University of Wyoming

American Heritage Center

Introduction to Records Scheduling and Management for University of Wyoming Offices, Colleges, and Departments

American Heritage Center

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This booklet is intended to assist the University of Wyoming's colleges, departments, and offices that wish to improve control over their records. It is intended to be a brief introduction to issues involved in managing University records. At the end of the booklet is a section containing forms and contact information should you need assistance.

This booklet was originally prepared in 1992 by Mark A. Greene for the Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul, MN) at the behest of the Minnesota State Historical Records Advisory Board, and with funds provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. It was intended for non-profit institutions. The booklet has been updated, by its original author and Mark Shelstad (former Manager of Digital Programs), for the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (Laramie, WY), to better reflect issues relating to computer-generated records. It was further updated in 2009 by Laura Uglean Jackson (former University Archivist, AHC) to pertain specifically to the University of Wyoming. In 2018 and 2020, Sara Davis (current University Archivist, AHC) updated the manual to reflect up-to-date information regarding the University of Wyoming and state standards for records retention.

This booklet is available online through the American Heritage Center website at https://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/uw-archives/campus-units.html. Contact Sara Davis, the University Archivist, for inquiries and additional information. Copies of this booklet may be made and distributed to others, so long as such copies include the title page and this acknowledgment page, and so long as the copies are not sold or otherwise used for profit.

2020

INTRODUCTION

The offices of most universities share an overriding problem: not enough space. Not enough space for people. Not enough space for equipment. But especially, not enough space for the gobs and gobs of records.

File cabinets are stacked on top of file cabinets. Closets, basements, and attics are filled with file cabinets. Inside those file cabinets, the squeeze continues. Too many folders in the drawer, too many pieces of paper in the folders. Nor has the computerization of even the smallest organization resulted in the long-predicted "paperless office." In fact, the quantity of paper generated every year by government, business, and the non-profit sector is still increasing. At the same time, the problems once confined to paper are now evident in the electronic realm as well. Hard drives are overflowing. The files on those drives are not well-labeled or well-organized. Files "saved" to disks have been misplaced or never migrated (or left to warp on a radiator).

Finding particular reports or memos becomes more a job for a superhero than for mere mortals. Not only is there too much stuff, but it is usually organized haphazardly. Most filing systems suffer from one or more of the "danger signals" listed in Figure 1. These problems are dangerous because they impede the accurate creation and retrieval of information, as well as making it difficult to insure that historically important records are identified and preserved.

So, what to do? You and your staff are already overworked, and the thought of redesigning your filing system has--to say the least--limited appeal. But there are improvements that can be made with a very small expenditure of time, effort, and money.

THE SOLUTION: RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The solution is records management—the process of determining a useful filing structure, the relative value of the types of files kept by your office or department, and a useful (and legally acceptable) method for throwing away or deleting files that are no longer useful. For instance, certain classes of records can and should be destroyed routinely three, five, or seven years after their creation. These include (but are not limited to) bank statements, canceled checks, invoices, expense reports, time cards/sheets, duplicate copies of anything, publications received from outside agencies and organizations. Such records have administrative value (value to the daily operation of the organization) or legal value (a legal requirement that they be retained) only for a limited time, and have little or no long-term historical value. We can call these records "short-term," because they need only be preserved for a relatively brief time. While these records must be retained for three or seven years, most of them cease being useful in the daily operation of the organization after one or two years. When records are no longer regularly consulted by the University they are said to be "inactive."

