ABSTRACT: University archives and records management programs in Canada and the United States are phenomena of the post-World War II era. Surveys undertaken by the Society of American Archivists from 1949 to the mid-1960s found that universities in Canada and the United States managed their institutional archival records primarily as a part-time activity, preferring instead to devote resources to traditional library collections including manuscripts and rare books. The survey the authors conducted in the spring of 2002 revealed the persistence of old trends and the struggle of the university archivists and records managers to balance old and new needs. The survey results demonstrated the effectiveness of an advisory records management committee on the promotion of records and archives policies and procedures, the need for compliance audit, and the development and delivery of systematic training on information management. A major weakness identified by survey respondents was the lack of institution-wide electronic records management policies and procedures developed in cooperation with senior administrators, information technology staff, university archivists, and records managers. Another weakness is the absence of official standards for university archives and records programs. The release of ISO 15489, Information and documentation — Records management in September 2001, provides an important departure. This international standard, when used in conjunction with the SAA Guidelines for College and University Archives, will provide Canadian and American universities with the tools to address current challenges in order to develop a comprehensive archives and records program.

Introduction

Publicly supported universities in the United States and Canada face increasing pressure from society to meet not only cultural and research needs, but also accountability demands. Historically, universities have been leaders in acquiring and preserving our documentary heritage. But how well have these academic institutions preserved their own institutional history? What factors have promoted or detracted from the success of
their own archives and records programs? In the following paragraphs, the authors present an overview of the historical background of records and archives programs in these two countries as well as report on the current state deduced from a survey conducted in the spring of 2002. Program standards are also presented based on the new ISO 15489, *Information and documentation — Records management.*

**Historical Background**

Interest in the nature and number of archives programs in universities devoted to the preservation of official university records began following World War II. In 1950, Dwight H. Wilson reported on a survey conducted in 1949 by the Society of American Archivists' Committee on College and University Archives (SAA CCUA) "to determine the extent of archival awareness in institutions of higher learning in the United States and Canada." Of the 84 institutions responding, 56 reported the existence of an archives, but of these, only 15 reported preserving "most of the official records, but have no unified archival program." Moreover, there existed confusion among university officials in distinguishing between the official records and the collections of historical material pertaining to the institution or the region. In a 1950 study of records management, two members of the History Department at the University of Wisconsin concluded that "University records answer the questions of university administrators, who must solve current problems and plan for the future, and they provide materials for university historians ..."

In 1952, Ernst Posner, professor of history and archival administration at American University, identified three problem areas associated with records administration in the universities of the day:

> Predominantly private institutions, universities in the U.S. were independent bodies and the bulk of records documenting their activities lies almost exclusively with the institution, rather than with government offices as would be the case for publicly supported institutions in Europe. As a result, the university has sole discretion in determining the final disposition of its records. There is no central authority to force or induce academic institutions to accept certain standards in matters archival. Finally, the great discrepancies in the size, structure and status of academic institutions undermines the development of any such standards.\(^3\)

Having said this, Posner advocated the placement of the university archives administratively within the library along the lines of the Harvard University model, and the development of programs, which combined the preservation of institutional records with the acquisition and servicing of noninstitutional records. He did, however, acknowledge that there was a growing trend to make the university archives responsible to a top executive of the university, but he felt that this could be avoided by defining clearly the functions of the librarian and the archivist, thereby ensuring that "justice" would be done "whether he [the archivist] reports directly to his college president or indirectly to an understanding librarian."\(^4\)
The SAA CCUA followed up on the 1949 survey in 1962 and 1966. The 1962 survey included a select list of 350 private and public universities and colleges based on geographical location, class, and size. The chairman, Philip Mason of Wayne State University, reported a return of 77 percent to the six questions. Mason reported that although 42 percent of respondents had employed a full- or part-time archivist, the majority of those holding the position were librarians with no training or experience as archivists. Four years later, institutions were asked to respond on two basic areas: the existence of an institutional archives and the nature and scope of that operation. The U.S. institutions surveyed totalled 1,156, with all but 350 institutions responding; 45 of the 46 Canadian institutions responded. Of these, 204 in the United States and 21 in Canada were described as "universities." The picture of archives in universities at this time reflects a similar pattern of development in both countries, and little progress since the 1962 survey. Most archives appeared to be a part-time activity within the library; their holdings were very small. Warner concludes that in 1966, college and university archives "are still in the developmental stage" but "that there is general acceptance by higher educational institutions in the United States and Canada of the idea of preserving their archives, a statement that could not have been made two decades ago."

