

I would say "no".

RBE follows many models on replying by email being used by Basecamp, Github, etc.

Github uses this for example - reply+i-22330393-65252cdefb274b76a5f9a973ceee37400aff6fc7-505921@reply.github.com

These email addresses are automatically generated and unique for each user so you **can't** remember them. Spammers can go crazy if they know these addresses and start spamming.

You can of course save each email address as a contact in your address book.

#2 - 2013-11-08 01:44 PM - Boone Gorges

I wonder, though, how much of an issue spam would be if we are whitelisting from-addresses against a member list anyway. So, RBE would have more spam to sift through on the back end, but none of it would ever show up on front, since spam wouldn't match the email address of a valid group member.

Plus, we would probably want to make the start-a-topic email address visible only to logged-in users. It'd still be predictable for someone who knew how to concatenate, but at least it wouldn't be scrapable.

These are just thoughts off the top of my head, though. What do you think, Ray?

#3 - 2013-11-08 01:48 PM - Raymond Hoh

I directly copied Basecamp's model. Email address headers can be spoofed and is not foolproof.

However, knowing this and if we need this functionality, I can go ahead and build it. If we wanted such a shortlink, how would it be formatted?

Some admin-defined prefix followed by a smaller hash or group ID?

#4 - 2013-11-08 01:52 PM - Boone Gorges

Email address headers can be spoofed and is not foolproof.

Yeah, I'd wondered about this. I'd worry less about spam in this case (you'd have to do a pretty large amount of research to identify the email addresses of legit group members) and more about malicious spoofing: one person intentionally posting a message, posing as someone else. If we

remove the member-specific hashes, there's not much preventing this.

Matt, what do you think? This seems like a security risk that, while perhaps not likely to be exploited, would be pretty ugly if it were.

#5 - 2013-12-06 01:42 AM - Matt Gold

I don't know the answer to this. I do wish there was a way to do this, as I think it would make BP groups much more usable as a replacement for listserves and would do much to promote usage on the CAC and other CBOX sites. But I hear you about security risks and certainly don't want to do anything that would endanger the site, create spam, or create distrust.

#6 - 2015-03-21 09:04 PM - Boone Gorges

- Status changed from Assigned to Deferred

#7 - 2015-03-21 09:16 PM - Matt Gold

:(

(not saying that wasn't the right choice, though)

#8 - 2016-02-02 12:59 PM - Raymond Hoh

- Status changed from Deferred to Hold

- Target version set to 1.10

This was brought up today in the devchat.

As we want groups on the Commons to become more like list-servs, this functionality becomes increasingly important.

Here are some proposals for a new email address to create a new group forum topic:

- cunyacademiccommons+group-ID-new@gmail.com (ID is the number of the group ID)

- cunyacademiccommons+group-SLUG-new@gmail.com (SLUG is the group slug; this could be long depending on the name of the group). For example, [this group's](#) email address would be

cunyacademiccommons+group-library-technology-subcommittee-of-the-cuny-committee-on-academic-technology-new@gmail.com

- cunyacademiccommons+group-CUSTOM-new@gmail.com (CUSTOM would be defined by the group admin. Would require building an admin screen and some checks to see if the custom slug is in use.)

I'm moving this to 2.0 for now, but could be moved back to Future Release pending feedback.

To play devil's advocate, would the email addresses listed above be that much simpler to use compared to what we have at the moment? You would still need to save the email address(es) in your email app if you post regularly to a certain group or groups.

Related: [#4331](#) - UI of the "Post By Email" option.

#9 - 2016-02-02 02:21 PM - Matt Gold

Thank you, Ray. Just one small point of clarification (especially for Boone) -- it's not that we want groups to become more like listservs, but rather that we want to make it easy for people to move from a listserv to a Commons group, since it is such a big potential use case for the Commons. In a recent meeting, two librarians spoke about moving the entire CUNY library listserv over to the CAC, which led me to think about the barriers to doing so -- one being how complex our registration process is, and another being how one would then need to find/join a group. Compare that to the onboarding process for a listserv, which is so much simpler.

I agree that the examples you've given above would not improve usability. We'd ideally have something like a short group email slug -- e.g. libtech@cunycommons.edu

#10 - 2016-02-19 02:28 PM - Raymond Hoh

I agree that the examples you've given above would not improve usability. We'd ideally have something like a short group email slug -- e.g. libtech@cunycommons.edu

RBE has two modes of operation: IMAP and Inbound Email.

We're currently using IMAP mode with Gmail, so our reply-to email address currently looks like this - cunyacademiccommons+EMAILHASH@gmail.com, which doesn't make things possible to use a shorter email address.

If we used Inbound Email mode, we could have a reply-to-email address like EMAILHASH@cunycommons.edu, and then I could code a new topic address that resembled what Matt was asking for.