Figure 1: Danger Signs

ORGANIZATION/CLASSIFICATION DANGER SIGNS
Filing system changes when employees change (this applies to tangible filing folders as well as computer file folders (or directory structures).
Information gets "lost" or misfiled.
Time and money are spent recreating information you already have.
Delays in finding requested information.
There are folders with only one document in them, or folders filled beyond capacity.
Information retrieval depends on an individual's memory.
Security measures aren't adequate to protect confidential records.
Requested information is not always complete and accurate.
The same type of record crops up in several locations in the filing system.
File folders are created arbitrarily, and there is no current file guide/index.
MAINTENANCE DANGER SIGNS
Records storage space problems (physical or gigabytes).
Frequent requests for more supplies, equipment, records personnel.
Physical records clutter office area; computer records clutter desktop.
No one knows where all the office's records are.
File weeding is sporadic and arbitrary.
There are no written procedures and controls for file system and filing operations.
Some records get filed but are never referred to again.
Supplies and equipment are not appropriate to records housed in them.
There is no plan for what gets filed, and no plan for movement of records into and out of the filing system.

Some records in an office become inactive only after a long time, and continue to have potential usefulness—or must be retained for legal reasons—essentially for the entire lifetime of the University. These records can be referred to as "permanent," because the University has to keep them safe and accessible for the indefinite future. Many other records in an office--reports, correspondence, minutes, etc.--may have long term "historical" value but cease to have administrative value after three to five years. These historical records form the University's Archives. The archives is the University's memory, ensuring that as staff changes and the University evolves, its history is accessible. The University Archives preserves, in the smallest amount of records possible, documentation of the University's administration, history, research, teaching, culture, and community.

RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULES

Designating files as being short-term, permanent, and/or historical is the essence of establishing a "records retention schedule." At its simplest, a records schedule identifies how long each portion of an organization's records needs to be retained, and—perhaps more importantly—how soon each portion can be thrown away. Figure 2 shows the general schedule for the University of Wyoming.

A records schedule identifies how long each portion of an organization's records is legally required to be retained, when it can be thrown away, and if it should be transferred to the archives for legal and historical reasons. When used consistently, a records retention schedule can be beneficial for a number of reasons:

- Improves efficiency of retrieval
- Reduces costs associated with the storage of inactive records
- Compliance with legal recordkeeping requirements
- Protection of valuable records
- Preservation of UW's institutional memory
- Protections from legal fines and penalties

As a state agency, the University of Wyoming and its records are governed in accordance to Wyoming State Statutes 9-2-401 to 9-2-413, and UW's records retention schedules are set and approved by the Wyoming State Records Committee in collaboration with the Wyoming State Archives and the university archivist. Most significant to UW's records is W.S. 9-2-401, which language is as follows:

> Public records includes the original and all copies of any paper, correspondence, form, book, photograph, photostat, film, microfilm, scan, sound recording, map, drawing or other document, regardless of physical, digital or electronic form or characteristics, which have been made or received in transacting public business by the state, a political subdivision or an agency of the state;

Figure 2: General Retention Schedule

The table below shows retention period for the most common types of University of Wyoming records. Contact Sara Davis, the University Archivist, or visit the AHC Website to find out what to do with the record after the retention time period has been met. Most units on campus will have records which are not listed below, but which are included on the official schedule posted on the AHC's website at https://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/uw-archives/schedules.html.

