



Digital Records Management

It is not an understatement to say that digital records have overtaken the modern workplace. From word processing documents, to spreadsheets and databases, to email, and to web applications, everybody at the University of Delaware works intensively with digital records in one form or another. University Archives and Records Management (UARM) is committed to helping you manage your digital records to the fullest extent, and likewise is committed to fostering a paper-sparse environment for the university. In this document, you will find some guidance for properly and efficiently managing your digital records.

If you are not familiar with the University's archives and records management policies, please take a moment to familiarize yourself with them. They are located on the website of the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel at <https://sites.udel.edu/generalcounsel/policies/>.

Please contact UARM with any questions, concerns, or for further information at 831-2750 or ud-archives@udel.edu.

What are digital records?

Technically, digital records are defined as data or information that has been captured and fixed for storage and manipulation in an automated system and that requires the use of the system to render it intelligible by its users.

More plainly put, digital records are those records that you generate and use in the course of conducting the university's business when using a computer, PDA, or cell phone. This can include but is not limited to word processing documents, spreadsheets, databases, email, image files, presentations, web-based records, social media pages, messaging through social media applications, and text messages. However, not all digital documents or information generated by University employees in the course of business are considered University records. This topic will be explored further below.

Benefits of good digital records management

Good digital records management practices and procedures can truly help both you as an employee and the university as a whole. Here are some of those benefits:

- Improved knowledge of what constitutes a University digital record and what does not,
- Reduced costs of storing and handling obsolete paper and digital records,
- Increased reliability and speed in retrieving needed digital records,
- Increased productivity in handling large amounts of digital records and information,
- Improved compliance with University policies,
- Reduced risk of adverse legal or regulatory actions, and
- Preservation of appropriate digital records for historic purposes.

Your responsibilities as an employee

Your responsibilities as an employee are as follows:

- Follow the University records retention schedule with regard to the management of all University records, paper or digital. If you do not have access to the retention schedule for your unit, the records management contact in your unit or UARM staff can provide it for you.
- Follow the University's policies regarding recordkeeping and use of digital records and computing systems. All policies can be found on the website of the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel.
- If a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request or litigation hold order has been applied to your unit, save and preserve all digital records covered by the request or the hold. The Office of the Vice President and General Counsel will provide instructions on which records are covered by the request or the hold. Destroying and deleting records subject to a request or a hold jeopardizes the University and you may be subject to disciplinary action for doing so.
- Do not disclose confidential business information, paper or digital, to unauthorized users. All active University records are considered confidential business information unless produced for public distribution or disclosed by the University for public access.
- Remember that in the world of digital records, everybody becomes a records manager. Everybody uses a computer, everybody is producing digital records, and many of those records are not filed into any sort of central recordkeeping system. It is impossible to delegate this task to one person in your unit.

Managing digital records

It's time to tackle your desktop or laptop! Here are some practices to help you manage the ongoing flow and built-up detritus of digital records on your computer:

- Digital records are defined above. However, note that this category divides into two different classes: records and non-records, also known as transitory records. Records are those documents in their final versions generated while undertaking the business of the university that possess enduring value. Non-records are those documents perhaps generated while undertaking the business of the university that do not possess enduring value. Examples of records include the final versions of reports and studies, meeting minutes, executed contracts and agreements, budgets, image files, etc. Non-records include transitory documents such as drafts of records, spreadsheets generated for the purpose of producing final budgets, notes, duplicate copies of records, personal files, etc.
- When considering if a digital document is a record or not, ask yourself the following questions. If the answer to any one of these questions is yes, then the document may be a record. When in doubt, consult with UARM for help in identifying records.
 - Does it record official decisions?
 - Is it the final version of a project, report, program, policy, or procedure?
 - Does it include or is it meeting minutes?
 - Does it document a business transaction?
 - Does it prove or document that a business-related event or activity did or did not occur?
 - Does it have business, operational, legal, compliance, regulatory, or historic value for the university?
 - Can it help resolve disputes or problems in the future?

- Is there a legal expectation to retain it?
- If it were in paper form, would you retain it?
- Remember that retention applies to digital records in the same manner as it applies to paper records; records retention applies to content, not format. For example, if an MS Word document that is the final copy of a procedure falls into the records retention series for policies and procedures for your unit, you may only need to keep that document until it is obsolete and replaced with a new procedure.
- While everybody inevitably makes their own file layout or schema, an easy way to organize your computer files is according to the records retention schedule for your unit, and more precisely as it applies directly to your work. You can make file folders that mirror each of the records series pertinent to your work.
- If you find that your digital records do not match the records retention schedule, discuss this with your unit's records management contact. It is possible that the schedule needs to be modified to reflect types of records that it currently does not document.
- Perform a digital records file cleanup on a regular basis. You may be able to delete many of the following types of transitory non-records:
 - Resource material created or received for reference purposes;
 - Draft documents;
 - Spreadsheets used to build a final budget or proposal; and
 - Digital copies of documents retained in paper form as the copy of record.
- MS Word files intended for permanent retention should be converted to PDF/A format, as this is best suited for long-term preservation. The original file may be deleted after conversion.
- Migration of digital records to updated computing platforms and software for their preservation in accordance with the University records retention schedule is the responsibility of individual units. For example, if an MS Excel spreadsheet is a record and must be retained per the records retention schedule, you must ensure its viability and integrity as it is migrated from version to version of that program until retention expires.

