RECORDS MANAGEMENT @ WWU: E-MAIL

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What's a “Public Record”? 

- RCW 40.14 requires all public records to be kept according to an approved retention schedule
  - Illegal to destroy public records except according to approved retention schedule
- “Public Records” includes all
  - “writing” (“writing” = any information affixed to a medium, not just text on paper)
  - prepared, owned, used, or retained by Western
  - relating to the conduct of Western or the performance of any institutional or proprietary function
- **Email is a public record**
What about Email?

University policy describes the appropriate use of resources:

- Used to support administrative and academic functions
- Used for official duties
- Employees responsible for own actions

more…
What about Email?

University policy on use of resources (continued):

- Occasional, very limited personal use OK
  
  a) There is little or no cost to the state;
  
  b) The use is brief in duration, occurs infrequently, and is the most effective use of time and resources;
  
  c) The use does not interfere with the performance of the employee’s official duties;
  
  d) The use does not disrupt or distract from the conduct of University business due to volume or frequency;
  
  e) The use does not disrupt other University or other state employees and does not obligate them to make a personal use of state resources;
  
  f) The use does not compromise the security or integrity of state property or software; and,
  
  g) The use is not a prohibited use as set forth in Section 6 of University Policy POL-U5400.05, “Using University Resources” more...
What about Email?

University policy on use of resources (continued):

- Employees shall have no expectation of privacy
  - Emails are public records and can be disclosed in the case of public records requests or litigation
  - “Don’t put anything in an email that you would not want on the front page of a newspaper”
  - Don’t use work email as a personal email account
Do I have to keep all my email?

- No.
  - What you keep depends on the nature of the email
  - A high percentage of email is informational or reference-only and can be disposed when no longer needed

- Emails you need to retain:
  - Those that document your official work, decisions made and executed, transactions carried out
    - Including attachments
  - Retention depends on which record series the emails document

[WWU General Records Retention Schedule]
Here is President Haggard posing for an official portrait. The pen and paper identify an era when creating a record was a very conscious and official act. Technology has made creating and sharing records far simpler today, yet we must still be mindful of the intent behind the information we create and use. Email, in particular, challenges us to consider our relationship to the business processes in which we participate.
How can I possibly manage all my email?

- It’s better not to treat all email as equal!
  - Consider dividing email into two types:
    - Email you can delete immediately
    - Email you need to keep or act upon
E-mail Record Decision Tree

How to decide if an e-mail is a record.

- Related to WWU or your responsibilities at WWU
  - Yes
  - No → Nonrecord

- Are you the Sender/Creator
  - Yes
  - No

  - Are you the Recipient
    - Yes
    - No → Nonrecord

  - Does it explain, justify, or document an action or decision
    - Yes
    - No → Nonrecord

    - RECORD
      - File in recordkeeping system

  - Do you need to take an action
    - Yes
    - No → Nonrecord

    - Does it explain, justify, or document an action or decision
      - Yes
      - No → Nonrecord

    - RECORD
      - File in recordkeeping system
What email can I delete immediately?

- Personal email
  - “Let’s meet for lunch”
    - (not even considered a public record)

- Information-only email
  - “Staff meeting at 2pm today”
  - “Newsletter for March”

- Copies or drafts of documents
  - Sent to you for your information or comment; sender will be responsible for retaining official copies; you might keep a copy of drafts you comment on until the final draft is approved.

- Emails created solely for the preparation of other records

- Secondary copies with no retention requirement (where you are not the official copy holder)

- Junk email
What email do I need to keep?

Email you initiate or act upon that...

- Documents the substantive or official work of your unit or the university
- Authorizes the expenditure of funds (*but less likely to be manifest in a simple email...*)
- Documents negotiations on behalf of the university
- Contains information the loss of which would jeopardize ongoing work
- Establishes or alters policy

These emails should all be identifiable with a business function or activity documented on a records retention schedule

- Same as paper
It’s important to consider not only whether we have the appropriate tools or technology for the task but also whether we are all aiming at the target. The “target” is not only to complete the task but to establish an accountable record of it.
How do we manage the email we need to keep?