Retention - Permanently	Record Group (Series)	Description
	Correspondence – Senior Administration	Records related to internal and external communications to or from the senior administration and/or management of policy issues, concerns and issues, and actions taken.
Retention - 10 Years	**Record Group (Series)**	**Description**
	Grant Records	Contains grant applications, background information on the School and the University of Wyoming, resumes and vitas, correspondence, reports, notes and other materials related to applications and management of outside-funded grants.
Retention - 7 Years	**Record Group (Series)**	**Description**
	Accounting and Budget Records	Contains green-bar printouts of accounts with account number, financial data, payment information, breakdowns of transactions for the account, reports, and control sheets used for accounts held by the department. UW Accounting holds record copy.
	Academic Program Administrative Records	Contains subject files for the daily administration of the program. It may include correspondence, contracts, agreements, budgets, memorandums, reports, and other information.
Retention - 5 Years	**Record Group (Series)**	**Description**
	Faculty Personnel Records	This series documents individual faculty academic work histories. Records include vitae, letters of recommendation, offer and acceptance letters, contracts, appointment forms, course descriptions, performance evaluations, professional development records, faculty planning sheets, sabbatical leave requests and reports, letters of resignation, and related correspondence. UW Academic Affairs holds record copy.
	Instructor Evaluation Forms	Records document student evaluations of teaching by faculty members and to review courses and programs. Contains the instructor evaluation form and student score data form. Evaluation forms contain statistical summary by class, with typed comments of student ratings on course content, instructor performance, evaluation and grading, overall course and instructor rating, and comments on strengths and weaknesses of the instructor and the course.
	Inter-Departmental Requests, Invoices, Purchase Orders, and Vouchers	Series contains multi-part forms to document requests and purchases for travel and supplies. UW Accounting holds record copy.
	Staff Personnel Records	Series documents individual staff work histories. Records may include Personnel Activity Reports, Personnel/Payroll Reports, Timesheets, performance evaluations, and related documentation and correspondence. UW Human Resources holds record copy.
	Student Personnel Records	Series contains copies of personnel records and recommendation forms for students. UW Human Resources holds record copy.
	Student Records	Series contains materials relating to the student's enrollment in the program, including correspondence, application forms, high school and college transcripts, class rosters, withdrawal slips, advising, grade reports, learning plans, and other supporting documentation.
	Tenure and Promotion Packets	This series documents the periodic consideration of faculty who are eligible for changes in rank, tenure status, and/or pay. Records may include but are not limited to promotion and tenure packets compiled and presented by the faculty member as per instructions from Academic Affairs as well as other materials which are compiled and maintained for inclusion, analysis, and summarization into the packet.
	Publications	This series includes publications produced to document and/or promote the activities of the department. Types of publications may include but are not limited to brochures, newsletters, or catalogs. *Transfer 4 copies to UW Libraries.
Retention - 3 Years	**Record Group (Series)**	**Description**
	Correspondence – General	Records related to routine correspondence of day-to-day office administration and not identified in other record series
	Unsuccessful Position Applications	This series documents unsuccessful applications for student, staff, or faculty positions. Contains letters of application, resumes, and supporting documentation.
	Web site	Contains hyperlinked html pages mounted on the University of Wyoming web server using the Hypertext Transfer Protocol. The pages are used as an outreach tool for the support of the school's educational and outreach functions. Site includes a message from the dean, admission requirements, alumni information, student activities, news releases, and other issues.

STAYING ORGANIZED AND FOLLOWING THE RETENTION SCHEDULE

A retention schedule is only beneficial when followed consistently and accurately. With everything else that you have to do, keeping up with disposing and transferring records can fall off the radar or become a burdensome chore. There are a few things you can do to effortlessly follow a retention schedule.

Use "Breaking" Files. "Breaking" a file means to start a new folder every year (or every five years) without fail. In this way, not only do folders not become overcrowded, but it is extremely easy to purge records according to a schedule. Indeed, if files are broken by year it is a simple matter to remove short-term paper records each year (or whenever they become inactive), box them, and store them elsewhere than in file cabinets for the duration of their legal or administrative lives. Please note that a "folder" can be physical or virtual; it is no accident that the most popular software uses an icon of an office folder to suggest a grouping of computer files.
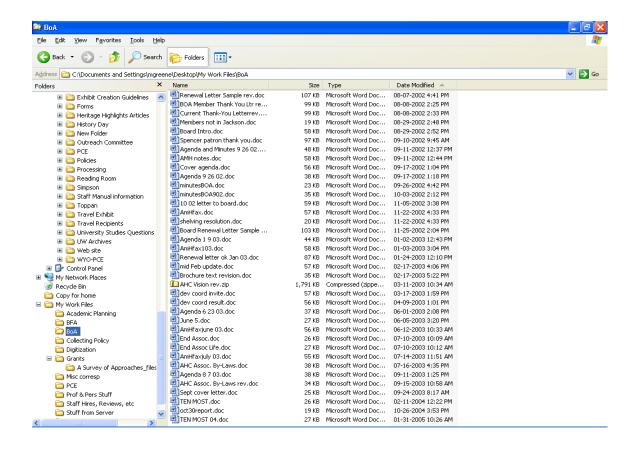
A roughly similar approach should be taken with computer files. First of all, however, it is important to adopt the approach of "foldering" computer files. Whether in email or word processing files, or PowerPoint, or databases, both PC and Macintosh operating systems permit creation of virtual folders. Such folders should be employed to organize material, first (definitely) by category, and then (ideally) by year. For example, emails can be organized by person and/or organization, by topic, by department, by funding agency, or the like. A similar foldering scheme can be employed with other types of files—see Figure 3, for example. "Subfolders" may also usefully be employed: for example, first by funding agency, and then by grant number. Then, ideally, within each folder or subfolder, there would be a further division by year. This annual division is somewhat less necessary than for hard-copy files, only because it is relatively easier to locate and move or delete computer items by date.

