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Records Management

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Introduction

Records management is the field of management responsible for efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of the records of a business or organization. There are two reasons for retaining non-current records. First is to satisfy the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the organization for specific periods of time; second is to permanently retain those records which document the history of the institution. Not all academic or research institutions have a records management program. This survey was an inquiry into the state of records management in ARL member institutions.

The survey was distributed to the 123 ARL member libraries in February 2008. Sixty-two libraries completed the survey for a response rate of 50%. Of those 62, 41 (66%) have records management programs. Three have had programs, but no longer have them. One of these began at an unknown time and ended in 1993; one existed for only five years, between 1991 and 1996; a third ended in 2003 after thirty-eight years of operation.

At the majority of responding institutions (25 or 61%) records management duties are located in a library unit. They are the responsibility of special collections in twelve institutions (29%); archives units that are part of the library system but not part of the special collections library or department in five cases (12%); and another library unit or department in 10 cases (24%). Records management is the responsibility of an archives unit that is not part of the library system in five cases (12%) and of some other non-library unit or department in 11 cases (27%).

Thirty-five respondents reported the year the records management program began. Four started in the 1960s, the earliest in 1962 in a non-library archives unit. In each decade since, between seven and nine new programs have begun, mostly in library units. The most recent began in 2007 and reports to a non-library unit, the University Secretariat. The percentage of departments that participate in the records management program ranges from a minimum of 2% to a maximum of 100% with a mean of 53.11% and a median of 50%.

The respondents at institutions where records management is not the responsibility of a library unit were asked to conclude the survey at this point. The 25 remaining respondents completed the rest of the survey.

Staffing

Sixteen respondents (64%) report that there is a professional records manager responsible for their records management program. At one institution, two positions, Associate Archivist and Electronic Records Archivist, share this responsibility. Time spent on records management duties by individuals in this position ranges from a minimum of 10% (one individual, Head, University Archives & Records Management) to a maximum of 100% (eight individuals with titles such as Records Manager, Records Officer, Records Coordinator, or Records Archivist). Positions that

spend less than half their time on records management duties are mostly designated as archivists. Overall, the mean percentage of time is 70.6% and the median is 95%.

Eighteen respondents (72%) reported a total of 27 other professional staff. In ten cases these were in addition to a records manager; in eight they were instead of a records manager. The majority of these positions are archivists. Time spent on records management duties by individuals in these positions ranges from a minimum of 1% to a maximum of 100%, though only seven individuals spend more than 50% of their time on these activities. The mean percentage of time is 37.5% and the median is 25%.

Twelve programs (48%) have a total of 17 support staff. Titles reported include Archives and Records Assistant, Archives Assistant, Inactive Records Center Manager, Institutional Records Assistant, Office Manager, Project Archivist, Records Management Specialist, Records Services Assistant, Records Technical Assistant, Reference Assistant, and Senior Library Associate. Time spent by individuals in these positions on records management duties ranges from a minimum of 1% to a maximum of 100% (8 of 17 support staff). The mean is 60.7% and the median is 75%.

Twelve programs (48%) have student assistants, including three that don't have support staff. Time spent on records management duties by the 24 individuals in these positions ranges from a minimum of 0.1% to a maximum of 100% with a mean of 34.8% and a median of 20%.

Three respondents (12%) reported additional professional staff that didn't fit above. Their titles and percent of time spent on records management are: Associate Dean of the Special Collections and Digital Programs Division (represents the university on the State Records Commission) (1%); Manager, Resource Support (25%); and Records Services Archivist (75%).

The majority of records management programs (12 of 22 or 55%) report to the head of the archives. Four report to the head of special collections/archives, five report to an AUL position, and one reports to the university librarian.

Budget

Only four of the 25 respondents (16%) have a separate, designated operating budget for records management. The remainder (84%) are covered by a general operating budget. Of the four with a separate budget, one's funding is part of the administering unit's budget, one's is part of the broader institution's budget, and two derive their funding from both the institution's and the administering unit's budgets. Eighteen respondents (72%) indicated that all costs are covered by their budget. Two (8%) also charge for services. At one institution, each department covers its own expenses. Other responses indicate that a combination of strategies is used to cover costs.