Managing email

Email can be overwhelming. The volume of email that we all receive in a given day or week can be onerous. Here are some practices that will help you control your inbox while also furthering the University's records management goals:

- Email records are defined in the same manner as digital records above. As with other digital records, all email falls into one of two categories: records and non-records, also known as transitory records. Email records are those records generated while undertaking the business of the university that possess enduring value. Email non-records are those documents perhaps generated while undertaking the business of the university that do not possess enduring value. Examples of email records include messages that include final decisions of significance to the operations of the university or its constituent units, messages that indicate the completion of contracted work for the university, etc. Non-records include transitory messages like those used to arrange meetings, those including general university information received from other units than your own, personal messages, etc.
- When considering if an email is a record or not, ask yourself the following questions. If the answer to any one of these questions is yes, then the document may be a record. When in doubt, consult with UARM for help in identifying records.
 - Does it record official decisions?

- Does it record significant conversations about policies, programs, or procedures?
 - Does it document a business transaction?
 - Does it prove or document that a business-related event or activity did or did not occur?
 - Does it have business, operational, legal, compliance, regulatory, or historic value for the university?
 - Can it help resolve problems in the future?
 - Is there a legal expectation to retain it?
 - If it were in paper form, would you retain it?
- Keep in mind that the majority of email messages are transitory non-records and can be deleted.
 - Remember that retention applies to email in the same manner as it applies to paper and other digital records. For example, if an email record related to an employment search falls into the records retention series for search committee records for your unit, you may only need to keep that email for that many years from the close of the search.
 - It is a good idea to arrange your saved email files and folders in the same or similar manner to the records retention schedule for your unit. Email messages should be filed in a way that enhances their accessibility and facilitates the unit's records management tasks.
 - Perform an email cleanup on a regular basis. You may be able to delete many of the following types of transitory non-records:
 - Resource material created or received for reference purposes;
 - General routine unit business correspondence (i.e., messages that have short-term administrative or operational value), such as routine requests for information, meeting notices and reminders, administrative notices, invitations and responses, etc.;
 - Draft messages; and
 - Courtesy copy informational messages (i.e., messages that you receive to keep you informed on a matter, but that you do not need to act upon).
 - With regard to attachments, if the content of the email message is not needed to complete the record, move the attachment to the appropriate folder on your hard drive or network, then delete the original email. If the content of the email message is needed to document important information such as its content, the recipients of the message, or the date and time when the message was sent, then keep the email with its attachment.
 - If you have multiple email messages on the same topic with the same subject, i.e., a message thread, delete all of the messages except for the final message that contains all of the previous messages.
 - When doing an email cleanup, do not forget to also review your sent mail folder.
 - It is best practice not to use your work email account for personal messages, and the University discourages its employees from doing so. Using your work email account for private emails only adds to the volume of email that you will have to sort and delete. If you need a private email account that you can use occasionally at work, try one of the free web-based systems like Gmail.

Digitization of paper records

Many units digitize paper records in order to make their workflows easier and more efficient. Should you decide to undertake a digitization project, you will want to answer the following questions:

- What are the goals for the project? What is the desired end product? Is it for filing records into a digital document management system, or for preservation of records, or for search capabilities that exceed those for paper records?
- Where will the digital content live? Do you possess or have access to the digital infrastructure necessary to store, access, safeguard, and preserve these records in an efficient, trustworthy, and reliable manner?
- How will you handle the metadata necessary for managing and accessing the records?
- What will you do with the paper records once they are digitized? Should they be kept as backup in case documents are digitized incorrectly or poorly? Is there a legal, policy, or procedural obligation to retain the paper copies even if the records are digitized?
- What are the retention periods for these records? Are they short-lived records (retention of three to five years or less before disposition)? Does the cost of digitization – including labor – outweigh the possible benefit? If you file the records into a digital document management system, can the records be deleted once retention expires?
- How will you remember to dispose of records once their retention periods have expired? Most records should not and cannot be kept indefinitely; doing so exposes the university to legal risk.

These can be complex questions with sometimes equally complex answers. You should consult with UARM before undertaking a records digitization project to ensure that all records management issues are properly and sufficiently addressed.

Disposition of digital records

Disposition of digital records means the final activity that you will take regarding those records at the end of their retention period. Disposition can mean either deletion of transitory records or transfer of non-transitory records to UARM for permanent retention or “archiving.”

Deletion of digital records is relatively straightforward. It is important to make deletion an ongoing process so that the bulk of records does not become too overwhelming to reasonably handle. An important point to remember is that although Information Technologies may retain your records through central digital storage systems (email is a good example of this), your individual records retention responsibilities are not preempted by their actions. You still have a duty to delete digital records when their retention period has expired, insofar as is feasible.

With regard to records that are not transitory in nature but instead are intended for permanent retention, contact UARM to learn about the transfer process and requirements for turning over digital records for preservation. It is important to preserve and safeguard permanent records for historical reasons. Now that large sections of the university are paperless or paper-sparse, UARM needs your digital records to continue to build its historical collections and tell the story of the University of Delaware for future generations!

Information security

Information security is a critical matter for the university, which has significant expectations of its employees with regard to the secure management of its data and information. For more information, visit Information Technologies’ computing security best practices website at <https://www.udel.edu/security/bestpractices/>.

Destruction of portable electronic media

Digital records stored on portable media such as tapes, disks, ID cards, flash drives, etc. can and should be destroyed by UARM. There is no cost to units for this service.

Computer hard drives, including portable hard drives, cannot be destroyed by UARM and must be destroyed through Procurement Services using the equipment activity webform, the procedure for which is described in university policy *Use and Disposal of University Equipment and Material (Legacy Policy #5-6)*.