To learn more about organizing and filing university records, please see the section "A Suggested Filing System" on page 16 of this manual.

Carry out disposition in bulk. If the retention schedule states to keep a record group for five years, dispose of those records annually in their sixth year. For example, if a series of records was created in 2003 and the retention schedule states that records be kept for five years, then all of the records from January-December, 2003 should be destroyed at one time in 2009.

Make a date with disposition. Put a tickler or carve out a block of time on your calendar to carry out the destruction and transfer of records. Find a time of year that works best with your schedule. For many departments, this is in the summer. Any time of the year is fine, as long as you are keeping the records for the length of time stated in the schedule.

Figure 3: Word Processing Files Organized by Topical Folders

STORAGE OF INACTIVE, SHORT-TERM RECORDS

Storing inactive, short-term paper records in file cabinets is a waste of what is probably your office's most scarce and expensive storage space. Once they become inactive, short-term paper records can be moved to less desirable and accessible locations. (Please note, the American Heritage Center does not store records of short-term value or operate as a temporary storage facility.) Because it is necessary that the records be identifiable and retrievable for however long they must be retained, and since it is important to be able to easily identify records that have become eligible for destruction, some formalities should be observed when paper records are retired from the filing cabinets.

Records should be removed from the file cabinets in their original folders and in as close to their original order as possible.

Records should be placed in standard, lidded, storage boxes (see Figure 4, for examples), available from any office supply store. This type of box is slightly more expensive than scavenging for cast-off boxes at the liquor or grocery store, but they are: a) easier to handle; b) sturdier; c) stackable; d) reusable.

The boxes should be labeled with the following information: type of records (e.g., invoices, canceled checks, and payroll cards); earliest and latest year-dates contained in the box (e.g., 1994-96), and the person or (in larger organizations) the office that put the records in the box. Ideally,

adhesive labels should not be used to record this information, because most of these labels have short-term adhesive that is rendered even less predictable by the storage conditions found in basements, attics, etc. The labels may fall off in as little as a couple of years. Therefore, it is best to use a permanent marker and record the information directly on the boxes.

Where to store these boxes? Short-term, inactive records can be stored in many places that are not suitable for storing records you want or need to keep for a long time: a basement (so long as the boxes are up off the floor and there are no silverfish); a garage (ditto); a rented "self-store" locker (ditto again); an attic (so long as there are no squirrels or mice living up there). Ideally, the boxes should be stored on shelves in any of these locations, but record storage boxes can safely be stacked up to five (5) high unless the environment is quite damp.

Preparing inactive, short-term computer files for "storage" is similar to working with paper files, with one important difference. The difference is that computer files require more conscious and consistent maintenance if they are to even survive long enough to be made inactive. For more information on this please see the section, "Computer Files" on page 19. Therefore, the first and most critically important step with electronic files is TO BACK UP ALL IMPORTANT FILES AT LEAST WEEKLY, and to store the backup material someplace other than your office. UW's Office of Information Technology regularly backs up files saved to the network servers. Still, all other preservation considerations and scheduling decisions are meaningless if a hard-drive crashes or a fire or flood destroys the computer(s). Whenever your department makes significant software or hardware changes, you should be sure to copy into the new system or format ALL the computer records which still have a legal, fiscal, administrative, or historical value, EVEN IF THOSE RECORDS ARE INACTIVE.