However, currently, we cannot turn on both modes at the same time. If we moved to Inbound Email mode, replies made to the older Gmail RBE address would no longer post to the Commons site. We definitely do not want that to happen.

As a compromise, I'm thinking I could write a secondary plugin to turn on Inbound Email mode, but only for new topic emails. We would still use Gmail for the main RBE address for replying.

For Inbound Mode to work, we would need to have access to a domain like new.cunycommons.edu or whatever we decide to use for the new topic address domain. The Inbound Email set up process would be similar to what we've done with the General Chemistry sites, which uses Inbound Email mode.

For the custom email group slug, I think I'll have to create a UI for a group admin to change the email slug. But by default, it will use the existing group slug. The problem with offering such an interface is if the email slug changes, new topics created using an older version of the new topic address would fail. Something to think about.

I would still want to add the group- prefix to the slug. So, the email address would look like this - group-MYSLUG@new.cunycommons.edu. This is so if we ever wanted to post new different items in the future (eg. blog-), this would make things simpler.

For me to move forward, I need feedback on:

- The custom email slug interface and whether we want to offer this functionality (I lean towards "No" here);
- The group- prefix to the new topic email address and whether we should use it;
- And the email domain (eg. new.cunycommons.edu) we would want to use for the new topic email address and if we have access to that domain (might have to talk to IT about this)

#11 - 2016-02-21 04:22 PM - Matt Gold

Hi Ray,

Thanks for thinking all of this through. My thoughts:

-- I think that having inbound for new topics only and Gmail for RBE replying would be fine.

-- I do think we should offer the ability to customize the slug, as long as notice was sent out to group members when it was changed and emails sent to the old address would receive an error message pointing them to the new one

-- I'm happy to buy a domain name if that would be easier, or we could go through GC IT

Thanks for your work on this; I think this could be a pretty huge usability improvement for the Commons

#12 - 2016-09-06 12:01 AM - Raymond Hoh

- *Status changed from Hold to Assigned*

I've [created a new plugin for this](#) based on what we've discussed above.

Since the new topic email address will require RBE to use Inbound Mode, we will need to test this on a public site. (I'm suggesting nycdh.org.) Matt, I sent you an email over the weekend with details to proceed. Let me know if you'd rather use a different site to test.

#13 - 2016-09-06 09:07 AM - Matt Gold

Thanks, Ray! Looking forward to checking this out and I will respond to your email ASAP

#14 - 2016-10-21 06:10 AM - Raymond Hoh

- *Assignee changed from Raymond Hoh to Matt Gold*

Matt, just a friendly bump to set up an account at SparkPost so we can test customized new topic email addresses.

Let me know if you'd rather I set up the initial account.

#15 - 2016-10-21 10:21 AM - Matt Gold

Hi Ray,

Do you have the bandwidth to set up the initial account? I'd appreciate it if so

#16 - 2016-10-26 01:10 AM - Raymond Hoh

- *Target version changed from 1.10 to 1.11*

I think we'll have to move this to 1.11 or a 1.10.x milestone.

NYCDH.org will be our testing guinea pig when it is set up. Matt, let me know if you need anything else from me to move forward here.

After we are happy with this feature on NYCDH, we'll need to ping GC IT to set up some MX records for inbound email on the Commons.

Moving this to 1.11 for now.

#17 - 2017-04-06 11:00 AM - Boone Gorges

Ray, have you tested this on NYCDH? If we want to get this into a 1.11 release, we'll need to move soon on getting the MX records.

#18 - 2017-04-19 03:23 PM - Raymond Hoh

- Assignee changed from Matt Gold to Raymond Hoh

Yes, I've tested this on NYCDH.

We should get more testers to try and break things though.

The requested group email slug customization feature might overlap with [#6241](#). If cuny.is is used for group slug changes, then perhaps my plugin can look for cuny.is before falling back to what I created:

cff75412-73a8-11e6-9f31-0672c7595014.png

#19 - 2017-04-25 12:35 PM - Raymond Hoh

If we want to move forward with this ticket, we'll need to decide on an email domain to use for the new topic email address.

If we want to keep branding with the GC, we'll want a domain like reply.commonsgc.cuny.edu, which will require contacting IT. Another suggestion was cunycommons.edu made by Matt in [comment 9](#). If we go with that domain, it would still have to be a subdomain like reply.cunycommons.edu.

#20 - 2017-04-25 01:00 PM - Matt Gold

I think that we should proceed with a request to IT, as I don't think we can register an edu domain on our own

#21 - 2017-04-25 01:43 PM - Boone Gorges

It's highly unlikely we'll be able to register any kind of new .edu domain. The EDUCAUSE organization controls the tld, and I think there's a process. It'd have to be cunycommons.org or something.

