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Acknowledgments

Prepared by: **The Committee on Student Records Management:
Retention, Disposal, and Archive of Student Records**

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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 changed and evolved. The first update (the 1979 edition) 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 optical disks. It was clear during this timeframe that an increasing number of institutions relied on such media for record security and storage, thus introducing a new level of complexity for records managers. 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. In addition, it became clear that the records were important to genealogists, statisticians, historians, and for posterity long after the students left the institution. This remains true today, and

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records managers have an ongoing responsibility to researchers and archivists.

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 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.

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 how to address technological changes.

The 2010 edition provided numerous updates throughout the guide. Chapter 3 was expanded to provide additional information regarding recommendations for record retention schedules, including differentiated retention periods for four-year schools and community and technical colleges. A case study was added which outlined one institution's experience with developing a recommended policy for academic department offices on records reten-

tion and disposition. In addition, Chapter 4 contained practice and policy considerations for various storage media.

Today, the use of electronic records as the primary record creation and storage medium presents a new set of challenges for the records and registration professional. 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. However, not all information needs to be preserved and traditionally has not been. Many transactional records that would have been destroyed on paper are not purged from the database. Therefore, databases can become bogged down with information which can affect operational run times. With a heightening national concern regarding privacy and identity theft, 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 electronic information in three categories:

- Online information that is used daily;
- Near-line information that needs to be accessible, but is not often accessed; and
- Off-line information that is rarely accessed, but must be preserved.

It is the storage of near-line and off-line information that must be addressed most cautiously by records managers. It is equally important to ensure that off-line 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.

The 2014 edition picks up where the 2010 *Guide* left off to continue the discussion of electronic records. Many of the same issues exist in records offices, including document imaging software, email archiving, web-based data warehouses, cloud-computing resources, enterprise-wide data systems, and mainframe systems. Additionally, institutions may be struggling with outdated microfilm or microfiche records that can no longer be read easily, as well as having to determine the appropriate redundant method of storage for records that have been scanned or digitized. Many are even questioning whether a redundant record is necessary. The 2014 edition has been updated to answer many of these questions and to provide guidance from records professionals wherever possible. Emphasis is placed on the need for institutions to be responsive to their respective state archives offices and to their respective discipline-specific records management obligations.

Additionally, the chapter editors were each tasked with considering any legal implications that might be relevant to the topic discussed. When the 2010 version of the *Guide* has been presented during various professional development meetings, attendees often discussed the possible negative consequences of retaining records for periods longer than is required. Institutions that are involved in litigation with students can find themselves compromised by the information contained in documents or

records that remain part of a student's file long after their usefulness or need.

It is the editors' expectation that readers find advice and guidance rather than a directive in this edition. Given the diverse institutions represented by AACRAO members, we acknowledge that there is not one simple answer for all records managers. We encourage readers 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. Finally, Chapter 6 shares a case study.