Factors to consider:

- Where will you **store** your email?
- How will you **organize** your email?

- **Note:** The following discussion presents several options for storing and organizing email. You may wish to consult with IT staff regarding some of the storage options available to you. Regardless of where/how stored, emails are public records and are subject to all retention and disposition rules. Email must be accessible in electronic form for the length of its applicable retention period.
Where should you store email?

- **Option 1: In Outlook/Outlook Web/Office365**
  - **Advantages:**
    - Email is all in one place
    - Accessible over the web
    - Regularly backed up
    - Relatively secure
  - **Disadvantages**
    - Possibility of over-retention: lots of storage reduces pressure to clean out unnecessary email
      - Creates difficulties for litigation or public records requests
      - Creates long-term management problems due to too many unnecessary records
Where should you store email?

- Option 2: On a network server (either in personal email folders or in shared drives outside of email program)
  
  **Advantages:**
  - More disk space
  - Regular backup
  - Security
  
  **Disadvantages:**
  - May not be accessible remotely
  - May not be stored as part of email program
Where should you store email?

- Option 3: On your PC hard drive
  
  - Advantages:
    - More disk space
  
  - Disadvantages:
    - Not backed up regularly
    - Accessible only on that PC
    - Not recommended.
Where should you store email?

- Option 4: On an external drive, CD/DVD or other media

Advantages:
- Can be used for rarely accessed data
- External media can provide extra storage quickly

Disadvantages:
- Not easily accessible
- Media may degrade over time or become obsolete
- Nearly impossible to manage different retention periods

Not recommended
- Most variations of this option do not support good records management
- Should only be done for well-organized email files
- Backup tapes do not satisfy records retention requirements
How should you organize email?

- **Recommendation: Combination of inbox and filing system**
  - Delete emails you don’t need to keep
    - Do this first and on a daily basis
  - File emails you know you want/need to keep and don’t have to follow up on
    - These may be emails that you want to keep as evidence of your activities or evidence of a business transaction.
    - Create folders for these that are easily identifiable
  - Emails left in your inbox should be emails you need to act upon or on which you need resolution
    - You could “flag” these or even create a separate “follow-up” folder
In this example, email folders are organized according to common activities.

The records that result from common activities are what make up records series. All activities that produce records must be documented by a corresponding records series.

Since records retention schedules are applied at the records series level, this method of organizing records will help facilitate compliant records management.

However, this also introduces a level of complexity to managing an email account, so it’s best to file only necessary records and to eliminate any emails with no retention requirement.
How should you organize email?

- Some situations require suspension of retention schedule
  - “Preservation hold” or Public Records Request
    - Need to preserve records that are subject to Public Records Requests, Audits, Litigation, or other officially-mandated purpose
    - Should copy all relevant email/folders into a designated folder, with indefinite retention, for the specific hold

- Some emails also have permanent archival value
  - In those cases, the email records must be transferred to University Archives for historical preservation.
    - Contact University Archives for assistance
How should you organize email?

- Be mindful of program continuity

Email records pertaining to the functions of our office, like any other records, must be kept intact for our successors. This requires planning for program continuity in the event of personnel changes.
What about printing emails or other electronic records?

- State law does not allow us to delete an electronic record in favor of a paper copy when the electronic version is the official version.
- Still acceptable (and advisable) to print a reference copy to file with a paper file unit for completeness (if a paper file unit exists).
Which is the “official copy”—paper or electronic?

- **Paper** if the paper version is the one with full authority
  - Usually based on a signature or if the complete version was created first on paper
- **Electronic** if it is created electronically and is not dependent on hand signature or other non-electronic information for authority
  - Electronic version contains metadata critical to the record
- **Scanning paper into electronic form**
  - Process must be approved first if paper will be destroyed
    - (WAC 434-663)
  - Contact University Archives & Records Management
    - Tony Kurtz x3124
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Why is all this necessary?

- Legal requirement
- Litigation
- Fiscal/Audit
- Public Disclosure
- Efficiency
- Transparency & Accountability
- History
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Western Libraries Heritage Resources

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