Six years later, little had changed. In 1972, the SAA CCUA conducted another survey for an updated edition of its directory of institutions. Questions were similar to the 1966 survey and dealt with staffing, types of holdings, and the place of the archives in the administrative structure of the institution. Two hundred fifty-three respondents were universities in both the United States (236) and Canada (17). The committee found that little had changed with regard to resources allocated to the preservation of university records:

It is interesting and a little sad to note that many of the reservations which Robert Warner expressed in his Introduction in 1966 are still valid ... It is unfortunately clear that there are comparatively few full-time university archivists and that this is a field where the profession has a great deal of work to do ...

The decade of the 1970s, however, would prove to be one of unprecedented growth of public institutions of higher education in North America. Coupled with this was an increasing awareness of the importance of recorded information for both current operational use and long-term historical use. By the late 1970s, other directories such as the National Historical Publications and Records Commission’s Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories provided listings of over 13,000 repositories throughout the United States. In early 1979, the SAA CCUA surveyed 1,600 higher educational institutions. Only those institutions with manuscripts, archives, or both were included in the directory whether or not the repository was designated the official repository for the university’s records. The 1980 edition, edited by J. Frank Cook, director of University Archives at University of Wisconsin–Madison, included 458 universities. Compared to 1972, there has been an increase of 45 percent in the number of repositories in both Canada and the United States.

In all of these surveys, the SAA CCUA found it difficult to accurately document the role of records management in the development of university archives. The 1980 sur-
vey did ask institutions to identify records management as a responsibility. Only 17 of
the 458 universities identified a staff member with responsibility for records manage-
ment. In the early 1980s, two separate studies were undertaken that would provide
some assessment of the state of records management in North American universities. 12
In 1982, Nicholas Burckel and J. Frank Cook of the University of Wisconsin published
the results of their survey of 110 randomly selected institutions in Canada and the United
States. They found that 52 percent of public institutions reported records management
activity, while only 30 percent of private institutions could report such activity. They
concluded that the reason for this difference lay in the fact that "public institutions must
maintain more control over the preservation and destruction of their records because
they fall under the provisions of state public records laws ..." 13

The results of this study were supported by one conducted by the Office of Manage-
ment Studies of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in 1983. ARL surveyed 58
academic public institution members. 14 Fifty-two of the 53 institutions (from both Canada
and the United States) responding reported that they had a university archives respon-
sible for the acquisition and preservation of records of the parent institution. 15 Twenty-
six of these universities had instituted campus-wide records management programs,
with 21 of these formally linked to the archives. Even with this apparent increase in
records management, it was clear that many universities were still very much in the
formative stages of a comprehensive records management system.

Thus, by the end of the 1980s, university archives programs far exceeded the number
of records management programs at North American universities. However, among these,
public universities appeared to be far more likely to have recognized the link between
archives and records than their private counterparts. This pattern was reinforced in a
1990 study of records management at U.S. colleges and universities conducted by
Don C. Skemer and Geoffrey P. Williams of the University of Albany. They found that
55 percent of public universities had a campus-wide records management program com-
pared to 6.8 percent of private universities. As in the early 1980s, the reasons for this
were linked to public accountability as well as better institutional archives, improved
records retrieval, and savings of space and filing equipment. 16 While archivists recog-
nized the importance of the relationship between records management and archives
programs, high-level administrators viewed records management as a low priority, fre-
quently resulting in an unnecessary and potentially expensive layer of bureaucracy.