However, at the point electronic records become inactive, the approach to segregating and labeling them is familiar. Rather than have them take up important and expensive network server or internal hard drive space, it may be useful to "physically" transfer inactive files to external drives (external hard drives are preferable, for durability reasons). The hard drive should be clearly labeled with their contents (with permanent markers). "Folders" should be renamed, if necessary, to reflect more clearly their contents. It does little good to have a folder labeled "JDs files," with subfolders "ARD Proj," "Background," "Documents," and/or "Misc." Several years after "JD's" departure it is possible nobody will remember who JD was, much less what his/her folder designations meant. It is important to identify material in ways likely to be understood by your successors. The physical storage of electronic material is different in several important respects from paper material, as presented further below.

Figure 4: Storage Boxes for Short-Term, Inactive Records

RECOMMENDED STORAGE BOXES FOR PAPER FILES: Inexpensive storage containers for office files come in many shapes and sizes from office supply stores. The University Archives recommends 2-piece (lift-off lids), 15x12x10-inch storage boxes with cut-out handles. These boxes are made by several companies, and are relatively inexpensive. They weigh approximately 35-lbs. when full, and so are relatively easy to move, and they will easily stack up to five high or fit most utility shelving. These 2-piece boxes will accommodate either letter or legal folders, and are manufactured with large blank labeling spaces.

TYPES OF STORAGE BOXES NOT RECOMMENDED. Common 15x24x10-inch boxes, when full, are too heavy for one person to move easily, and unless steel-reinforced, are much more likely to crush when stacked more than two high. The so-called "drawer files," which are basically cardboard versions of filing cabinets, are generally too week to stand up to even infrequent use and are nearly impossible to move safely unless completely emptied.

A Word About Destroying Records. The authority to destroy records is stated in the retention schedule. Unless otherwise noted, the authority and responsibility to destroy records will be assigned to the department. Confidential documents should be shredded.

STORAGE OF PERMANENT & HISTORICAL RECORDS

Boxing inactive permanent and inactive historical records is similar to that of storing inactive, short-term records, but these can be transferred to the American Heritage Center (AHC). The AHC preserves inactive records with permanent and historical value in climate controlled and secure stacks. It is not a temporary records center and only accepts records deemed permanently valuable in an official retention schedule. Files and boxes can be temporarily loaned to your department if necessary.

When your department is ready to transfer records, please follow these steps:

1. Consult Sara Davis at the American Heritage Center (x6832) to ensure that your records are scheduled for transfer to the archives. Annual transfers of scheduled records are preferred. Please provide the following information:
   - What types of records you have for transfer (i.e. subject files, committee records, personnel files, etc.)
   - If a records schedule for your department has been completed.
   - How much you have to transfer (i.e. number of file drawers or boxes).
2. Prepare records for transfer.
   - In the event that a large volume (50+ boxes) of records is to be transferred, it's best to have the records examined before they are sent and archives staff may want to participate in packing them for shipment.
     - o Remove material identified as being of short-term value.
     - o Remove materials from ring binders and hanging folders and place in file folders; maintain the original order of the records. Transfer information from the ring binders and hanging folders to the file folders; if more than one folder is needed label as, for example, "folder 1 of 2," "folder 2 of 2," etc.
3. Fill out an Inventory Form and a Records Transfer Authorization Form, and send with the boxes.
4. Box the records scheduled for transfer.
   - The records will need to be boxed properly. Please use boxes measuring 10"x12"x15" (see Figure 4 above).
   - Place in boxes in the same order that they were maintained as active files (i.e. alphabetic, numeric, chronological, subject).
   - Keep the records in their original file folders and ensure that the files are clearly labeled; include span dates. (Example: Space Planning, 1983-1990).
   - Do not over-pack or under-pack the boxes.
   - Clearly label the boxes.
5. Call or e-mail **Sara Davis** (307-766-6832) to arrange pickup or drop-off of your records or if you have any questions.

