UW-Madison Records Management:

A 10-Step Plan for Organization and Management of University Records

Information is at the center of everything the University does: strategic & decision planning, research & development, teaching & learning. The knowledge and transmission of information is basic to the University’s mission:

*The primary purpose of the University of Wisconsin Madison is to provide a learning environment in which faculty, staff and students can discover, examine critically, preserve and transmit the knowledge, wisdom and values that will help ensure the survival of this and future generations and improve the quality of life for all.*

How our employees, staff and faculty manage university records and information can directly affect the ability to make decisions, compete, comply with regulations, and recover from disaster – in other words, to operate efficiently. University records are an important information asset for the university.

The following records management best practices will not only help you meet legal requirements, they will benefit you and the University in many ways such as:

- Improving access to information
- Controlling the growth of materials taking up valuable office space
- Reducing operating costs
- Minimizing litigation risks
- Safeguarding vital information
- Supporting better management decision making
- Preserving Historical records

*Records have a Life-cycle.*

1. Records are first **created or received** both physically and electronically. Records are **active** in this stage.

2. Records are then **distributed to others, used and filed**. Records are in a **semi-active** stage.

3. Over time records lose their value. Record activity drops and then they need to be stored or transferred to less expensive storage offsite to fulfill retention period. This is the **inactive stage** of records.
4. When the retention periods expire, records then are up for disposition and eligible for destruction or transfer to the UW-Archives based on the records policy and records value.

5. The records retention & disposition schedule is suspended during litigation hold or audit hold. Destruction should be done per the records retention policy and within the normal course of business.

**Records have a Value**

*NOTE: Simply keeping records forever – past their usefulness – is neither cost-effective nor prudent. The assignment of retention periods must be carefully considered and crafted in a meaningful way to support the organization and its functions.*

Records have a value assigned to determine how long they are to be retained.

Retention periods are not arbitrarily created. Rather, they are determined by appraising their usefulness or value in these five areas:

- **Administrative / Operational Value:** The usefulness of records to the office of origin for carrying out its day-to-day activities. This is the period of time during which an organization or a department uses a record to perform its primary function or a record process.

- **Legal Value:** The usefulness of records to contain evidence of legally enforceable rights or obligations of the government or private persons. There may also be federal or state legal retention requirements to meet.
• **Archival/Historical Value:** The usefulness of records for the preservation of University records and information of permanent historical value.

• **Research Value:** The usefulness of records for over time for university research and study.

**Who is responsible for managing records and information?**

**Everyone is.** Each employee of the University has an important role to play in protecting the future of the University by creating, using, retrieving, and disposing of records in accordance with the University’s established policies and procedures including the *Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles* as a campus best practice.

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Integrity
- Protection
- Compliance
- Accessibility
- Retention
- Disposition

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**THE 10-STEP RECORDS MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR UNIT OF DEPARTMENT OFFICE**

**Step 1:** Determine who will be responsible and what resources will be needed.

**Step 2:** Identify Paper and Electronic Records in the department or unit. This is known as a Records Inventory.

**Step 3:** Match records to the appropriate university records schedules. *Contact the University Records Officer if there are questions.*

**Step 4:** Using the inventory review filing systems and how records are classified and where they are stored.
Step 5: Prepare a "Department or Unit file plan." See Job Aid to Document Your Departments Records Management Practices aka “File Plan Creation” [pdf]

Step 6: Execute the schedule....Clean out records which are beyond the approved retention periods using the schedules.

Step 7: Re-organize your records

Step 8: Maintain your records on an on-going basis

Step 9: Train and communicate that the department or unit has a documented way to handle both electronic and paper records.

Step 10: If you need more assistance, contact the University Records Officer for a consultation

**LET’S GET STARTED WITH THE PLAN:**

**STEP 1: Determine who will be responsible and what resources will be needed.**

Establish a team with representatives from all sub units and job series (not just support and clerical staff) to oversee the department’s records management responsibilities. The project team should:

- Determine who will be responsible for the records initiative within the department or unit
- What resources will be needed to accomplish the task?
- Who will maintain and audit the records after the initial task is completed.