Survey of Public Universities in Canada and the United States, 2002

Although the survey covered a small sample of publicly-assisted universities in both
Canada and the United States, its results were indicative of the persistence of old trends
and the struggle of the university archivists and records managers to grapple with the
new ones. The survey attempted to draw a more recent picture of the conditions in
which the archives and records programs operate by assessing the factors impacting
their growth and effectiveness as well as the way in which the university archivists and
records managers see their changing role.
Survey Questions

The survey questions reflected some of the areas suggested by the SAA Guidelines for College and University Archives, such as organizational structure, administrative authorization, policies and procedures, personnel, and training and outreach. In addition, there were questions on the history of the establishment of the programs, the degree of policy implementation, and the existence of a compliance review process. Aside from the factual information, the authors asked the respondents to share their project priorities and constraints for the next five years, as well as assess how their institution perceives the effectiveness of their records and archives program and how they view the relation between information management and accountability in managing it. Lastly, universities were asked to comment on the positive and negative effects of information technology on their programs and the factors that, in their opinion, would help raise the awareness of accountability in managing active university records and that would make their program more effective.

Survey Methodology

The survey was sent to 43 U.S. and 16 Canadian universities. Fifteen U.S. (34.8 percent return) and 15 Canadian (93.75 percent return) institutions responded. Of the 15 U.S. institutions that responded, two had student populations between 11,000 and 15,000, and 13 between 21,000 and 48,500, according to the 1998 Higher Education Directory (Higher Education Publications, Inc., Falls Church, Virginia, 1998). Of the 15 Canadian universities, nearly half (six universities) had student populations between 21,000 and 49,000, with two between 10,000 and 15,000, two over 49,000, and four under 10,000. One university had between 15,000 and 20,000 students. Their Web sites were also used to determine that they had records and/or archives programs. The institutions selected were representative of the main geographic areas: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West in the U.S., and Atlantic, Central, and West in Canada.

Survey Results

Administrative Authorization

In the American institutions, the university archives/records management functions are supported by university policies approved by the board of trustees or a high-level administrative policy advisory committee and take into consideration the state’s public records laws. Some institutions have administrative authorization by their state’s records committee. In addition, there were specific university archives policies and procedures. Similarly, in the Canadian universities, these functions were supported by the overall institutional policies and approved by the board of governors, board of regents, or the office of the president. What was not common to all institutions in both countries is the existence of a records management and advisory committee. In the U.S., half of the institutions reported having a records management advisory group. In Canada, nine of the institutions reported a committee, but four of them indicated that the committee was inactive. In both countries, the work of the committee is of only advisory nature with limited or no authority to enforce policy.
Policy Implementation/Compliance

Most U.S. and Canadian institutions reported policies applying to all records formats, not specific to electronic records. Six out of the 15 U.S. institutions reported separate electronic records guidelines/policies (two of them only on electronic mail management). In Canada, none of the universities reported having a separate electronic records policy. The ones with electronic records guidelines/policies admitted that these policies have not helped promote records management issues or good records practices. Only electronic mail policies have somewhat caught the attention of the information technology department. Most lamented that the electronic records policies lack an implementation mechanism.

