Making Records Management Work for Your Department

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Records Management (RM)?
Records management is the systematic control of the life span of records, from their creation through their final disposition.

What is defined as a record?
A record is any written, photographic, machine-readable, or other information created or received that documents activities in the conduct of university business.

What is a Retention Schedule?
A records retention schedule is a listing of records series, also known as the record type, commonly found at the university. The schedule further lists the **minimum** length of time these items must be retained, any legal citations which help determine retention, and whether the record series is recognized as having "archival" value.

As outlined in T.G.C. § 441.187 and 13 T.A.C. § 6.7, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) grants permission to Texas Tech University to destroy official university records by certifying a records retention schedule that lists recognized record series, their retention times and their proper disposal methods.

Texas Tech University's Records Retention Schedule is reviewed and recertified every three years by the TSLAC under T.G.C. § 441.185. A records survey is done every 2 ½ years to ensure that the revised retention schedule submitted to the TSLAC

includes all known record series found at the university. Texas Tech OPs 10.10 and 10.09 define the responsibilities and authority for the records management program.

For more information regarding the Records Management program at Texas Tech, contact Lynn Whitfield at lynn.whitfield@ttu.edu or call (806) 742-8675.

What does records management mean for my department?
Each university department or unit has a responsibility to preserve and protect of all records that are under its control. For the rest of this document, the term "department" will be used to cover the terms "department," "unit" and "area."

What are the benefits of a records management program?

As stated in university OPs 10.10 and 10.09, each department should appoint an individual, or individuals if needed, to review their university records to determine whether the records should be further retained or destroyed.

Benefits of managing a record's life span include:

- Quicker retrieval of records
- Better security for the protection of employee and student rights
- Meeting compliance with statutory and federal guidelines concerning record management rules and regulations.
- Providing support and protection in litigation by reducing the volume of records that must be searched when responding to open records requests, audits, subpoenas, and other administrative requirements.
- More efficient use of prime office space
- Eliminating record overflows in the filing cabinets, storage closets, and/or computer servers where records

are kept "just in case," thus allowing the approved disposal of unnecessary records.

- Helps ensure that historical records are sent to the University Archives, which is the entity responsible for long term preservation of Texas Tech's historical papers and artifacts.

How should my department organize its records?

In addition to appointing an individual to administer the records, each department should establish a policy on how it will attend to lifecycle of its records.
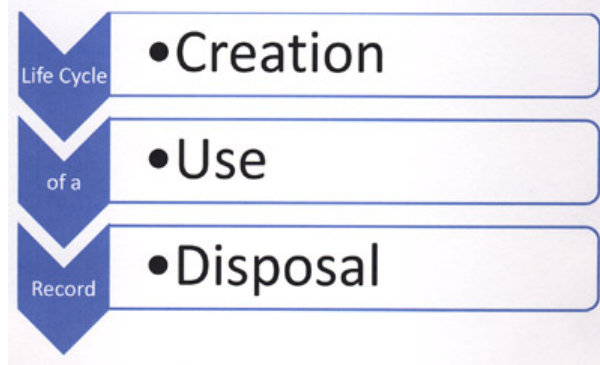
It is recommended that office files be reviewed at least once a year, preferably around the same time each year. The University's records retention schedule at http://www.swco.ttu.edu/recordsmanagement/rrs.html should be used to determine which records have met their minimum retention times and can be disposed.

In order to streamline the process, many departments will cull through their files at a set time. Often this takes place near the end of the fiscal year in preparation for the new school year.

One popular method of managing record life cycles involves the annual shifting of files using the following steps:

Expired records that have met their minimum retention time and are no longer needed should be set aside for disposal. New folders are made for the upcoming year's new records. Existing records that have not fulfilled their minimum retention time and/or are still necessary for operations are then moved further back in the filing cabinet.

Many departments also prefer to designate a set period of time for active records and another for inactive records. A popular combination is 5 years for active records and 3-5 years for inactive records. Any records beyond 10 years that have been flagged as "archival" according to the university's retention schedule should be sent to the University Archives.