Seven respondents (28%) described charges for services, including: charges for boxes, charges for box pickup, charges for re-boxing and inventory if departments are unable to do so, hourly fee for services, and charges for storage, retrieval, destruction, and HIPPA-related requests. Units may also be required to use preferred vendors and are responsible for charges incurred.

Records Management Services

Records programs manage a variety of record types. Of the 25 responding institutions, all manage text (eye-readable), 22 (88%) manage graphic materials (eye-readable pictures, drawings, maps, photographs, architectural plans, etc.), 19 (76%) manage audio-visual materials (sound recordings, film, etc.; requires a device other than a computer to access), and 18 (72%) manage electronic records (medium that requires a computer to access). In addition, two have artifacts and one has floppy disks in non-permanent records.

Respondents were asked whether the records management program or another unit provided a list of records management services. In the majority of cases the records management program prepares policy and procedure documents (85%), trains originating department staff in proper records man-

agement procedures (85%), transfers permanent records to archives (76%), prepares records retention schedules (68%), picks up materials from originating departments (56%), stores text records (56%), and retrieves records from storage (56%). Only three or four respondents don't offer these services.

Records management programs are somewhat more likely to store graphic materials (13 vs. 9 cases), answer reference questions from records in storage (13 vs. 8 cases), and store audio-visual materials (12 vs. 8 cases). Responsibility for preparing content lists is almost equally divided between the records management program and another unit (13 vs. 14 cases).

Another unit more often has responsibility for storing electronic records (64%), destroying records at the end of their retention period (60%), delivering retrieved records to the originating department (48%), storing other record formats (44%), and converting permanent records to preservation format (40%). Eleven respondents (44%) report that discarding records at the end of their retention schedules is not a service offered; thirteen (52%) report that refreshing the format of permanent records is not offered.

At all of the responding institutions staff in the originating department have responsibility for creating content lists at some level. At 11 institutions staff in the records management program share this responsibility. Lists are most often made at the box level (23 respondents) and the folder level (22 respondents). Originating departments perform this task in 20 cases (91%), while records management program staff are responsible in 11 cases (50%). Twelve respondents create content lists at the item level. Four respondents report making content lists at some other level, for example, document level for electronic records, accession level, and series level. One respondent reported that each department maintains its own record keeping system and levels vary from department to department.

Policy Decisions

Policy decisions are made at many levels and can involve a number of individuals. In some cases, state records commissions or the state archives either singularly or jointly may establish records retention schedules for institutions of higher education. In others, there may be statewide policies through the action of a state board of regents.

At the university level, policy decisions may be made by records management committees or by the individual in charge of the records management program. Retention schedules may be created by the individual in charge of the records management program, often with input from originating divisions or offices and the appropriate dean or vice president, as well as with input from University Counsel. In some cases, such a records retention policy must then be approved by the state records commission. Changes to statewide retention schedules may be suggested to the state records commission. Others mentioned by respondents as involved in retention schedules include the designee of the president, the records officer in each department, and the head of the office creating the records.

Policies and procedures for training of departments, transportation, storage, and destruction are often the role of the University Archivist.

Records Storage

Physical records are stored in a variety of locations. Fifteen respondents (60%) report using remote storage, eleven (44%) use on-site storage, and six (24%) report storage in the originating department. Eleven (44%) use a combination of locations. The survey also asked where electronic records are stored. The 23 open-ended responses indicate that electronic records are widely distributed across individual office computers, departmental servers, enterprise-wide systems, offsite facilities, state records centers, and commercial vendors. Only a few respondents mentioned storing records in an institutional repository.

The amounts of materials currently in storage were reported in different ways, including items, boxes, cubic feet, and linear feet. While this makes it difficult to compare different programs, it is clear that there is a wide range in the quantities of records be-

ing managed. For example, 15 respondents reported between 7,000 and 13,500 boxes, 1,500 to 27,000 cubic feet, and 4,971 to 17,100 linear feet of textual material. Nine respondents with graphic materials reported from 500 blueprints to 100 boxes to 31.25 linear feet to 500 cubic feet to millions of items. A similar range of audio-visual material was reported: from approximately 25 to 1.5 million items. Electronic records are harder to quantify. One reported 150 disks of unspecified size, one reported 76 gigabytes, and two reported 100 and 263 items. Two respondents indicated that they do not know how many records are in storage because storage is too distributed. Four could only address records of permanent value.