As for the types of records retention schedules used, most institutions had both general and unit-specific ones. Again, despite the fact that most of these records programs have been in existence for over three decades, the records retention and archives policies lacked consistent implementation. This highlighted the difficulty of implementing a compliance review process. It seemed that the only people who understand its importance in ensuring legal compliance and systematic collection of historical institutional records are the university archivists and records managers. Some institutions had established information processes that were aided by the internal auditor’s office, reminders, and annual in-person compliance visits (both in offices and records center). Most U.S. institutions did not have a compliance review process in place, while in Canadian institutions, the compliance process has been aided by provincial legislation on access to information and protection of privacy laws. The province of Quebec has additional legislation, such as the Archives Law, requiring universities to manage and preserve corporate records.19

Personnel

The U.S. and Canadian institutional archives and records programs are administered on an average by two to four full-time professional archivists/records managers and one to five part-time students as well as “casual staff.” Their responsibilities include university archives reference, records management, records management training, Web-site management, archival processing, oral history, exhibit design, and records center administration. In most instances, the archivists/records managers perform a variety of duties regardless of their job description. The majority complain about rising workloads and inadequate staff. Sixty percent of the U.S. institutional archives/records programs managed their own budget, 20 percent handled a small budget, and 20 percent did not manage their own budget; 46.6 percent of the Canadian institutional archives/records and information management programs managed their own budget, while 53.3 percent did not. Most were discouraged by the ever-shrinking budgets and competition in the allocation of library resources. What was interesting in the survey responses was the recurring themes of the post-World War II archival literature. These included inadequate funding, lack of space, and backlog of unprocessed collections. A new problem was the increased number of research requests via electronic mail as well as the labor-intensive and technically demanding development and maintenance of Web sites.
Training and Outreach

The institutional approach to employee training and outreach varied a great deal among records and archives programs. It reflected the limitations of time and resources university archivists and records managers face and was indicative of the institution’s perception of compliance and accountability issues. The type of employee training was determined by the “comprehensiveness” of the program and the availability of staff. The institutions with full-fledged records and archives programs offered annual training and appeared to have “systematic” (scheduled) training. The institutions where the university archives was “stronger” than the records management component provided “how to use the archives” types of sessions and spent more time developing educational exhibits on university history and designing Web sites. The survey answers revealed that fewer than half of the institutions that participated have “formalized” records and archives management training. Also, very few have designed sessions on electronic records management that include electronic mail. Most university archivists and records managers offered periodic one-on-one or group sessions (for colleges, departments, etc.) on records policies and procedures, records center services, filing methods, and electronic records. They also disseminated the information when they met with various offices to design the department-specific records retention schedules.

The forms of outreach again depended on which component of the program was stronger. If the archives program was stronger, then the presentations, articles in university publications, exhibits, and tours emphasized the institutional records collections. In some cases, the university archives collaborated with the history department to promote the use of its collections. Conversely, if the emphasis was on records management, the university records manager offered orientation presentations (sometimes collaborating with the university archivist where there were two separate positions), tours of the records center, and articles on archives, records retention, and policy issues for university publications. The outreach efforts included addressing various institutional committees. It was interesting to note that in Canadian institutions the training and outreach area was still a weak one. Only four (all four have records management programs) of the 15 institutions had any regular training sessions offered.

Project Priorities/Constraints

When the participants were asked what their project priorities were for the next five years, their responses were expectedly similar. Their projects fell into two categories: a) basic records and archives management such as systematic collection of university records by the university archives, employee training, records retention compliance review, and finding storage for inactive records, and b) electronic records management such as imaging of photographic collections, design and implementation of an electronic records policy, and design and maintenance of the departmental Web pages. Although more than half of the Canadian institutions were in the initial phases of their records program development, their project priorities did not differ from those of their U.S. counterparts. Their constraints did not differ either. Both U.S. and Canadian university records managers and archivists complained about insufficient funding (mainly competition in allocation of library budget), time, and staff.
Their more salient complaint, however, was the unsatisfactory cooperation with the information technology department and their frustrating efforts, as one respondent said, to "integrate the records management program into the campus information architecture." The following quotation from another respondent eloquently sums up the sources of frustration: "General campus-wide decline in the perceived need for reliable record keeping, unfounded confidence in the longevity of electronic products, continuing expansion of departmental responsibilities without related staffing increase, narrow libraries support for records management functions, insufficient technical support and resources."

