

# RECORDS MANAGEMENT OFFICE

## HARVARD UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

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### UNIVERSITY RECORDS POLICIES

Records are a vital corporate resource requiring prudent management. Recognizing this, the University has developed a set of policies governing the care and management of its records. University policy regarding its records has evolved over the years and is articulated in a series of Corporation votes.

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**University records definition:** “For the purposes of this definition, records shall mean recorded information, regardless of physical form.

University records include all forms of recorded information regardless of physical characteristics, created, received, recorded, or legally filed in the course of University business or in pursuance of the University’s legal obligations. These records serve as evidence of the University’s organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities and are subject to records management review and evaluation prior to any decisions regarding reformatting or disposal. University records include but are not limited to minutes; correspondence; memoranda; financial records, such as invoices, journals, ledgers, purchase orders, and other information pertaining to fiscal matters, including grant fiscal matters; published materials, including reports and newsletters; moving images and photographs; sound recordings; drawings and maps; annotated copies or books; and computer data or other machine readable electronic records, including electronic mail. Records created or received by faculty in administrative and University committee capacities are also considered to be University records.”<sup>1</sup>

**Electronic Records:** Electronic records, including electronic mail, are included in the definition of University records.

**Ownership:** University records evince the University’s history, organization and operations; as such, they are the property of the University and not of the officers, faculty members, or employees who create them or to whom they are entrusted.<sup>2</sup>

**Management of Records:** General oversight of University records is vested in the University Archives. The University Archives is responsible for establishing general record

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<sup>1</sup> Corporation Vote of March 13, 1995

<sup>2</sup> Corporation Vote of February 6, 1939; Corporation Vote of March 13, 1995

procedures and retention schedules “to ensure the prudent maintenance and efficient disposition of University records.... Faculties and other units may establish individual archives; in such cases the administrator of the archives shall coordinate the archives’ procedures and schedules with the Curator of the University Archives to ensure that the objectives of the University’s record management program are met. The administrator of the Archives shall observe archival standards and university policies regarding the condition of the records and the storage facility as well as the maintenance and accessibility of the collection. No records in these archives shall be destroyed without the approval of the Curator of the University Archives.<sup>3</sup>

**Records Disposal:** “Records are not to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of except in accordance with procedures and schedules established by the University Archives through its records management program.”<sup>4</sup> Records may not be destroyed unless they have been included on an approved records retention schedule. Permission to destroy records is granted through the schedule.

**Historic Records:** The University Archives is the repository of the historic records of the University.<sup>5</sup>

**Access to Records:** Access to records remaining in the custody of offices is through the head of the office. The University Archives will normally grant access to University records that are greater than 50 years old, or 80 years old if they relate to individuals. In cases where records are so fragile that they may be damaged by use, the Archives will provide copies for reference, or they refer to individuals. Access to records less than 50 years old, or 80 years old if they relate to individuals, may be granted with the approval of the appropriate office or department.<sup>6</sup>

**Records not Subject to these policies:**

- Extra copies of documents kept only for convenience or reference;
- Extra copies of publication stocked for distribution purposes;
- Reproduction masters, unless they are the only copy of the record in existence or are the microfilm master copy;
- Material relating to individual employees’ memberships;
- Faculty research notes;
- Blank forms kept for supply purposes;
- Personal or private papers neither created nor received in connection with the University’s business; and
- Reference materials such as library, museum, and specimen material made or acquired

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3 Corporation Vote of March 13, 1995

4 Corporation Vote of March 13, 1995

5 Corporation Vote of February 6, 1939

6 Corporation Vote of October 3, 1988, amended by Corporation Vote of March 13, 1989

solely for reference, research, or exhibition purposes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Corporation Vote of March 13, 1995