PLEASE NOTE: Limited staff prevents the University Archives being able to assist with boxing and preparing inventory sheets for most records. Similarly, University Archives is not able to accept transfers of records without accompanying inventory forms and transfer forms (included at the end of this manual).

A Word About Filling Out The Box Inventory Form. Box inventories are simply brief lists of the files found in a particular box.

The box inventory should be prepared at the time the box is filled, and should be filed in an agreed-upon place within the organization (a second copy should be placed inside the relevant box, for safety's sake). The inventories will be a quick and easy guide to current and future staff members giving an indication of what files have been placed in permanent storage and where they are. Being able to refer to the inventories will save considerable time otherwise spent in aimlessly rummaging through boxes looking for specific information.

A similar approach is useful for computer files. It is relatively simple to print out a screen view of the "file tree" for both email and other types of files, which can then be filed in the same fashion as inventories for boxes of papers.

Some offices retain permanent records rather than transfer them to the AHC (such as the Registrar's Office with permanent student files). Ideally, storage space for permanent and historical records should be a space that is heated in winter, cooled in summer, generally dark, free from vermin, and as dry as possible at all times. Examples include closets, storerooms, or other rooms in your organization's main office building. Basements, garages, self-storage rental spaces, and attics should not be used to store permanent and historical records unless there is no alternative.

Permanent storage of computer files is substantially different than for paper records. It is not enough to find a well-located set of shelves onto which to place external hard drives. Records in computer form (in whatever media) should be stored ONLY in spaces that are cooled in summer and heated in winter (your living areas at home, your office at work, a bank safe deposit box, the home of a relative), never in basements, attics, or garages, or near electric motors or other sources of magnetic fields.

A SUGGESTED FILING SYSTEM

If your office or department needs or wants to convert to a better organized filing system, the following section outlines a systematic way to file university records.

A well-designed filing system must:

1. Simplify filing and offer quick and easy placement of retrieval of information.
2. Assure integrity and continuity of recordkeeping. (Anyone must be able to retrieve the information they need at any time).
3. Allow for easy identification of inactive records.

Subject Filing

Of the three basic systems of arrangement - alphabetical, numerical, and subject - subject filing offers the most substantial advantages for effectively handling paperwork. It also helps in the eventual appraisal, scheduling, and transferring of records from your office to the University of Wyoming Archives.

Subject files group records according to subject or category, using alphabetic principles to a certain extent. Subject files group records into broad organizational units called records series - a group of identical or related records that are normally used and filed as a unit because they have a common subject or function and that allow for evaluation as a unit for retention and disposition scheduling.

A typical office's records can be divided into six broad groups or series. Six broad subject groups are included:

1. Departmental Office Records
2. School or Division Records
3. University-Wide Records
4. Records Pertaining to Other Institutions
5. Student Records
6. Personnel Records

With this filing system, the records maintained in your office can be filed in only one of these six series. Please note that it is not necessary to create a records series if you traditionally do not receive or create that record. For instance, if your office does not keep student records, it is not necessary for you to begin doing so.

The following section describes some suggested primary and secondary categories within each of the six series. Unless otherwise noted, file records in alphabetical order and then by date within each category (i.e. "breaking" files as described above).

Series One: Departmental or Unit Office Records

In organizing and arranging the records in this first series it is important to distinguish clearly between records that pertain to the department and records that pertain to the department's school or division. For example, a department may have an executive committee, whose membership is from the department itself. Committees with the same name may also exist on the university level, and the department may contribute members to them. The first series, however, should contain only the records of committees that are exclusively departmental. The same is true for other categories within the first series.