Institutional Culture

With the last group of questions, the authors aimed at gathering some qualitative responses in order to assess the prevailing perceptions about the records and archives programs and their effectiveness of these programs in raising the level of accountability in the management of active institutional records. One of the questions examined the relationship between the records and archives program and the offices of internal auditor, legal counsel, and information technology. The U.S. respondents reported that they had good to strong collaboration and routine contact with the first two, while their relationship with the last of these was weak. They complained of not being included in the decision-making process pertaining to electronic records management. Most viewed the information technology department as "a challenging area." The Canadian respondents reported a closer collaboration with the offices of internal auditor and legal counsel since these administrators were usually members of the records management advisory committees. Overall, there seemed to be a more uniform involvement of these offices in records management compared to their U.S. counterparts. Surprisingly, the Canadian comments on the relationship with the information technology office were limited.

The next question dealt with how the records and archives program was perceived by the university community and, more specifically, by the administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Most reported that the staff had a very decent to good attitude toward the university archivists' and records managers' efforts to promote their programs. The administrators' attitude was improving. The students had good or no reaction and the faculty's attitude was fair. One response echoed the consensus on the faculty's attitude: "Mostly never heard of us unless they need us." The Canadians' responses on the staff's and administrators' attitude were the same as those from the U.S. In the case of faculty and students, they seemed to be more aware of the existence of the university archives in Canada and their attitude was overall reported as good.

Current Trends in Information Technology/Perception of Accountability

Since the late 1980s, the university records and archives programs have been facing new issues brought about by the explosion of electronic records and the Internet, and the resulting ease of access to resources. When asked to discuss the negative and positive effects of information technology on their operation, the responses revealed that the programs were not equipped to face the new issues. They have struggled desperately to find a balance between satisfying the basic records and archives needs of their
institutions and the more complex ones stemming from the pressure to provide better and faster access to institutional information. To make matters worse, they seem to be continually caught between the senior management politics and the shortsighted view of information by the information technologists.

They all admitted that Web-based access to their archival and records management information had improved the visibility of their programs. For example, the photographic collection digitization and electronic finding aids projects have improved access to collections and boosted public relations. They have not, however, solved the problems of systematic collection of institutional records for the university archives. The negative effect of electronic access and communications has been the sharp increase in workload mainly because both result in higher expectations for fast turnaround. In addition, the Web sites are a dynamic collection of documents and they need to be regularly maintained in order to be effective tools. A more specific workload problem has emerged from the rise of photographic and other non-textual media reproduction requests that are labor-intensive and time-consuming.

In general, the persistent complaint, as one colleague put it, is that the electronic records issues are “not dealt with adequately.” Even when electronic records policies or guidelines exist, no implementation mechanism is in place to support them. When it comes to electronic records, the crisis management approach has prevailed, while significant institutional records remain at risk (e.g., research, student, electronic records documenting university history, large databases). What is obvious is that both U.S. and Canadian university archivists and records managers wish to develop a closer relationship with their information technology colleagues and participate in electronic records management decisions. One of the respondents aptly observed that “archives and records management need to be seen as components of the campus information system architecture and we need an infrastructure that will support the carrying out of archival and records management activities.”

The difficulties in managing electronic records effectively did not derive simply from not being able to enforce policies but rather from the fact that universities have adopted new technologies with little consideration given to appraising the information content. The content has not been managed according to its value. University administrators have not caught up with the concept of information as an asset/resource that must be protected and managed across the institution, or with the fact that university archivists and records managers are information content appraisers. This approach has resulted in increased legal risks, neglect of the electronic records requiring long-term preservation, and inconsistent documentation and collection of historical university records. In addition, new legislation has created new issues to consider. The Canadian colleagues reported that Freedom of Information legislation has increased awareness of the benefits of good records practices, but has created some problems in interpreting access issues.

The survey responses showed that university records and archives programs are caught between a very slowly changing institutional culture and an uncertain view of accountability in managing institutional information. Indeed, there were very few comments specific to perceptions of accountability. One, can, however, draw some conclusions from the responses as a whole. The institutional attitudes and the legal risks involving electronic records along with the traditional records management issues have created
increased responsibilities and workload for the university archivists/records managers. The university archivists/records managers are trying to improve archival services in their departments and train the employees of the entire institution in basic paper and electronic records management concepts, but have not been involved in the design of university-wide information management strategies. To make matters worse, the policies they help create have not been consistently implemented, leaving them in a constant state of frustration. While the solution to these problems in information management are multifaceted, it seems evident from the survey responses that universities would benefit from the application of standards relating to the development of policies and responsibilities, design and implementation of records systems, records processes and controls, monitoring and auditing, and training.

**Standards for Model University Archives and Records Programs**

In spite of decades of discussion, analysis, and study by university archivists, there are still no official standards for university archives and records management programs. The closest model available to universities is the Society of American Archivists Guidelines for College and University Archives.20 This document emphasizes the components of an archives repository with records management being viewed as largely supplemental to, rather than an essential feature of, a university archives. More recently, the University Archivists Group of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation produced “Standards for an electronic records policy,” but it, too, fails to marry its standard with any overall records or archives regime for universities.21

With the publication of the ISO 15489 in September 2001, universities as well as all other public and private organizations have an opportunity to apply an internationally approved strategy for developing and maintaining an effective records management program. The standard, while not addressing archival institutions in particular, recognizes that one of the basic principles of a records management program is “preserving records and making them accessible over time, in order to meet business requirements and community expectations.”22 For universities, this standard should be used in conjunction with the SAA Guidelines in the development of a comprehensive archives and records program.

ISO 15489 is produced in two parts, Part 1: General and Part 2: Guidelines, and applies to records regardless of format or medium. Both of these documents should be reviewed as one assesses a program’s strengths and weaknesses. As a general philosophy, universities need to recognize that “to support the continuing conduct of [university] business, comply with the regulatory environment, and provide necessary accountability, organizations should create and maintain authentic, reliable and useable records, and protect the integrity of those records for as long as required.”23 Part 2 of ISO 15489 describes a methodology that includes five broad areas that must be adopted by an organization intending to comply with this goal. In the following paragraphs, we present this methodology as it might be adapted to a privately or publicly funded university environment. References to the particular section of ISO 15489 are found in parentheses.
1. Policies and responsibilities (ISO 15489, Part 2, Section 2)

1.1 University archives and records management policy
A university policy on records management "should be adopted and endorsed at the highest decision-making level and promulgated throughout the organization" and those responsible for compliance should be identified. While separate policy statements on archives and records management may be the norm in many universities, a single policy statement on records and archives would emphasize the reality of the records continuum, especially in today’s electronic information environment.

1.2 Objectives
In developing a records program policy, the ISO standard identifies five basic goals covering the full records continuum from creation to final disposition and, where appropriate, ongoing preservation for scholarly research. In particular, these goals focus on the creation of records essential to the organization’s activities, the transparency of record processes and adequacy of records systems, and the maintenance, storage, preservation, and destruction of records according to a defined approval process. The emphasis of these goals is the importance of an integrated records and archives system.

1.3 Responsibilities
Today's electronic information environment demands the close collaboration of all levels of administration. Ideally, the responsibilities for records and archives management should be under one administrative head. At the very least, the university archivist must be a key player in this process with authority to work closely with all levels of the administration. As we have seen from our survey responses, it has become a frequent practice to place records management activities under the jurisdiction of the university archives. This arrangement will be effective only if the office reports to a senior administrator who authorizes a close working relationship with the rest of senior administration, information technology staff, and general administrative staff. In short, all employees need to be made aware of their individual responsibility for the management of the records they create, use, maintain, and store in the performance of their duties.

2. Strategies, design and implementation (ISO 15489, Part 2, Section 3)
Part 2 of the ISO standard discusses the design and implementation of a records system that would include such activities as preliminary investigation, analysis of business activity, identification of records requirements, assessment of existing systems, identification of strategies for satisfying requirements, and the design, implementation, and post-implementation of the records system. The main objective of these steps is to determine to what extent the information in your current records system contains the following characteristics: reliability, integrity, compliance, comprehensiveness, and systematism.

Since this ISO does not address standards for archives specifically, we propose a summary of activities for the design and implementation of archival systems based
on the Society of American Archivists Guidelines for College and University Archives. The activities inherent in the design of an archival system would include acquisition mandate and strategies, identification of requirements for university archives, appraisal criteria, accessioning system, processing, descriptive standards, reference services, and access and use. In a university setting, the strategies for an archival system could be developed as part and parcel of the process for design and implementation of the records system.

At the implementation stage of these systems, policies, procedures, and standards must be well documented and distributed to all participants, training undertaken, and improved records management practices integrated into daily business activities. As reported in our survey, this is an area where university administrators have failed to act in a consistent manner.

3. Records processes and controls (ISO 15489, Part 2, Section 4)
Once the analysis and planning have been done, universities must then look at specific tools and processes to manage their corporate information. In the summary below, we merged the instruments and processes described in Section 4 of the ISO standard into three broad areas and identified where the archives processes may come into play:

3.1 Business activities classification
This process is familiar to many of us as an essential feature of any records management program. A university must determine which records are to be kept as part of the records system, and how they are to be filed, indexed, and stored in order to be retrieved when necessary, regardless of whether they are paper based or electronic. The activities include the capture of records, registration, classification (such as a file classification scheme), the use and tracking of the records in the office, in storage, or in the archives, and the adoption of archival principles of provenance and original order for those records of permanent value that are transferred to the archives.

3.2 Disposition authorities
The need for retention schedules covering all formats and media of records is not new, but the need to develop these at the time electronic records systems are designed and implemented must be emphasized to university administrators in the development of any records system. As our survey responses indicated, this is not the case in most universities and, indeed, in many other organizations as well. In addition to identifying facilities for on- and off-site storage, a university must designate separate facilities for the permanent storage of archival records and ensure that procedures for the use and tracking of these records are in place.

3.3 Access and security classification for records and archives
Determining who has the right to access information in the university and protecting individual privacy are essential elements in today’s information-based society. In
today’s electronic work environment, the ability to duplicate and distribute information throughout the workplace and beyond can be done with the touch of a computer key. This element of a records system now must be identified at the time of creation and built into the records system. It is important to note as well that access rights and security of information do not end with the transfer of records to a university archives. University policies on privacy as well as state and provincial legislation may extend periods of restriction for many years and will impact the use of university records transferred to the archives.

4. Monitoring and auditing (ISO 15489, Part 2, Section 5)

The need for ongoing actions to monitor the compliance with records and archives policies and procedures is an area that has been neglected in many universities, as reported in the survey results. This activity should be imbedded in the records management policy for a university and involve means of measuring how well university employees, at all levels, are complying with the program. Regular activity in this area will help to identify weaknesses in a program before they can jeopardize the university’s legal, fiscal, and operational responsibilities. Using survey tools to get user feedback from office administrators about the records and archives program services is useful in understanding the level of compliance, along with a more formal compliance review through regular auditing of information management practices.

5. Training (ISO 15489, Part 2, Section 6)

ISO 15489 identifies the need for all staff involved in creating and managing recorded information to be well-informed and trained in the university’s records management program. This principle should include the archives as well. Universities should employ information professionals with recognized credentials to manage their programs. These professionals can, in turn, provide the training environment essential to ensure that university employees meet all compliance requirements of the program. Training sessions developed by archivists and/or records managers should utilize the resources of IT staff—systems administrators, Web designers—as well as legal counsel and auditing staff to present balanced and authoritative content.

Summary

As demonstrated in the survey responses and the review of ISO 15489, basic archives and records management issues are integral parts of the overall institutional records and information system. How effective archives and records programs are depends on the establishment of comprehensive records management policies and procedures. In addition, the survey identified an advisory records management committee as vital to a well-managed program. This committee allows the university archivist/records manager to gain knowledge and consensus from the diverse groups of the university community and to garner senior management support. The collaboration with the committee may be greatly enhanced with a more “formal” or “regular” collaboration among the university archivist/records manager, internal audit, and legal counsel. Unfortunately, neither
written policies and procedures nor the work of a committee can yield any results if there is no mechanism to measure its effectiveness. Therefore, a process assessing compliance and measuring the effectiveness of the records and archives program is one of its vital components. Again, once designed, a compliance review process that lacks implementation and senior management support is as worthless as the policy it was based on.

Systematic training in information management was seen as a key to a university’s records program’s success in both ISO 15489 and in survey responses, since institutional information is created and managed by people. This training should target new employees as well as offer opportunities to all employees to “refresh” their knowledge on records policies and practices. A combination of in-person and on-line training would be appropriate to meet the different needs of employees as well as free up time for other tasks by the university archivist/records manager. Here again the effectiveness of the training methods needs to be measured and the employees need to be rewarded for participating. During training it is important to emphasize the importance of documentation of current business processes, to raise awareness of accountability issues on institutional, departmental, and individual levels, and to involve various experts (information technologists, Web designers, legal counsel, and internal auditors). Perceptions of accountability vary from group to group and are not easy to change. University archivists and records managers should keep in mind that their role is to educate the university community and to participate in information management policy design and implementation. More specifically, they must educate information technology personnel and senior administrators on the differences “between storage, ownership and responsibility for records,” on assignment of responsibility as well as on the value of records content.

Although records management is media independent, electronic records issues have significantly complicated the management of archives and records programs. Therefore, they require new strategies based on basic records management principles. When designing electronic records policies, universities should include electronic records series in the general and department-specific records retention schedules so that electronic records are not seen as “different” records. Short- and long-term retention periods for records must be addressed. This includes assessing the “systems”’ ability to allow the implementation of “scheduling” and when data migration and media conversion should be undertaken. In addition, when planning electronic records management projects (i.e., imaging, media conversions, and other types of “pilot” projects) design should take into consideration the overall systems architecture. They deserve thorough planning with reasonable but not unknown deadlines because of their complexity and the involvement of many information professionals and administrators.

Given the history of multiple approaches to managing records and archives in the last 50 years and the enormous challenges—technical, financial, managerial—that North American universities face today, widely accepted records and information management models challenge universities to seek a degree of uniformity in managing and safeguarding their information resources. Thus, university records issues need to be examined in the context of the large information picture of a university’s long-range plan. ISO 15489, in conjunction with the SAA Guidelines, offers a strong foundation
for defining program objectives and responsibilities, designing effective information systems, ensuring systematic collection of institutional history, monitoring legal compliance and administrative efficiency, and establishing an ongoing employee training program.

Selected Resources/References

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NOTES

4. Posner, 156.
6. Also in 1966, the SAA College and University Archives Committee published the first directory. It included 45 Canadian institutions, which may coincide with the ones reported by the Committee in Mason’s 1963 article. See College and University Archives in the United States and Canada (Ann Arbor: Society of American Archivists, College and University Archives Committee, 1966).
7. For the purposes of this paper, any institution whose name includes the word “university” was counted as a “university archives.”


15. However, a “university archives” reporting such activity did not have to have exclusive responsibility for official records, but could include a partial responsibility within a larger administrative unit responsible for non-university records.


18. Total number of universities in the U.S.: approximately 3,786; total number of universities in Canada: approximately 90.


20. Guidelines for College and University Archives.


27. ISO 15489-1:2001, Part 1, Section 8.3.4.