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Acknowledgments

Prepared by: The Committee on AACRAO's
*Retention of Records: Guide for Retention and
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Introduction

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Retention of Records. A Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records was first published in 1960. The *Guide* has been updated periodically as records management practices and requirements have changed and evolved. The first update (the 1979 edition) included recommended guidelines for the retention and disposal of specific hard copy documents, which proved to be 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 optical disks. It was clear that more and more institutions relied on such media for record security and storage. In fact, hard copy records were being replaced by various computer media and records managers faced a new set of problems. Provisions had to be made for accessing, updating, displaying, securing, preserving, translating, transmitting, and converting data stored in machine-readable form. Managers of student records needed to be aware of the issues involved and insist on policies and procedures that ensured both the usefulness and the security of data stored in machine-readable form.

III

The 1987 *Guide* discussed the archival significance of student records. It was becoming clear that those records are important to genealogists, statisticians, historians, and posterity long after the students have left the institution. Archivists must select and preserve records and data that will convey a sense of the institution's past and contribute to significant research efforts. Records managers have some responsibility to the researchers and archivists of the future. This updated guide included recommendations for fulfilling this responsibility.

The 1987 *Guide* also provided reasonable standards to assist student records managers in making record retention decisions. Records retention and disposal practices should be as consistent as possible among colleges and universities. It 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 sample of the AACRAO members who responded to a questionnaire.

The 1998 edition acknowledged the technological advances that have created new options for records managers, especially electronic storage of records. It focused on updating financial aid and international student record requirements and state policies for records storage for schools that have closed. AACRAO continues to provide this information for professionals and others involved in records retention and disposal.

The 2000 edition had three primary objectives: i) to ensure that institutional records

managers were aware of and compliant with new federal requirements for records administration, ii) to promote commonality in retention practices and policies used across institutions, and iii) to provide guidelines driven by technological changes.

The 2010 edition provides numerous updates throughout the guide. Chapter 3 has been expanded to provide additional information regarding recommendations for record retention schedules including differentiated retention periods for four-year schools and community and technical colleges. In addition, a case study that outlines developing a recommended policy for academic department offices on records retention and disposal has been added as Chapter 6. Given the complexity of record retention laws, Appendix E has been crafted to provide contact information for state records management agencies.

Technology continues to give records managers options such as CD-ROM, Optical Disk, Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) computer hard drives and related magnetic media as well as integrated circuitry media such as flash drives; all presenting greater storage capacity with each passing year. In addition, records managers have been given options such as data warehousing, sophisticated web tools, the Internet and workflow concepts to aid in distributing more efficient services firsthand to students, faculty, staff, parents and alumni. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), eXensible Markup Language (XML) and Portable Document Format (PDF) have enabled institutions to send transcripts and other educational documents electronically. The fax machine

continues to be used to transmit documents and we see a growing number of online systems; both developed by institutions in-house as well as offered by corporate partner service providers. Kiosks and labs around campuses and personal laptops make it easy for students to look up information and, in many cases, make changes. Telephones and Web sites have brought application, registration and grade reporting into the new age. Paper management and paper storage are no longer the primary concerns of a records retention policy. Chapter 4 of the 2010 *Guide, Methods of Storage*, considers storage media of records and provides a discussion of issues to consider for each of these storage media and formats as well as related policy and procedure considerations.

Currently, most institutions are using electronically generated records, many without a plan for destruction, retention, and recovery. Since information is so easily accessible and storage is seemingly limitless, it is hard to think of destroying or purging any of it. In time, however, computer mainframe disks and related storage technologies will soon present the same storage problems as filing cabinets have in the past and computer programs will become bogged down with information that should be archived or simply destroyed. Not all information needs to be preserved and traditionally has not been. In addition, with the heightening concern regarding privacy, it is critical that institutions destroy or purge information according to a set retention schedule based on institutional policy and federal and State law.

Most institutions are beginning to think of information in three categories:

- Online information that is used daily;
- Nearline information that needs to be accessible but is not often accessed; and
- Offline information that is rarely accessed but must be preserved.

It is the storage of near-line and offline information that must be addressed. However, it is equally important to ensure that offline information can be brought back online and accessed when needed. Institutions need to ensure that their off-line and online technologies and systems are compatible.

With auditors and external sources demanding “accountability,” increasing numbers of registrars and records managers are finding themselves with no alternative but to invest in new technologies that support their evolving record retention issues and business continuity plans.

As more offices use electronic systems, the matters of security, records storage, backup and business continuity, recovery procedures and staff training become new challenges. In addition, poorly designed information systems and business processes, no matter how technologically advanced, can create nightmares when one has to access one record out of potentially thousands of daily computer transactions.

New challenges now confront records managers on how documents are to be classified, what level of security they are to have, and who within their institutions should be permitted to view each document. Some per-

ceive security of the electronic records to be a problem because of the continuing growth of malware, data breaches and online attacks by hackers. Information systems and business processes and procedures must be designed with and include appropriate security precautions to avoid any unauthorized access or inadvertent data loss.

The 2010 *Guide* addresses these issues, placing greater emphasis on electronic records

such as in the schedules found in Chapter 3 and in the expanded recommendations regarding the security of those records detailed in Chapter 5. Records management will be vital in the digital age, and future revisions of the Guide will be needed to address the rapid technological developments in the storage, security and retention of institutional records.