SAA Records Management Colloquium

TITLE SLIDE

Hi everyone. Thanks for having us. I'm Alston Cobourn, Head of University History and Records at East Carolina University, which is comprised of University Archives and Records Management. And I'm joined by…

I'm Zachary Dale, Records & Archives Assistant at East Carolina University.

And today we are going to discuss the challenges we have addressed in our records management program during the last year.

INFORMATION DISPERSAL SLIDE

So first, we made improvements to the ways we disperse information about our department's services and procedures.

We worked with a colleague to create rack cards about University Archives and separately about Records Management as well as a more in-depth brochure about Records Management. These items contain information about our services, contact info, and records responsibilities. We are handing them out at training events and are working to have them included in new employee orientations.

With the creation of new promotional materials, we decided it would be necessary to bring our training powerpoints up-to-date as well. Among some of the significant revisions we made were: bringing the slides in line with our University's branding guide, rewriting content to be more audience-friendly (i.e. general, applicable to them), and updating tutorial slides to reflect updates to our database interface.

Lastly, we finished writing our Records Management procedural manual, reviewing and then formally codifying our processes. This will help us stay on the same page and ensure things don't fall through the cracks. We also want the manual to be a mechanism for training future permanent staff and our graduate assistants.

PHYSICAL SPACE STEWARDSHIP SLIDE

We also evaluated how we could be even more responsible stewards of our physical spaces.

We reviewed who has access to our two spaces that are used to store active records from campus departments and offices until they meet their retention periods. This is a free service we offer to the university. We store records defined as non-confidential by the records retention schedule in the Basement Records Center, and we store records defined as confidential by the schedule in the Cage. The Cage can only be accessed by myself, Zach, the Assistant Director of Special Collections, and the library director.

We received a request that our library building operations staff (3 people) be given access to the BRC so that they can provide supervised access to campus facilities workers to conduct general maintenance work. After ensuring that we had no confidential records in the space, we agreed to provide them with keycard access with the understanding that they must first complete the FERPA and HIPAA online training modules that all records management staff and student employees must take and that facilities staff are never to be left unattended in the space.

We also received a request to provide temporary keycard access to the BRC for some library staff members who are facilitating a renovation in their space because we agreed to store some of their collection materials temporarily. With the backing of the Assistant Director for Special Collections, we denied this request, politely explaining that while the BRC does not contain "confidential" records it is still important for access to it to be limited because many of the records still contain information that needs to be protected, such as bank account numbers, and because the records do not belong to the library, but rather are just in our custody, and that instead of providing this temporary access, we would be happy to be on hand to provide access to the space while the materials are being moved into it.

Myself, Zach, the AD of Special Collections, the library director, the library building operations employees, and the university police are the only ones with access to the BRC.

Humidity has long been an issue in the BRC and Cage because of their location in the basement and because of an ongoing situation with a leak in a nearby part of the basement. Therefore the library was able to submit and have approved a capital request to replace the HVAC system with an archival quality one. This will ensure we are taking care of the records in our custody and allows for the possibility of repurposing some of the BRC into storage for special collections materials at a later date. This work is scheduled to be completed over this summer.

While in the process of conducting an audit of our record center holdings, we discovered several sets of records that we were either not supposed to have or did not have a record of in our database. These included active personnel files, grievance files, personnel action dossiers, and even therapy clinic files. The sudden departure of our Records Manager also meant that we lost most of the custodial history and what provenance we could determine had been pulled from available accession records (if any). We also dealt with the issue of departments that were hesitant (and some even unwilling) to take back records that they didn't even know we had in our possession. These problems ultimately forced us to reassess our requirements for intake and establish stricter standards for storage. Next slide please.

BUILDING DIGITAL RECORDS INFRASTRUCTURE SLIDE

ECU uses ApplicationXtender for document surrogacy. In order to start using Xtender, campus offices and departments have to complete our standard operating procedure document and have it approved by us. In the SOP they explain how their office will conduct records retention and deletion in their application and designate who is assigned to do this work, outline their business continuity plan should Xtender be unavailable, and agree to the requirements for scanning quality, indexing of scans, quarterly Quality Assurance, etc.

In spring 2024 our records manager went out on long-term leave, at which point I discovered that she was storing all of the current, approved SOPs in her email instead of our departmental cloud storage location. Therefore I began reaching out to application owners to determine if they did in fact have a current SOP and if so, get a copy, and if not, work with them to put one in place. This was a lengthy process that I have not finished but have made good progress on.

All campus offices and departments that are actively adding files to Xtender applications are required to complete quarterly quality assurance where they review 3 of the images that have been uploaded during that quarter and ensure the scans are legible. We had a few repeat offenders who were not doing their QA. After working with them, their supervisors, and their supervisors' supervisor, we have been able to achieve 100% compliance for the first time ever, which is really exciting. We also believe this will continue for the foreseeable future because we have addressed the underlying issues with these employees.

Also, we persevered in trying to get permission from central IT to begin using the open source ePADD software for email archiving. That has been a 2 year process of getting permission from multiple IT committees, being told one thing and then another, having to really educate different groups on the functions and qualifications of archivists, and the specifics of ePADD itself. The complications we've encountered seem to stem from IT not being used to people requesting to use open source software; IT and some administration being unclear about the roles and responsibilities of archivists; and those parties also not thoroughly understanding the legal mandates related to records retention for public records in North Carolina and how those are reflected in our university system's records retention schedule. Recently I have enlisted the aid of the Government Records Unit at the State Archives.

So this challenge is still a work in progress, but we continue to persevere and collect and store email of long-term historical value from departing administrators, deans, department heads, and long-time faculty members until the time comes when we are able to process them.

In assessing our department procedures, we noticed that there were some glaring issues with the way we had been sending our request for destruction notices, which is how we approve the destruction of boxes in our record centers that have met retention. Originally, we would email the notice and box list to the liaison, requesting that they print and review the box list. If they agreed to the destruction, they were instructed to then sign, scan, and email these items back to us. If they didn't agree, they needed to provide an approved reason, indicate which boxes, scan, and send back. The records manager would then print, sign, scan, and then email the final copy back to the liaison. The most obvious issue with this process is that it's just too many steps, not to mention all the wasteful printing. But, the combination of print/sign/scan/send/repeat was ultimately increasing the time between sending notices and receiving responses (and in some cases resulting in no responses at all). Now we upload the notice and box list into DocuSign, designate the signees (records liaison and records manager), and click send. DocuSign allows us to set a specific due date, and send reminder notifications every week until the deadline is met. Once the document is signed by both parties, they are each sent a final version that contains both signatures which eliminates the need for redundant or unsigned copies. The combination of collaborative signing and centralized workflow has significantly reduced response time as well as improved response rate from our liaisons. Next slide please.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? SLIDE

Here's our contact information. We're happy to take questions and comments or hear about your experiences with similar challenges.