Goals:
My visualization on the mail system has two main purposes:
One is to maintain the relationship from a long distance; the other is to establish the global view of social networking. As an international student, I relied on the email as the main channel to contact my parents, sister, boyfriend and friends in hometown. Sometimes during the mid-term or final exam, the connection with my family would decline unconsciously. Therefore, I did get mails from my close others to remind me for taking care myself or trying to get more involvement with my life. This visualization will help me “see” the maintenance of each relationship. If I forgot to reply email to a friend for a certain time, I’ll easily remind myself from the visualization of mail system. Not only for the international students or people who lived far away from their family, as the global economic connected more tightly, there was a trend that people with intimacy may not live in the same city. Thus, the need to maintain a long-distance relationship might be more important in the near future.

The basic layout
The visualization was based on a global map which specified the living cities of senders and receivers. I used the color wave as a metaphor of interpersonal relationship which implied how frequently people contacted each other. If two people contacted each other a lot, the bandwidth of the wave would be broader. For example, there was a relatively thin purple wave
from Australia which means the correspondence between us was not two-directional or less frequent. As the time goes by, people sometimes may lost connection with others; thus, some waves which didn’t connect to the user directly implied their last email was too long ago. Another feature was the colors of the wave represented how close the relationship stands. Sometimes even people don’t contact each other that often, they can still maintain a close relationship; on the contrary, people you contacted everyday might not be your close friend at all. Thus, the thermometer might imply the intimacy of relationship which might not interact with the bandwidth of the wave. Another feature was to show the time difference between different areas; thus, people can easily identify which time zone (day or night) his friend was in through the visualization. If people were online, the wave would flow as a dynamic thread; if not, the wave would stay static. Then people can contact their friend according to their availability and time-appropriateness.

![Thermometer of intimacy](image)

Closer relationship

Colder relationship

Thermometer of intimacy
Use examples to illustrate the visualization (My private email from January to Now)

The direction of sunlight.

The borderline of day and night

A friend who doesn’t contact really often, but we still remain close relationship.

The green wave implied a friend who lost connection during the summer. But we kept mailing each other now.

This implied a friend who wrote to me several times. But I somehow forgot to reply, and the connection shut down.

The red wave implied the closest relationship which is my sister. But we wrote to each other less frequently during my final exam; thus, there was a temporary decrease of the bandwidth. However, the relationship so far maintains well.

This wave implied my boyfriend and our relationship maintains well and closely during these months.
The center of the wave

Summary
This information visualization presents several important features:

1. Each colored wave represents one respondent.
2. The bandwidth of the wave implied how frequently they contacted each other. The small bandwidth meant either the unidirectional relationship or less frequently contact.
3. The color of the wave implied the relationship between two people.
4. If the wave disappeared before reaching the user, it meant the user didn't contact the sender for a while. The conversation was temporarily dead.
5. If the wave flows, that means the person was currently online; if the wave remains static, that means the person was offline.
6. The different brightness of the map implied if the people in the area were during their daytime or nighttime; thus, you may know if it's appropriate to contact them.
online.

7. If the wave kept narrowing down, this may remind you to maintain or repair the relationship.

8. The visualization may help people maintain the relationship from a long distance. The pattern of correspondence also implied the life cycle of user’s social network. Also, it would let people live alone from their close others feel kinds of intimacy. From the figure, it showed physical distance didn’t influence the mental distance directly. If the connection remains well, the relationship stays.