As with materials in storage, the amounts of new material received on average each year were reported in different ways: boxes, items, feet, etc. Incoming records range from a few boxes, items, or feet to thousands of each.

Records Management Systems

Nineteen of 22 respondents (86%) use both paper and electronic systems for accessions, inventories, check outs, etc. Three (14%) rely on an electronic system alone, and none rely completely on a paper-based system. For their electronic systems, 12 (55%) use commercial software and 10 (45%) use homegrown systems. Five use dedicated records management software (Iron Mountain's Accutrac (2), DocuData Software Corporation's EDC RC, DHS's Total Recall, and EMC Documentum). Three use integrated library systems (Ex Libris's ALEPH and Voyager). One uses digital content management software (DSpace and EAD (DLXS)), one uses Web design & development software (Macromedia Dreamweaver). Three use Microsoft Access relational database software.

Records Use

Requests to retrieve records may be made by staff in the originating office at almost all of the responding institutions (91%). Seven respondents (33%) report that staff in other offices of the institution and the general public may also make such requests. The general public may make requests at one other of the responding institutions. In a few cases the originating office may permit access to their records to other individuals.

Records are checked out at all levels, but most often at the folder (75%) or box (70%) level. Four respondents (20%) check out materials at the item level. Two respondents clarified that items aren't actually "checked out," they remain in the facility.

Fourteen respondents report, on average, from two to 2,770 checkout requests per year. Of these, five (36%) report 100 or fewer checkout requests per year, five (36%) report from 150 to 335 checkout requests per year, and three (21%) report 900–1400 checkout requests per year. The mean number of requests per year is 546; the median is 198. At 10 institutions (56%) materials are not used onsite; at eight (44%) they are used onsite.

Disposal/Destruction of Records

All 18 respondents report that they destroy records at the end of their retention periods. Five of these also report discarding some items. Thirteen respondents (72%) destroy textual records at the end of their retention period; five (28%) destroy some and discard others. Eight respondents (73%) destroy graphic materials, two (18%) discard some and destroy other items, and one (9%) only discards them. Seven respondents (78%) destroy audio-visual materials, one (11%) destroys some and discards others, and one (11%) only discards them. Six respondents (86%) destroy electronic records; one (14%) discards some and destroys others. One respondent only manages permanent records, so destruction is not an issue.

Of the five respondents who discard records, all use recycling and one also discards records in the trash. Ten of the respondents who destroy records (56%) do so by shredding; eight (44%) use the services of vendors; three (17%) degauss audio-visual and electronic records and then shred them; one (6%) shreds and burns. As with the number of new items added each year, the quantities of records discarded or destroyed on an annual basis ranges from a few items, boxes, or feet to hundreds or thousands.

Staff Training

Staff receive training in records management policies and procedures in a number of ways. The most common methods are in-person workshops (20 respondents or 83%) and on-the-job experience (19 respondents or 79%). Self-study of manuals (46%) and formal classes (33%) are also fairly common. Only three respondents (13%) have used webinars. A variety of other methods have been used, including a records management listserv, Web training modules, and one-on-one instruction.

Thirteen respondents (59%) reported that all staff members are trained to manage all formats of records. Of the other nine respondents, one stated that all staff are trained to manage textual, audio-visual, and graphic materials, while only the department head was trained to handle electronic records. One reported staff training in paper and electronic records and other formats as needed. Two reported limited experience or no training with electronic records. One stated that training depends on job functions and data access policies.

Assessment

The survey asked what metrics are used to assess the performance of the records management program. Eleven respondents (48%) measure success by the percentage of departments using the records management program. Seven (30%) use the turnaround time for retrieval requests. Six (26%) use the turnaround time for accessioning, creating box lists, and moving items to storage. Four (17%) use the backlog volume. Eight (35%) have not assessed the success of the program.

Conclusion

It is interesting that only two-thirds of the institutions responding have records management programs and that the majority of those programs are located in the library. Within those libraries, there is no single model of records management. In some cases, the records management program deals with both permanent and non-permanent records. In others it deals with permanent records only. Not all are funded in the same way. Only five programs use dedicated records management software systems. The majority who are utilizing electronic tools use tools that are library specific or could be expected to be in use in a library. Surprisingly little progress seems to have been made in gaining control over electronic records, judging by the number in storage. Nonetheless, the services offered to their institutions are largely the same.