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Acknowledgments

This version of *Student Records Management: Retention, Disposal, and Archive of Student Records* has been prepared and authored by a committee of higher education professionals representing a range of institutional sizes and types. AACRAO would like to thank the 2019 committee members and their institutions for their diligent work in updating this guide.

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Introduction

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AACRAO's Student Records Management: Retention, Disposal, and Archive of Student Records was first published in 1960 as *Retention of Records: A Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records*. The guide has been updated periodically as records management practices and requirements have evolved. The first update (in 1979) included recommended guidelines for the retention and disposition of specific hard copy documents, which provided invaluable information for records managers faced with sorting through a myriad of documents and deciding which to keep and which to discard.

The 1987 edition addressed issues related to the retention of records stored on microfilm and microfiche; on such computer media as tapes, disks, and diskettes; and on optical disks. Reliance upon such media became prevalent in order to minimize space constraints and improve the efficiency of record retrieval. The format of these records, however, raised new challenges. Managers of student records were required to develop policies and procedures that ensured the usefulness, longevity, and security of data stored in machine-readable form. In addition, it became clear that the records were important to genealogists, statisticians, historians, and for posterity long after the students separated from the institution. The 1987 *Guide* also provided reasonable standards to assist

student records managers in making record retention decisions. This version represented the collective efforts of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Records Retention Task Force, the records management committees, and a representative sample of AACRAO members who responded to a questionnaire.

The 1998 edition acknowledged the technological advances that created new record-keeping options for records managers, especially the electronic storage of records. It also featured updated financial aid and international student record requirements as well as state policies for records storage for schools that have closed.

The 2000 edition had three primary objectives: to ensure that institutional records managers were aware of and compliant with new federal requirements for records administration, to promote consistency in retention practices and policies used across institutions, and to provide guidelines on addressing technological changes.

The 2010 edition also provided numerous updates throughout the guide. Information regarding recommendations for record retention schedules, including differentiated retention periods for four-year schools and community and technical colleges was expanded. A case study was added which outlined one institution's experience with developing a recommended policy for academic department offices on records retention and disposition.

The 2014 edition continued the discussion of electronic records. Many of the same issues persisted in records offices, including document imaging software, email archiving, web-based data warehouses, cloud-computing resources, enterprise-wide data systems, and mainframe systems. The guide was updated to address these questions. Emphasis was placed on the need for institutions to be responsive to their respective state archives offices and to their respective discipline-specific records management obligations, including legal concerns.

Today, the use of electronic records as the primary record creation and storage medium presents an ongoing set of challenges for the records and registration professional. Much attention has been given to the management challenges posed by electronic records; it is important to remember, however, that the transition from paper-based to electronic recordkeeping that began decades ago may take decades more to complete. While some of those records are grandfathered into paper legacy systems and will never be converted into an electronic system, the complexity of administering two or more records management systems, one for historical files and one for more recent electronic files, is ever-present.

Institutions at the forefront of records management are consolidating disparate systems into one that handles all records regardless of media or file format. Records produced by a variety of sources: mainframe computers, business applications as well as office applications, for instance, must integrate with the systems that create them. Ideally, they need to capture records from the time they are generated and immediately store them without human intervention.

The pitfall of the ease-of-use that comes with electronic record generation, however, is record removal. Since information is easily accessible and storage seemingly limitless, destroying or purging information is not an urgent matter. Most institutions are using electronically generated records; many do not have a systematic plan for destruction, retention, and recovery.

This edition of the guide reaffirms the complexity of not only managing records, but also protecting the access to and security of records. Records custodians are challenged to effectively and efficiently manage electronic records in an environment of rapidly changing technology, new regulations and an increasing volume of electronic records. Disaster recovery, breech mitigation and business continuity are emphasized as important considerations to include in the overall records management program. This edition asserts that carefully planned records management and recovery policies and processes serve to protect the most business critical processes, record security and to minimize unplanned downtime.

Given the diverse institutions represented by AACRAO members, it is acknowledged that there is not one simple answer for all records managers. Readers are encouraged to see this edition as a resource for creating a records management practice that fits their specific institution.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to provide you with a comprehensive set of best practice recommendations to develop and modify your student records management policy, practice, and the application of technology. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the complex issues facing student records managers today. Chapter 2 shares recommendations on how to develop or modify your own records retention and disposition schedule. Chapter 3 provides some examples from specific institutions by type, state guidelines, accrediting body guidelines, and other samples for special categories of records. It is important to remember that samples are provided not as a set of absolutes on establishing a records retention and disposition schedule, but simply as samples from which to build and modify your own unique policy. Chapter 4 addresses the historical and evolving methods of records storage and practice considerations for each. Chapter 5 reflects on the myriad of security considerations around student records management.