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Into the Trenches with Enterprise Data Management: MSU Records Management Program

By Cynthia Ghering, Michigan State University

In 2006, Michigan State University (MSU) began to replace and improve existing business information systems and workflows supporting core finance, human resources, and research administration functions. This Enterprise Business Systems (EBS) project inspired the University Archives and Historical Collections (UAHC) staff to strengthen the university's records management program by jumping into the trenches and defining records in the context of the enterprise data management environment. This article provides a brief overview of our approach.

Background

Until recently, the University Archives and Historical Collections of Michigan State University was structurally part of the university's central Information Technology Services (ITS) administrative unit. This structure had many advantages for the records management and digital archives programs such as increased awareness of the vital connections between records management, data governance, and information security. During the past few years, as ITS moved rapidly through a succession of transformative changes, UAHC's deep commitment to pedagogical support, academic research, and community outreach led to a realignment of reporting lines. UAHC now reports to the associate provost for academic services and enrollment management. Despite this change in reporting lines, UAHC's efforts to revamp the university's records management program has benefited from its previously close alignment with ITS.

MSU's current retention schedules had not changed much in the past several decades. We knew from our experience with the Enterprise Business Systems project and years of operating under the current schedules that we had four major objectives in revising the retention schedules: 1) reflect current business workflows; 2) identify offices of record; 3) align with federal and state regulations; and 4) create clearer descriptions of record types. We began the revision project with the two business functions that the new EBS project impacted most—the Human Resources records series and the Fiscal records series. We started with a plan to overhaul the general records retention schedules, but, before we could begin, we needed three things in place:

1. A dedicated records manager position
2. Specialized software to manage retention schedules
3. Institutional support and stakeholder buy-in

It took several years, but UAHC was able to achieve these three things by tying records management to the ongoing goals of central IT—standardization, efficiency, compliance, and risk management. While MSU sought to improve the university's technical infrastructure, we stressed the correlation between a strong records management program and our institution's goals to strategically manage and optimize the IT environment and resources.

The Work Plan

Our work to overhaul the general records retention schedules began with a full assessment of the federal and state regulations that govern the university's personnel and financial processes and a thorough review of the many university policies that guide the creation, use, and retention of these records. First drafts of the new schedules were developed from these sources and distributed to the major stakeholder units for review and comment.

Finding Stakeholders

While we had tacit stakeholder buy-in, no established processes or procedures existed for a schedule review of this magnitude. UAHC staff initially addressed this gap by identifying advocates in the major business offices. These advocates became our liaisons with several related offices and resulted in large face-to-face meetings with representatives from as many subject matter experts in the business fields as possible. Eventually the coordination process became so time consuming that we narrowed our focus to the largest business function—Human Resources—and postponed our work with the Fiscal records for a second phase. At MSU, the Human Resources (HR) function includes stakeholders from central Human Resources, Academic Human Resources, Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, Office of Institutional Equity, and Office of the General Counsel. From the largest office, central Human Resources, both a staff coordinator and a leadership liaison were assigned to the project. The

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staff coordinator helped identify teams and/or experts we needed to identify HR records and understand business workflows. The leadership liaison role kept the executives informed and secured leadership approval.

Doing Documentation

The records retention schedule review process was iterative and lasted much longer than we originally anticipated. We learned that while Human Resources workflows had changed dramatically with the new Enterprise Business Systems, the organization had not fully documented these changes. No one staff member knew all the new workflows, nor did the training documentation describe all aspects of the new processes. The review meetings became a de facto records survey, and representatives from all the HR offices helped define their pieces of the workflow.

Multiple Data Sources

Throughout the records survey process, we learned that many of the HR records surveyed were actually created from a variety of data sources. Essentially, understanding the relationship between a particular record and the data needed to create that record became increasingly

significant. Data sources ranged from the new enterprise data warehouse, which few people fully understood, to 20 legacy data systems that were decommissioned but still maintained as data repositories. This revelation led us to invite an additional stakeholder group to the discussion—Analytics and Data Solutions (ADS), the central IT team responsible for the enterprise data warehouse, data analytics, and data governance.

We learned that no definitive list of data sources existed for HR records, or for any records for that matter. As our work progressed, it also became clear that a lack of understanding and definition of the enterprise data warehouse environment was hindering our ability to finalize the HR records retention schedules and would impact other schedules as well. With the full cooperation of the ADS team, UAHC decided to go one step further and document the enterprise data environment and create Analytics and Data Solutions records retention schedules for the eight data warehouses and the data snapshots or views created for specific business reporting needs.

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New Records Retention Schedules Examples

Table 1: Human Resources Records Retention Schedule

Schedule Title	Change in Pay Records
Schedule Description	This record series documents changes in pay for both faculty/academic staff and non-academic support staff. This record series may include but is not limited to: additional payment forms, special payment authorization forms, increase for support staff employee forms, pay rate change form, supporting documentation, and related correspondence.
Schedule Retention	ACT+5
Event Date	Employment Terminates
Disposition	Retain for 5 years after employment terminates, then proceed with confidential destruction.
Office of Record	Human Resources; Payroll; Office of Planning and Budgets.
Data Sourced From	SAP; COGNOS-Budget and Planning; ImageNow
Notes	Based on University best practices. Forms are submitted via SAP and COGNOS. Supporting documentation is retained in ImageNow. The Office of Planning and Budgets maintains change in pay records related to the Enterprise Raise process in COGNOS and SAP.
Series Identifier	HR009

Table 2: Analytics and Data Solutions Records Retention Schedule

Schedule Title	Human Resource Data: SAP Human Resource/Payroll System
Schedule Description	This record series documents the data retained in the MSU EDW from the SAP Human Resource/Payroll application.
Schedule Retention	ACT
Event Date	Creation
Disposition	Retain while MSU EDW is actively used.
Office of Record	Analytics & Data Solutions; Office of Planning and Budgets
Data Sourced From	SAP Human Resource/Payroll System
Notes	Based on University best practices.
Series Identifier	ADS006

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Current Efforts

The new Human Resources records retention schedules have been approved by all major business stakeholders and endorsed by executive leadership. Roll out and implementation are planned for early 2017. The new Analytics and Data Solutions records retention schedules are in the final stage of review and approval with the executive leadership of central IT Services and the Office of Planning and Budgets. After these schedules are approved, we will proceed with endorsement from the other senior leadership officers and begin rollout and communication efforts. We have resumed the project to revise the Fiscal records retention schedules, and we anticipate this will go much faster with the success of the HR records project and the classification of the enterprise data warehouse environment.

We have a steady line of records retention schedule revision projects in front of us. After we complete the general Fiscal records retention schedule, UAHC and stakeholders will revise Academic records retention schedules just as the university kicks off a multiyear project to replace its student information systems. We also continue to identify business functions still in need of records retention schedules, like Information Technology and Legal.

Moving Forward

In the future, we see the records management function becoming increasingly vital as Michigan State University, and higher education in general, emphasizes return on investment, accountability and transparency, and predictive analytics for student success. Although UAHC no longer reports administratively through central IT, the records management function still has a seat at the table in designing and developing new information systems. The records management function is recognized as one of several key functional areas in the successful development, acquisition, and implementation of new IT systems and services. UAHC is invited to review new IT project charters and identify if/how the records management function is required for implementation. In the meantime, we continue to develop new general records retention schedules while maintaining and updating our existing ones. Sometimes it's messy, but we continue to make incremental progress toward an optimized records management program.