

Records Retention

Summary/Purpose: Defines the type records, length of retention, and destruction for records past the retention date.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Storage of non-current or unofficial copies of records retained for managerial or regulatory reasons results in considerable staff, maintenance, and storage expenses for the University. Storing records efficiently reduces cost and litigation exposure, improves service, and meets accountability commitments (internal or external audit). This document provides departments with an efficient policy to manage records by providing retention and disposition guidelines. The term "records" is a unit of information, regardless of form, made or received by an employee while transacting official business of the University of Mississippi.

Examples of records: include academic files, administrative files, student files, correspondence, books, papers, letters, memoranda, forms, charts, reports, maps, photographs, films, microfilm, microfiche, electronic files and data processing output in media, and sound recordings.

All records (created, received, or maintained) by departments during their operations belong to the university and are retained and disposed of according to this policy. Do not dispose of University records until the stated minimum retention period has elapsed. **Notify the Internal Audit Office in writing, for addition or deletions of records to this policy.**

To add, change, delete a record, or to change the retention period, please send an e-mail to the [Internal Audit Office](#). With respect to a particular record, the official office of record may submit changes or grant permission to another office to make changes.

Offices that maintain official records should make copies available, upon request, to departments requesting copies.

Departments may retain unofficial copies of records for convenience. The department should consider the amount of space and personnel time required to maintain the unofficial copies. Departments are responsible for making decisions regarding their retention periods for unofficial copies of records.

The penalty for theft, deliberate alteration, or destruction of records by any person in a manner not authorized by an applicable records control schedule, or the unlawful divulging of restricted information under current state law (Mississippi Code 25-59-23) constitutes a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine not less than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) and not greater than one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00).

RECORDS IN THE DEPARTMENT

Official records should be stored consistently within the department in a manner that provides protection against misuse, misplacement, damage, destruction, or theft.

Departments having the official records for the University take precedence over copies of records maintained by individuals or other departments. Original, confidential, and sensitive documents should be stored in a secure location and protected according to the University's INFORMATION CONFIDENTIALITY/SECURITY PLAN.

Definition of Records:

Official Records: A record with current administrative use for the generating unit. Records remain active for varying amounts of time, depending on the purpose.

Archival Records: A record that is inactive; not retained in the office in which it originated or received; and has permanent or historical value. The University Archives or the Mississippi Department of Archives and History keep and stores archival records.

Official Repository: The unit designated the responsibility for retention and timely destruction of official university records. The administrative manager or designee will receive the assign of responsibility.

University Record: The original and official copy of a record.

Permanent Records: Records essential to the University's ongoing and future operations.

Vital Records: Records that would be difficult to reconstruct if lost, stolen, damaged, or destroyed and whose loss could result in material damage to the University. These records are essential to document the University's legal position, financial position, and to preserve the University's ongoing operations, commitments, and rights. If departments think a record vital, they should consider storing copies at a separate location from the originals to reduce the potential for loss.

Inactive Records: Records consulted infrequently (fewer than once a month for each file drawer) and no longer needed to conduct current business.

Unofficial Record: Unofficial copies maintained in an office for convenience, other than the Repository Office.

MAINTENANCE OF UNIVERSITY RECORDS

Departments must maintain university records in a manner that provides (1) access for faculty and staff to carry out normal job responsibilities, and (2) reasonable protection against misuse, misplacement, loss, destruction, damage, or theft.

Unless authorized by the Executive Committee (Chancellor, Provost, Vice Chancellors), university records must be stored on university premises at all times.

Departments should document official records loaned to other departments or individuals, by describing the record, loan date, return date, borrowing department, individual, and signature of the borrower.

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If possible, departments should maintain records in an environment that is free from rodents, flooding, fire hazards, and unusual moisture, heat, and dust. The desirable environment for preserving records is a space with forced-air ventilation system that maintains a controlled temperature of 65-75 degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of 40-60 percent.