There are only a few departments who are responsible for master copies of records deemed as having long-term retention. These departments include Personnel, the Registrar's Office, and Institutional Research.

The 10 year time period allows for an area to keep up with their operations and to reflect back on activity within a reasonable number of years. Beyond that time period, historical records should be transferred over to the University Archives. Non-historical and unnecessary records should be properly disposed.

It is important to keep in mind that the State of Texas has approved only a few record series for long-term or permanent retention. Most of those records have been flagged as "archival." The few others flagged with long-term or permanent retention pertain to master copies of student records and personnel files.

What is the difference between a master copy and a convenience copy of a record?

A record is designated as either a master copy or a convenience copy.

The master copy of a record is the **one** official version retained as the original. As such, it is subject to the requirements outlined in the Texas Tech University's records retention schedule and disposition policies. The master version can exist in any format or medium, from paper to digital to microfilm. The format must be readable, either by human eye or machine, during the required retention time for the record. The department in charge of the master copy is responsible for ensuring that the record remains readable. Departments should also be very clear and consistent when determining which format the master copy will reside in.

Convenience (or "duplicate") copies are all other versions of a record beyond the one master copy. These do not fall under the university retention schedule and may be discarded at any time.

Caution: Convenience copies retained after the destruction of a master copy of a record will automatically become a "master copy" and thus are subject to legal discovery and the university's retention schedule. Therefore, convenience copies should be destroyed along with the expired master copy or destroyed prior to the destruction of the master copy.

What is the difference between the university's open records versus confidential record?

Viewable by anyone under the Open Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act, an open record is a document or group of documents that has been created, used and/or retained for the purpose of any university business or function.

Confidential university records contain information that should only be accessible by persons with proper authorization. Examples of confidential records include transcripts, medical reports, background security checks, and social security information.

What is the difference between general and administrative correspondence?

This question comes up often when departments are culling through their expired records.

General Correspondence is defined by the State of Texas as "non-administrative incoming/outgoing and internal correspondence, in any media, pertaining to or arising from the routine operations of the policies, programs, services, or projects of an agency." It should be retained for 1 year.

Administrative Correspondence is defined by the State of Texas as "administrative correspondence as incoming/outgoing and internal correspondence pertaining to the formulation, planning, implementation, interpretation, modification, or redefinition of the programs, services, or projects of an agency and the administrative regulations, policies, and procedures that govern them." It should be retained for 3 years.

CAUTION: An archival review is required for the administrative correspondence records of the Office of the President, Senior and Vice Presidents, the Provost's Office, Legal Counsel, Internal Audit, and other upper executive staff members. This record series also includes correspondence from task forces, university committees and faculty.

What records are not included in the university's retention schedule?

The following are not considered official state records and can be disposed of at any time:

- Blank forms, letterhead and envelopes
- Convenience copies (or duplicates) kept only for reference needs
- Reference materials such as catalogs, journals, trade publications and conference materials not published by the Texas Tech University System

Is Email a record series?

Emails are created or received in the conduct of university business and can document related activities and events. Their retention length depends on whether the content of the email falls under general correspondence, administrative correspondence or transitory information.

Employees can receive an overwhelming amount of email. The ease with which one can hit the "reply" button actually encourages people to respond in bulk.

Emails that have nothing to do with university business, activities and events are considered transitory. These unnecessary, non-university related emails should be deleted as quickly as possible in order for employees to have better control on the volume of their email boxes.

Is the retention time for electronic records different than those of other formats?

The retention time for an electronic record is the same as other traditional formats. While it is not uncommon for a record to exist in multiple formats, a department should determine which version of a record will serve as the master copy and which will version(s) will serve as a convenience copy.

CAUTION: Convenience copies retained after the destruction of a master copy of a record will automatically become a "master copy" and thus are subject to legal discovery and the university's retention schedule. Therefore, convenience copies should be destroyed along with the expired master copy or destroyed prior to the destruction of the master copy.