1. Course and Curriculum Records (records pertaining to the planning, teaching, and evaluation of courses offered by the department)
   - Courses Offered
   - Courses Proposed
2. Departmental Committees (records, minutes, reports, and other materials pertaining to their work, by name of committee)
3. Equipment and Supplies (records, inventories, catalogs, and brochures, by product name)
4. Financial Records
   - Budget (records pertaining to the formulation and disbursement of the office budget, including worksheets, printouts, account books, ledgers, computations)
   - Purchases (requisitions, purchase orders, and correspondence pertaining to expenditures for purchases)
   - Salaries
   - Travel and Expense Reports

5. Policy and Procedures, Forms (all office and routine procedures guides, handbooks, and forms)
6. Projects, Programs, and Proposals (records pertaining to special or on-going projects sponsored by the department, listed by name. Do not confuse with school/division or university projects.)
7. Space Needs (records related to space needs, building operation, and room assignments)

Series Two: School or Division Records

Note that many of the categories have the same title as the categories in Series One. These records will relate only to the school or division, not the department.

1. School Committees (listed by name, do not confuse with either departmental or university committees)
2. Departments (records affecting your department that relate to other departments within your school or division, listed by name)
3. Policy and Procedures (records relating to school or division policy and procedures listed by the subject of the policy or procedural statement)
4. Projects, Programs, and Proposals (records pertaining to special or on-going projects sponsored by the school or division, listed by name)

Series Three: University-Wide Records

The size and complexity of university-wide records varies with the responsibilities of each individual office. This series contains all records relating to units of the university other than your departmental office and its school or division. For example, the English Department would not create a School of Arts and Sciences division here because A & S would be the entire second record series.

1. Administration - examples:
   - Board of Trustees
   - Office of the President
   - Vice-President for Academic Affairs
   - Associate Vice-President
2. Colleges - examples
   - College of Education
   - College of Education - Curriculum and Instruction
3. Committees
4. Organizations (records relating to campus organizations, listed by name)
5. Policy and Procedures

Series Four: Records Pertaining to Other Institutions

1. Educational Institutions - examples:
   - Colleges & Universities (use the distinctive name of the institution, for example: "Michigan, University of", rather than "University of Michigan")

2. Professional Organizations (correspondence, memoranda, brochures, reports, literature, and similar materials relating to professional or honorary societies, organizations, associations, or groups. Records within this series should be filed by organization name, each organization name being considered a primary category.)
3. Government - examples:
   - Federal Government
   - State of Wyoming
   - Local Government
4. Business and Industry

Series Five: Student Records

Series Six: Personnel Records

1. Faculty/Academic Professionals
2. Staff
3. Student Workers

Note: The conversion of an existing office file is never an easy job. While this manual and the records management program can be used even if your files are not arranged according to this system, we recommend conversion. Informal consultations, for individuals and groups needing assistance, can be arranged.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE RECORDKEEPING SYSTEM

Another important consideration—relevant both to issues of legal risk and to issues of administrative efficiency--for both paper-based and computer-based records systems is that the systems be well-documented and widely understood among your office's staff. If there is only one person in the office who knows how the filing system is organized, where inactive records are stored, and how the financial books are being kept, the office may be in deep trouble if that person suddenly leaves for whatever reason. Similarly, if only one person knows anything about your office's computer system and the records stored in it—who knows how the database was modified to produce special reports, what the cryptic file name abbreviations mean, or how to use the book-keeping software that's been tracking funds for the past four years—what is going to happen to the organization if something happens to that person? All units on campus should have a means of ensuring that several staff members are keeping track of what records are being produced, used for what purpose, on what software, filed in which locations, etc. In addition to ensuring continuity of record keeping during personnel turnover, such distributed knowledge will ensure that your organization is much better equipped to handle any problems related to obsolescence, the migration of data, damage or loss of records due to fire or flood, and other difficulties.