Probably worth reaching out to GC IT. It's an easy change for them, as long as there are no bureaucratic issues.

#22 - 2017-04-28 02:02 PM - Raymond Hoh

So do we like reply.commonsgc.cuny.edu as the domain?

New topic email addresses would look like MY-GROUP@reply.commonsgc.cuny.edu.

Or do we want to rename the reply portion to something else? I can start the process to reach out to GC IT once we've decided on the domain.

#23 - 2017-04-28 02:11 PM - Matt Gold

another possibility is groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu

(I'm imagining that people will use this when they want to start threads more than when they are replying)

happy to consider other suggestions. and I also think that reply is fine

#24 - 2017-04-28 02:26 PM - Raymond Hoh

Currently, the prefix would have to be generic because the domain would also be used for other content such as private messages.

Although, I haven't really considered using two different domains before, it could be possible to have groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu just for new group topic emails and have reply.commonsgc.cuny.edu for replied content.

#25 - 2017-04-28 04:12 PM - Matt Gold

Thanks, Ray. can you explain what you mean by "generic" here? I'm trying to understand why "reply" is generic but "groups" is not

#26 - 2017-04-28 04:40 PM - Raymond Hoh

By default, for those using RBE in Inbound Mode, this domain is also used for the Reply-To email header, which is used by all RBE emails not just for groups.

However, for the Commons, since we would only be using this domain for new group topic emails and GMail for regular RBE items (for now at least), we could go with groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu.

When we move exclusively to Inbound Mode, we would need another domain like reply.commonsgc.cuny.edu.

#27 - 2017-04-28 04:42 PM - Matt Gold

Okay -- thank you. FWIW, "groups" makes sense to me if possible -- e.g. cunyghi@groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu -- since it will reinforce that people are writing to groups

#28 - 2017-05-02 01:09 PM - Raymond Hoh

I'm going to make the request to IT today to create the necessary MX records for groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu.

Do I send the request to helpdesk@gc.cuny.edu?

#29 - 2017-05-02 01:10 PM - Matt Gold

sure, that's fine thanks, Ray

#30 - 2017-05-02 04:32 PM - Raymond Hoh

Gary replied saying that IT doesn't manage the DNS for *.commonsgc.cuny.edu:

commonsgc.cuny.edu.png
~~Maybe we can go with groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu or something like that?~~

If we have control of the DNS, perhaps we can make the change ourselves. Or maybe we could even consider a shorter domain like groups.cuny.is (I think we own the domain to cuny.is).

#31 - 2017-05-02 09:01 PM - Matt Gold

I think it would be better to have the GC take over ownership of the DNS as they were supposed to, and then to move forward from there. Let's see what Gary and Lihua say tomorrow

(as I remember from my conversations with Amazon last year, our DNS is in a kind of limbo, with Amazon's Route 53 DNS service no longer attached to an account that I or the CAC control

#32 - 2017-05-10 08:51 PM - Raymond Hoh

- Status changed from Assigned to Testing Required

The custom new topic email address is ready for testing.

As per the dev call, since this requires testing on the production server, we do not want to expose the new version of the group email address to end users at this time.

So to test the custom new topic email address at the moment:

1. Navigate to a group that you are a member of
2. Note down the current URL of the group. We are interested in the group slug as this comprises the new topic email address. For example, in the following URL, commonsgc.cuny.edu/groups/my-test-group, the group slug is my-test-group.
3. Send an email to GROUP-SLUG@groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu. In the example above, I would send an email to my-test-group@groups.commonsgc.cuny.edu. The subject line will be the topic title. Make sure you send the email from the email address you registered with on the Commons, otherwise the topic will not be posted.
4. If everything is successful, you should see the new topic in the group.

As noted in [comment:18](#), the custom new topic email address also has a further option to customize the email address even more. I haven't exposed this feature on production because we do not want group admins to see this. But if we're interested in testing this, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

#33 - 2017-05-18 12:54 PM - Boone Gorges

Ray, is there something you need to do to swap out the current "find out how" UI with the new one that reflects the new addresses?

#34 - 2017-05-18 12:55 PM - Boone Gorges

- Status changed from Testing Required to Assigned

#35 - 2017-05-18 01:00 PM - Raymond Hoh

I've re-enabled the new group email address by removing a custom filter I had on production.

#36 - 2017-05-18 01:04 PM - Boone Gorges

- Status changed from Assigned to Resolved

Thanks!

#37 - 2017-11-21 12:01 PM - Raymond Hoh

- Related to Feature #8929: Editing group forum email address added

#38 - 2017-12-04 02:28 PM - Raymond Hoh

- Related to Feature #8976: Package RBE new topics posting? added