MINIMUM RETENTION PERIODS

The links below are directed to official repository departments and an index of records. This policy lists the minimum record retention requirements for the following:

- (1) Compliance with guidelines issued by the University
- (2) Providing maximum protection under current State statutes of limitations,
- (3) Supporting general university business practices,
- (4) Providing maximum protection under current Federal statutes of limitations,
- (5) In accordance with Mississippi Department of Archives and History
- (5) External entities that require specific retention periods for records

Note: Individuals responsible for the areas identified in this policy must be aware of all applicable laws and external agency regulations that might supersede these minimum retention periods. They must follow all laws and regulations in the retention and disposition of records. If laws or regulations supersede those noted, notify the Internal Audit Office in writing, to change the time noted in the university policy.

Address questions about the minimum retention period for records **not** listed to the Internal Audit Office.

Each department should use their discretion in deciding when to dispose of records after meeting all state, federal laws, and requirements in this policy. Departments should save time and space by properly disposing of records after satisfying requirements in this policy.

The [Index of Departments with Files/Records Retention Data](#) provides retention time for official records for individual departments.

The [Index of Records](#) is an alphabetical listing of records. To determine the Repository Office (official record keeper), click on the record and information will be displayed for the official repository and retention time of the official record.

DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

University records (regardless of the storage medium) can be disposed of upon reaching the minimum retention period stated in this policy, provided the department does not need the records for future administrative, legal, research/historical, or fiscal purposes.

1. Administrative value: contain information applicable to current or future university operations
2. Legal value: contain evidence of legally enforceable rights or obligations of the University
3. Research or historical value: document the purpose, growth, history, services, programs, and character of the campus
4. Fiscal value: required for budget development, financial reporting, or audit purposes.

The department head (or designee) is responsible for performing, at least annually, a review to determine the value or usefulness of departmental records. During this review, the department head (or designee) should identify and designate for disposal (destruction or transfer to an archive) the records with elapsed retention periods (time maintained in office plus time in inactive records area) that are no longer useful.

The department head is responsible for authorizing the disposal of records. **When authorized, shred records containing sensitive and/or confidential information and dispose of shredded material properly by recycling or putting in trash. DO NOT discard documents containing sensitive or confidential information in the trash that are not shredded.** The department head should sign and maintain, in the departmental files or as required by campus/unit procedures, a list of the records destroyed.

Erase and verify elimination of data beyond recovery on electronic media (diskette, CD, hard drive) before reusing or discarding. Recycle, if possible, records that do not contain personal, confidential, or financial information. The Physical Plant (915-7051) can provide information regarding recycling. Otherwise, tear records in several pieces and place in the garbage container. Erase electronic media components for recycling.

Unofficial records do not record official university activities and include:

1. extra copies of official documents kept for convenience or reference
2. stock supplies of publications
3. extra copies of circulated materials where original materials are filed; reading files
4. follow-up correspondence copies
5. draft or work copies of finalized documents
6. letters of transmittal that do not alter the transmitted information
7. shorthand notes
8. tapes of transcribed documents
9. routing slips
10. telephone call slips

11. private materials that are neither made nor received by any administrative staff while transacting official business.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS STORAGE:

Electronic record keeping is the storage and retrieval of information in digital form. This means of record keeping includes, but is not limited to, the use of tapes, disks and optical disks. This applies to all electronic records systems.

Electronic or optical media, both fixed and removable, should have retention and disposition instructions incorporated into the system design. These media should be identified in a unique and standardized way, be maintained in a temperature-controlled and humidity-controlled environment determined by the medium, and be handled appropriately if the medium requires special care (e.g., a smoke-free, low-humidity environment). Develop procedures to ensure timely backups of data. Consider rotating tapes for vital records. Consult vendors of backup media to find out the maximum number of times a given tape may be used for backup purposes. The retention period for these records is in accordance with the guidelines set forth in this policy.

Disposal of Paper Records after Transfer to Other Media:

Compact storage methods provide a space saving and often cost efficient means of storing records originally in paper form. Take extreme care when transferring information to a storage medium. Departments must ensure that records are readable and verified for accuracy before destroying paper copies. Retain the stored electronic records for the minimum retention period specified in this policy. **Shred paper records containing sensitive and/or confidential information. DO NOT throw documents containing sensitive or confidential information in the trash that are not shredded!**