**STEP 2: Identify Paper and Electronic Records in the department or unit. This is known as a Records Inventory.**

Conduct a records inventory of the materials in your office. Don’t forget to include empty offices, closets, and other areas where things may have been "stashed." Include records that may be stored out at the State Records Center (SRC). Also include electronic records in shared drives, and email and collaboration spaces such as UW-
Madison Box.net Google Drive, Dropbox, and Microsoft OneDrive. Also review any unit or departmental business processes and document what records are created from those processes.

A records inventory will help you identify which materials are:

- Records
- Reference materials (non-records)
- Personal papers (non-records)
- Extra copies of documents or forms (non-records)

The inventory will also help you identify which records would need to be immediately available in the event of an emergency (vital records).

Document on the inventory, at a minimum:

- Where documents are located in the unit or department both physically and electronically. Are there records in a shared drive, email, desktops, file cabinets, in the cloud
- How much there is: # of Boxes, GB in electronic share drive etc.
- What format is it being stored in? (e.g., paper, electronic, application, databases, cloud etc.).

(When you have a "snapshot" of the scope of materials in your unit or department, you may need to go back to Step 1 and review the resources available to complete the process.)

STEP 3: Match your records to the university records schedules.

The next step in the organization of the records is to match the records identified in the inventory with the University Records Retention and Disposition Schedules. Records Retention Policies provide information on how long records are to be kept in the office and what happens when they are no longer needed in the office.

Retention periods as stated in the schedules should be completed with consistency and within the normal course of business. Records schedules can be found on the UW-Madison Records Management website. The following types of retention schedules are:

- UW-System wide Retention Schedules that the entire UW system campuses utilize.
• **Campus-wide Retention Schedules for UW-Madison use.**

• **Departmental:** Each department may have additional schedules for a specific record type unique to that area also known as Records Disposition Authorizations (RDA). *Contact the University Records Officer if you need to find out about a departmental schedule.*

**STEP 4: Review Filing Systems and how records are classified and where they are stored.**

Now that a records inventory has been completed and the retention schedules have been applied the team will need to determine and document how records will be maintained within the unit or department. Classification is used in records management to create file plans, filing systems and retention schedules.

• Review where and how records are filed and stored. A filing system is the “Systematic indexing and arranging or records based on established procedures.” ARMA Glossary.

• **Development of standardized naming conventions** for records especially for electronic records kept in shared drives, electronic folders and email for good origination. Utilize the Retention schedule for categories as a start.

• Most filing systems are arranged alphabetically, chronologically, numerically, or alpha-numeric for paper filing system.

• If records will be kept in a "centralized" area, or "decentralized" at individual work stations.

• Document if any records are kept in third party applications or cloud storage (outside of the university firewalls).

• Include any process maps for records processes that the department utilizes such as in scanning or imaging records.

Remember – Non-record materials such as convenience copies and personal papers need to be maintained separate from records.
STEP 5: Prepare a "File Plan."

Taking the information from Step 4 prepare a **file plan** lists the records in your office, and describes how they are organized and maintained and stored. A good file plan is one of the essential components of a recordkeeping system, and a key to a successfully managing records and information. Job Aid to Document Your Departments Records Management Practices *aka* “File Plan Creation” [pdf]

A **File Plan** will help you:

- document your activities effectively
- identify records consistently
- retrieve records quickly
- disposition records no longer needed
- meet statutory and regulatory requirement.

A **file plan** gives details on:

- How your records are organized and maintained,
- Who is responsible for doing what by job function? Look at the business process work flow of the information.
- When it should be done (e.g., annual file retirement),
- What happens to the records when they are no longer needed in the office? Where should they be stored both electronically and physically?
- Do you have a migration plan of what to do with records when a new recordkeeping application replaces an old one? It is recommended that you migrate all old legacy records to the new recordkeeping system. Keep in mind some of those records may have not met their retention requirements yet.
- Include all the decisions you made in steps 1 through 5 (e.g., what happens to draft documents).

STEP 6: Execute the schedule....Clean out records which are beyond the approved retention periods.