Guidelines set by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission for electronic and microfilmed records can be found at http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/slrm/recordspubs/

What do I need to do if a record series requires archival review?

T.G.C. § 441.186 of the State Records Management Laws grants universities the authority to retain and preserve the archival state records of the institution. Record series that are flagged as "archival" on the University's retention schedule are considered to have possible valuable historical information and **should not** be discarded without approval of the University Archivist.

The University Archivist can be reached by email at lynn.whitfield@ttu.edu or by calling (806) 742-8675.

What if I cannot find what I am looking for on the university's retention schedule?

The retention schedule identifies which record series are known to commonly exist in the Texas Tech University System. Should you run across a record series that is not listed please contact the Records Management Office at (806) 742-8675.

The title of a record series is often established by the State and may differ from what a department may call the record. In instances where a new record series needs to be created because it is either missing from the current retention schedule or differs from an already established record series, the University Archivist will work with the department to establish the new series and have it approved by the State of Texas.

What is a Disposition Log?

Before master copies of official university records can be disposed, a department is required to complete a form called a Disposition Log. On this form the department lists such information as the name of the records to be destroyed, their retention length, the disposal method, the name of the individual in charge of the records, and the date of disposal.

The log can be downloaded from http://www.swco.ttu.edu/recordsmanagement/dform.htm.

The disposition log basically serves as a paper trail for university records that have been disposed of, and should be kept by the department for a period of 10 years, as cited in OP 10.10 item #5. Departments can either keep the log on an annual basis or keep a running log that covers multiple years.

The master copy of the disposition log resides with the department, which may then chose to send a copy of the log to the Records Management Office.

Why do I have to do all this paperwork?

To be in compliance with Texas State Law, each state agency is mandated to have an on-going and active records management program. This includes having an appointed records manager, having departments participate in the records survey process, having the university's records retention schedule recertified every three years, and having departments properly manage their records per state requirements. Improper destruction of governmental records is covered under T.P.C. § 37.10.

What are the disposal methods for university records?

Proper disposal of records must be used, regardless of whether the record is a master copy or a convenience copy. Records that do not contain any confidential information can be placed in the trash or a recycle bin.

All records that contain confidential and/or personal information, such as social security numbers and grades, should be disposed of a manner that preserves the confidentiality of the information.

Since 2007, the Chief Information Officer's Office (CIO) has arranged a fall and spring Shred Day event that offers free, secure and on-site shredding of records for the Texas Tech community. The University Archives works with CIO to host these events.

Typically, the spring Shred Day event is hosted in May, and the fall Shred Day is hosted in October. CIO will send out notices via

newsletter and Tech Announce to notify the campus of an upcoming Shred Day event.

Departments that deal with large amounts of confidential records that need to be shredded can also contract with one of the local document disposal companies used by the university. These companies deliver bins that can be secured and return to empty the bins into their on-site shredding vehicles.

CAUTION: A state record may not be destroyed if any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit, open records request, administrative review, or other action involving the record is initiated before the expiration of a retention period for the record set by the commission or in the approved records retention schedule of the agency until the completion of the action and the resolution of all issues that arise from it, or until the expiration of the retention period, whichever is later.

-T.G.C. § 441.187(b)

Who is responsible for Disaster Recovery?

It is the responsibility of Texas Tech administrators to have a backup plan to protect their vital records (i.e. those records that are irreplaceable, unique, or necessary for the operation of their department and the University). The Libraries' disaster recovery procedures are set forth under their Disaster Response Plan. The rest of the University's responsibility to disaster recovery is outline under the security section of OP 76.01.

The Department of Marketing and Communications has a PDF version of the "Emergency Management Plan for Texas Tech University Lubbock Campuses" at http://www.depts.ttu.edu/communications/emergency/downloads/ttu-emergency-plan.pdf

The Texas Tech University Records Management Office is housed in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library.