COMPUTER FILES

Computer records—on diskettes, on CDs, on internal hard drives, on external hard drives—are both similar to and different from paper records. For most units on campus, computer records are just a different form of the same information found in paper records (a very rough analogy would

be between an LP and CD version of the same music). This is particularly true if your office uses computers primarily for word-processing, spreadsheet, and simple database applications. Computer records can become inactive, and most of them (like their paper counterparts) have only short-term value.

However, computer records are much more fragile than paper records, and greater care must be taken to ensure that—for however long they may be needed—they can in fact be used. Three things threaten the "legibility" of computer records: obsolete software, obsolete hardware, and deteriorated media. In less than seven years (the useful life of many kinds of short-term records), software can change so much as to make the material recorded on a diskette, backup tape, or auxiliary drive useless. In roughly the same period of time the hardware necessary to access a particular media may become obsolete—it has effectively happened to 5.25" diskettes, 3.5" diskettes, and CD-ROMs are similarly doomed. At the same time, in as little as three to four years the physical media itself may become too deteriorated for even compatible hardware and software to read—this is particularly true for diskettes and CDs, but even external hard drives are nowhere near as durable as paper (notwithstanding manufacturer's occasional claims to the contrary).

To guard against these threats, a few straightforward steps are necessary. First, it is important that any files of continuing value be "migrated" from one major software system to another, as the office migrates. This requires some time on someone's part, but is essential if the files are to be readable down the years. Some experts now suggest that the easiest means of ensuring the readability of files through the years is a) to convert them to a truly universal format, such as *txt files, or b) to quasi-universal formats such as either *.rtf or *pdf files. For particularly **vital records**, those without which the office cannot continue to function, it is still a good precaution to physically print them whenever they undergo substantial change—if they are printed, a laser printer should be used, because inkjet and deskjet printers do not create permanent documents.

Second, files must be backed up, whether off an individual's hard drive or off the organization's network, to guard against disasters—all other preservation considerations are meaningless if a hard-drive crashes or a fire or flood destroys the network server. This can most easily be accomplished using external hard drives, but those drives must then be stored off-site in as noted in the storage section of this document, above. And it is crucial to remember that back up media—whether CDs or external hard drives—themselves have limited lifespans—they should be tested every year at least, and replaced every 3-5 years for safety's sake. On a related note, be certain to copy still-needed files from any computer or server that is being retired.

In addition to concerns regarding the durability of the software and hardware, computer files, similar to image and audio files, are only as useful and historically valuable as their identification. Even now that computer files can be given almost unlimited names, often they are labeled so cryptically that not even the creator can remember what the name means six months after saving the file. Multiply one cryptically named file by potentially thousands on a typical computer hard drive or organization network, and the utility of the material comes quickly into question. This problem is multiplied by the tendency of creators not to organize their files into folders, as previously noted.

For computer files to endure and be useful, several things are required: a) migration from one major software release to another, for those files with enduring importance; b) proper backup and storage of backup media, and frequent replacement of that media; c) organization of files into the

electronic equivalent of hard-copy folders; d) intelligible naming of files.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

The university archivist is available to assist you with all of your records management needs. Please contact the university archivist if you have questions or need assistance.

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American Heritage Center
University Archives and Records Management Program

INVENTORY SHEET

Department Name:

Date of Files Placed In Boxes:

Contents with Dates	Box	Folder
Example: "Correspondence, July 2000-June 2001"	1	1-12
Example: "Committee Reports, Jan 2000-Dec. 2000"	1	13-25

University of Wyoming
University Archives and Records Management Program

RECORDS TRANSFER AUTHORIZATION

College or Administrative Unit:
Department:
Office:

Series Description: Dates: Volume: Accession Number:
 	
Restrictions
    a. Statutory
 	
    b. University Imposed
 	
[ ] Box List Attached

I hereby authorize the transfer of the following inactive records to the University of Wyoming Archives at the American Heritage Center.

Head of College, Department, or Administrative Unit:	Date:
University Archivist:	Date:
AHC Director:	Date: