



Managing The Records Of Departing Employees

FOR MANAGERS

Policies

Almost every employee creates records as a part of his or her job at Harvard. Of the records created, those that apply to a person's job or to the University are "University records." University records are those that are "created, received, recorded, or legally filed in the course of University business or in pursuance of the University's legal obligations." These records may be paper, e-mail, word processing documents, spreadsheets, photographs, or in other form or format. Often employees will keep them in their own desks, local file cabinets or on their local computer drives. Nonetheless, they remain University property and are subject to University records policy.

When an employee leaves a position, all records under the control of that employee should be reviewed and dealt with according to University [records policy](#). This includes records in shared spaces about which the employee has sole knowledge. Some records may be disposed of immediately, but most will need to be retained to ensure continued smooth operation of the office or for legal or policy reasons. In this case the records may need to be transferred to another employee, into the office's filing system or to another location. University offices should establish procedures to ensure that records in the possession of employees at the time of separation are managed properly and that important University information is not inadvertently destroyed or made public.

Responsibilities

Prior to separation, the employee should provide his or her supervisor with a list of all University records in his/her possession and their location. If possible, the employee and supervisor should review the records together. If it is not possible to review the records before separation, the employee's direct supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the records are stored, transferred, or destroyed properly. These actions should be documented as part of the separation process, for example by inclusion on a separation check-off list.

While information technology personnel need to be involved to ensure proper transfer, protection, or deletion of electronic records, it is the responsibility of the employee's supervisor to apply University policy to the employee's electronic files. Offices should establish procedures for initiating clean-up of the electronic files. IT personnel should take no actions that will result in the deletion of University records without the express approval of the separating employee's supervisor.

Places to Look for Records

Paper records

- desktop
- desk drawers
- filing cabinets, both shared and in the individual's workspace
- any records temporarily in the possession of a colleague or another department

Electronic records

- removable media (USB sticks, CDs, floppies, etc.)
- the employee's hard drive
- area(s) on server(s) designated for the employee's use or under the employee's control
- e-mail accounts
- calendar accounts
- the shared areas of servers for
 - areas that are primarily controlled or used by the employee
 - records created by or known only by the employee
- personal devices, whether Harvard- or personally-owned
 - laptops
 - PDAs
 - In some situations, information should not be stored on personal devices. See the [Harvard University Information Security and Privacy web site](#) for more information.

What to Do with the Records

- Active records should be transferred to the custody of other employees as appropriate. Under certain circumstances the status of the employee or the sensitivity of the records may require that the transfer be documented.
- Consult the General Records Schedule and any appropriate special schedules to determine the proper retention of any inactive records.
 - Inactive electronic records may need to be printed, depending on the length of time the files have value and the need to have them in electronic form.
- Records that are not University records may, if not claimed by the employee, be discarded immediately.
- For assistance with determining the proper retention or disposition of any of these records, contact Records Management Services.
- Dispose of any information securely.
 - For physical records, use secure shredding. The University has a preferred records destruction vendor who has been vetted by the University. The vendor can also set up shred bins in your office when appropriate.
 - For electronic information, appropriate steps should be taken to completely remove any information from discarded computers. When information is no longer needed, it should be rendered inaccessible or unreadable using appropriate software or other means. (For more information visit the [Harvard University Information Security and Privacy web site](#).)

FOR DEPARTING EMPLOYEES

If you are leaving Harvard, you should think about what to do with your records before you go, including email and electronic files. Here is some basic guidance to get you started with your records. If you need more help or advice, email Records Management Services or call us at 617-495-5961.

All Records

- Talk to co-workers and supervisors about the records you control that they may need after you leave
- Consult an approved Harvard records schedule like the [General Records Schedule](#) to determine whether they should be
 - destroyed
 - passed on to a colleague
 - these will be records which for some reason should not yet be destroyed or sent to the Archives
 - you may have records going to multiple colleagues
 - sent to the Archives
- Note that retention and disposition (destruction or archives transfer) rules apply to all the formats listed below
- While it is obvious that you should check your own personal storage spaces (desk drawers, and personal file cabinets and server space), be sure to check shared spaces, too. This is important where you are the primary custodian of groups of records in shared spaces (public file cabinets, group server space)

Paper Records

- Destroying paper records
 - Shred them, either on-site or through a Records Management Services (RMS) destruction event
- Passing to a colleague
 - Transfer them to the most appropriate colleague. Make sure that they are adequately labeled.
- Sending to the Archives
 - Consult the RMS web site and/or contact RMS for instructions on sending paper records to the Archives

E-Mail

- Destroying e-mail records
 - Delete the e-mails and attachments
 - Depending on the application, empty the trash or purge deleted messages
- Passing to a colleague
 - In order to keep attachments connected to messages, this will likely require IT assistance
- Sending to the Archives
 - Contact RMS to discuss the transfer of these records.
 - IT will likely need to be involved
 - Attachments must remain connected
 - The particular e-mail format must be acceptable to the Archives
 - An appropriate transfer mechanism must be determined. For example, copying to a DVD might violate [Harvard security policies](#)

Other Electronic Records

- Destroying electronic records
 - Delete the records
 - Empty the recycle bin or trash
- Passing to a colleague
 - Notify the colleague, with adequate description, of any records that are in shared spaces.
 - Transfer records in personal space to the colleague. This might be done in several ways
 - Transfer via removable media (DVD, thumb drive). Depending on the confidentiality of the records, this might violate Harvard security policies.

- Coordinate with the colleague to temporarily move the records through shared server space. Be careful, though. Depending on the confidentiality of the records, this might not be a good idea (<http://security.harvard.edu/>)
- Have IT move the files directly from your personal server space to your colleague's.
- Sending to the Archives
 - Contact RMS to discuss the transfer of these records.
 - IT may need to be involved.

FOR IT ADMINISTRATORS

In the current economic climate, pressure to control costs and the need to deal with the records of departing employees are challenges each IT administrator is likely to face. Records Management Services can help IT departments with these issues. Our basic philosophy is that departments and employees should manage their records efficiently, keeping records for as long as they need them but no longer and disposing of them either through secure destruction or transfer to the Archives. Adherence to good records management practices should lead directly to fewer problems with storage quotas and fewer requests for additional server space.

The records of departing employees have always been problematic for IT because managers either do not think about them or are reluctant to take the time to go through them. With neglect, these records accumulate, a problem that will only get worse as we see more employees departing than usual.

See below for tips on dealing with these issues.

Controlling Server Space

A prime focus of Records Management Services is helping offices run more efficiently. An efficient office will both organize its records well and dispose of them when appropriate. Any improvement in efficiency should result in the need for less storage space. RMS primarily helps offices do this through

- Education, in groups or individually
 - See the [workshops](#) page on our website, or
 - [Contact RMS](#) to discuss how to deal with your particular issues
- Guidelines
 - Harvard's [Guidelines for Managing Faculty Files](#)
 - Guidelines for all faculty at Harvard in managing a wide range of personal and professional files and related University records, including electronic records
 - [E-mail management guidelines](#)
 - This guideline is intended to be used by heads of University offices to establish policies and procedures for managing their offices' e-mail as records.
- The [General Records Schedule](#)
 - The GRS provides guidance for Harvard staff, stating University policy on how long to keep records and what to do with them when they are no longer needed. It applies to all information created or received by Harvard staff