Once you have documented your file plan you can begin to organize your records. First, however, it is a good idea to get rid of those materials in your office which are not needed within the normal course of business. If authorized by the records schedule, you can:
• Retire records which are inactive in the office to offsite storage (the State Records Center (SRC))

• Transfer permanent records to the UW- Madison Archives according to retention schedule.

• Recycle materials which have passed their approved retention period.  
  Remember to shred materials containing confidential or personal information.

• Suspend the retention schedule if under a litigation hold or audit until they are completed and lifted.

“Should I retain my records past the approved retention period just in case I need them?”

No, it is strongly suggested that you destroy records promptly at the time the retention period governing them has been completed.

There are several reasons for this:

a. Retaining records longer than necessary fills up hard copy and electronic storage space making it difficult to access and retrieve those record items that are needed.

b. Disposing of records in the normal course of business in accordance with approved retention schedules and procedures demonstrates consistency in records and information management practices. Courts understand of records destruction in instances in which the organization can demonstrate that a comprehensive records management program exists and the disposition is carried out on a systematic and routine basis.

c. It can be costly for the University in audit or legal action. If records that should have been destroyed remain available and an audit or court action is commenced, they are subject to subpoena and discovery. In the case of audits, if an exception is discovered, penalties can be assessed as far back as records are available.

STEP 7: Re-organize your records.

Once the file plan is created and the retention schedules applied the unit or department can now begin to implement the File Plan.
1. First, prepare folders and organize documents within the folders. Then follow
the procedures established in your file plan.

2. Place reference sheets in folders, when necessary, to refer users to the location
of related non-paper materials such as maps, drawings, videotapes, etc.

3. Organize electronic documents (e.g., word-processing documents, e-mail
messages, spreadsheet etc.) residing on individual computer or local shared
network using the standardized naming conventions from Step 3.

4. Remember to spend the majority of your time on the "mission-related" records
and less on administrative or "housekeeping" records such as routine
correspondence.

5. Document the records management plan for your department or unit and keep
updated for future use. This will be very helpful as staff changes or turns over.

STEP 8: Maintain your records on an on-going basis.

Once everything is organized, it is important to keep it current and up to date. It is a
best practice to be in compliance with your records management process and audit your
procedure periodically.

In addition be it is recommended to:

- File new materials on a regular basis (e.g., weekly).
- Protect records containing confidential information such as student information,
  health information or personal information.
- Establish a check-out system (e.g., "out" cards) to track the location of your
  records so you always know where they are.
- Clean out inactive materials on a regular basis, usually at the end of a year
  (academic year, fiscal or calendar year as per your written procedures).
- Organize and send inactive records to the State Records Center for lower cost
  storage.
- Keep shared drives organized according to standard naming conventions
  approved by department.
- Spend 15 minutes a day focusing on just one topic/item/folder and you will find
  yourself managing your records.
STEP 9: Train, Train, Train & Practice the Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles.

*Congratulations!* Now you have a file plan. You've cleaned out all the unnecessary materials and organized the necessary records and information.

Your job isn't over yet! You need to be sure all staff members (and student workers) know about their recordkeeping responsibilities.

The *Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles* provide a best practice to good recordkeeping. These principles are: Accountability, Transparency, Integrity, Protection, Compliance, Availability, Retention and Disposition.

Check the UW-Madison Records Management Website for resources, records schedules and other information for your department or unit. Search on the main UW page “Records Management”.

STEP 10: If you need more assistance, contact the University Records Officer for a consultation

- Management of Physical and Electronic Records
- Classification & Files Management (including email, Shared Network Drives)
- Development of Records Retention and Disposition Schedules
- Departmental and Campus communication & Training
- Litigation & Audit Support

**OTHER RESOURCES:**

FAQ by Topic: [http://www.library.wisc.edu/archives/records-management/training/frequently-asked-questions/](http://www.library.wisc.edu/archives/records-management/training/frequently-asked-questions/)


References for this document came from:

Michigan State University: A 10-Step Records Management Plan for Your Unit.  
http://archives.msu.edu/records/CreateRMPlanUniversityArchivesMichiganStateUniversity.php?records_createFP

For more information contact:  the UW- Madison University Records Officer  
recmgmt@library.wisc.edu