Proposed Initiative: Becoming a Leader in Digital Records Management

Proposed by: Chalmer Davee Library

What strategic goal does this initiative support? Innovation and Partnerships

Describe how the initiative supports the goal(s).
Nationally, 85% of government records are created electronically, yet none of the UW System campuses, and very few campuses in the country, have a full-fledged digital/electronic records program that allows them to ensure that these records will be accessible for future uses. The Library—partnering with DoTS, other UW System campuses, the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections, and potentially with other universities—wants to start us on the right path to make sure the information we need is there when we need it.

**Distinctive Academic Excellence.** One group of digital documents that we hope to capture and retain for the long term are the products (papers, posters, creative projects, etc.) of University-supported undergraduate research. For example, Falcon Scholars will receive a stipend that they can use to support a research project. The library proposes, as one part of this initiative, to acquire, describe, and archive these projects for long-term preservation and access. As the University seeks to become a national leader in undergraduate research, archiving and making available to an external audience the results of undergraduate research will differentiate us from our peers and will demonstrate our commitment to undergraduate and collaborative research, scholarship, and creative achievement. With time, we would continue to identify more products of research eligible for archiving.

Faculty papers are also fundamental to documenting the historical development of the University. As part of this initiative, we would be able to organize and retain the electronic records of faculty who have made major contributions to their discipline and/or to the University. By preserving important records related to such things as research discoveries, creative curriculum development, and national or international engagement, we will document the University’s commitment to distinctive academic excellence. While the University Archives has collected physical papers of some faculty, this initiative will help us address the growing amount of digital material that must be preserved.
Based on the definition of university-wide initiative, indicate how the proposed initiative has a university-wide impact.

Nearly all faculty, staff, and students create digital/electronic records (e-mail, databases, word processing, spreadsheets, etc.). A few of these resources are well-managed, but a lack of awareness across all sectors of the University regarding retention, organization, and long-term preservation of electronic records leaves the university, and its faculty, staff, and students, open to adverse consequences (such as non-compliance with state law; loss of historically significant documents; and an incomplete response to projects of campus-wide importance such as reaccreditation).

Please provide a set of benchmarks and/or indicators of success to support your initiative.

The first phase would identify key offices and organizations to start with, such as the Chancellor’s Office, undergraduate research, Faculty Senate, etc. We will inventory and analyze the digital records to both identify where older records can no longer be read (conversions gone bad, media failure, obsolete media, system malfunctions, lack of planning, etc.), and then focus on current records with permanent or long-term (more than 5-10 years) retention requirements. Workshops will be provided to train faculty and staff on how to manage their own electronic records (what to delete, when to delete it, making sure records get migrated). Later phases would focus on designing an Open Archival Information System (OAIS) environment where records with permanent value can be organized and described using interoperable metadata standards that support a broad range of purposes and business models, and developing an implementation plan.

The UW System Records Officers Council is developing a series of general records schedules that mandate retention schedules for various types of university records. Some records must be maintained permanently in the University Archives. We would benchmark the success of this initiative by ensuring that all born-digital documents that are mandated for permanent retention, per a records schedule, are captured, described, and archived for long-term preservation and access in an appropriate open archival system.

A successful digital records management program requires the active participation of all individuals on campus who create records. Another benchmark of the success of our leadership with this initiative would be achieving compliance with record retention guidelines by all academic and administrative units on campus.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of success will be the legacy that we leave for future generations of University administrators, faculty, and students. There is an oft-repeated saying about how we are doomed to repeat our past if we do not remember it. We want to ensure that we retain and essential university information to help with future decision making. If important electronic records are collected, organized, described and retained appropriately, we will provide centralized, timely access to essential information that will contribute to informed decision making in the future.

What elements are involved in the initiative?
Sustainability, Inclusiveness, Human Capital, Technology, Finance

Indicate how each element would be/would not be affected by the initiative.
• **Sustainability:** The goals are long-term accessibility of the records needed to run the university; an authoritative and trustworthy process to provide integrity, authenticity, legal compliance, and accountability; and finally to ensure the university’s legacy by preserving its history. To ensure the trustworthiness of electronic records, their entire “life cycle” (creation–maintenance and use–disposition, either preservation or destruction) needs to be systematically managed. As the university goes more and more green, with more and more records being born digital (never existing on paper), we have to deal with this issue or there will be no long-term records, no history.

• **Inclusiveness:** All staff and faculty, and student organizations that create and manage records would need to become involved in managing the full life cycle of the electronic records that they create.

• **Human Capital:** Initially, existing staff, and possibly grant-funded staff, would handle the first phases. Eventually, a part-time or even full-time electronic records manager/archivist/IT specialist may be required. Plus all faculty and staff will need to learn how to manage their own electronic records.

• **Technology:** The goal would be to make appropriate use of existing technology. Eventually, more servers and software for the permanent “archiving” of those records deemed significant for ongoing operations or because they are legally or historically valuable may need to be added.

• **Facilities:** No new facilities would be needed.

• **Finance:** Federal grants are a definite possibility to cover start-up costs. As we go further down this path in years to come, additional server space, software, access interfaces, and a dedicated person are possible expenses.

• **Other:**