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Next Review	N/A		

Records Information Management (RIM) Standard Operating Procedure

Authority for Procedure granted by UWG PL #1008, Records Information Management (RIM)

A. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to establish a consistent, university-wide framework for creating, maintaining, accessing, and Disposing of Records in compliance with the Georgia Records Act (O.C.G.A. §§ 50-18-90 – 50-18-103) and other applicable laws. This ensures transparency, accountability, and the preservation of Public Records.

B. Scope

This procedure applies to all University employees, departments, and units responsible for creating, receiving, managing, storing, or Disposing of University Records, regardless of format (e.g., paper, electronic, audiovisual, or other media).

C. Roles and Responsibilities

Chief Legal Officer or designee: Ensures compliance with the Georgia Records Act and the University Records Management policy and associated procedures.

Records Management Officer (RMO): Oversees the University Records Management Program and provides guidance on University Records policy, Records Retention Schedules, best practices, and USG-wide compliance standards. Serves as the University's liaison with the University System of Georgia.

Information Technology Services (ITS): Ensures Electronic Records systems are secure, reliable, and regularly backed up; supports access controls, audit trails, and disaster recovery for University Records.

UWG Special Collections: Provides guidance on Permanent Records, transfers, and archiving in accordance with USG and University Retention policies.

Office of Record - Unit, department, or division responsible for the retention and timely destruction of Official University Records and assigned to the Unit Administrator or designee.

Unit Administrators: Oversees the proper retention and timely destruction of Official University Records within their unit, department, or division. Ensures faculty and staff comply with approved Records Retention Schedules, maintain accurate Records, and safeguard sensitive or confidential information from unauthorized access or disclosure.

Employees: Create and manage accurate, complete, and timely Records of Official activities within their respective departments, comply with Record Retention Schedules, and safeguard Public Records in their control. Employees shall act ethically, take initiative, safeguard information resources, and remain vigilant to threats. All employees are responsible for following the Records Retention Schedules, UWG's Record Management procedures, and using proper and approved Forms and templates.

D. Record Classification

Proper identification of records is essential for effective management and compliance with the Georgia Records Act. Employees must distinguish between Non-Records, Official Records, Unofficial Records, and Personal Materials to ensure proper Retention, protection, and Disposal.

1. Official Records

Final, complete, and authoritative documents retained for business, administrative, fiscal, historical, or legal purposes by the **designated Office of Record**. Records are considered Official once they are finalized and approved, and no further substantive changes will be made. Official Records shall be maintained for the **entire retention period specified in the Records Retention Schedules**.

Examples: final policies, procedures, reports, executed contracts or agreements, approved minutes, and budgets and financial statements.

2. Unofficial Records

Drafts or duplicates of official records kept only for convenience or reference purposes. Unofficial Records **may be destroyed when no longer needed** for reference, **provided the Official version is maintained by the Office of Record**.

Examples: working drafts, duplicate copies, preliminary notes, and Informational copies.

3. Non-Records

Reference materials, drafts, working documents, or duplicates **not subject to Record Retention Schedules** and **may be destroyed without formal authorization** when no longer needed.

Examples: convenience copies, reference materials or publications, blank forms or templates, and personal notes.

4. Personal Materials

Non-business-related documents or items belonging to an individual and **unrelated to University business**. Employees must **keep personal materials separate** from University Records to prevent inadvertent disclosure or misclassification. These materials are not considered public records and are excluded from this procedure.

Examples: Personal correspondence, photos, calendars, journals, financial or medical records, and notes.

E. Records Creation and Maintenance

All Records created or received in the performance of University duties and supported by Public funds are the property of the State of Georgia (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-102).

- **Creation**: All Records created and maintained during the course of university business must be legible, accurate, and complete to ensure records are readily searchable, identifiable, and retrievable. Each Record must be identified by:
    - Record series, process/product, or event
    - Date created or received
    - Unit or individual responsible for the Record.
- **Maintenance**: Records must be stored in a secure environment that protects them from unauthorized access, alteration, or destruction. Sensitive or confidential records must be protected at all times.

Electronic Records and **Data files** must adhere to ITS security policies and include an audit trail documenting all changes. Electronic Records and systems must include appropriate safeguards (e.g., password protection, restricted or read-only access, and file encryption) where applicable to preserve the authenticity, security, and integrity of Records by protecting them from loss, alteration, or unauthorized access. Electronic Records must be regularly backed up, clearly labeled, and managed according to approved Records Retention Schedules.

Reporting: Any suspected security threats or breaches must be reported immediately to the ITS Service Desk.

F. Records Retention

Units shall maintain Records according to the **USG Records Retention Schedules**, ensuring compliance with federal, state, and UWG requirements.

- Vital Records must be identified and protected from loss, destruction, or unauthorized access.
- Record Retention Schedules may be reviewed annually and updated to reflect changes in law, university operations, or Record formats.

G. Records Access

Public access to Records is governed by the Georgia Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. §§ 50-18-70 – 50-18-74). All requests must be processed in accordance with university procedure, Compliance with Georgia Open Records Act.

H. Records Disposition

1. **Authorization**: Records shall only be **destroyed, altered, or removed** in accordance with approved USG Records Retention Schedules after the Retention Period has expired and with proper authorization from the RMO.
2. **Destruction**: Official Records must be destroyed in a secure manner that prevents unauthorized access, recovery, or reconstruction. Acceptable methods include shredding, pulping, recycling, or incineration for paper records, and degaussing, overwriting, or physical destruction for electronic records. **Completion of the UWG Records Destruction Authorization Form** is **required prior to disposal**.
3. **Transfer:** Records may be transferred to a local holding area, Records center, or the Georgia State Archives per an approved Record Retention Schedules (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-103). Records of Permanent or historical value may be transferred to **University Special Collections (**email **special@westga.edu)** after receiving approval of acceptance.

***Important:** Records **shall not** be placed in the custody of a private individual, institution, or semi-private organization unless authorized by Records Retention Schedules.*

I. Training and Compliance

1. **Training**: The university shall provide training to personnel on Records Management policies and procedures. The RMO assists units in understanding and implementing USG best practices and ensures University-wide compliance.
2. **Audits**: Units should periodically assess compliance with this procedure, the Georgia Records Act, and Record Retention Schedules to ensure compliance with Records Management policies and the Georgia Records Act.

J. Violation of the Act

Unauthorized alienation, alteration, theft, or destruction of University Records is a **misdemeanor** under O.C.G.A. § 50-18-102.

Noncompliance with this procedure may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with university policies.

Suspected violations or improper handling of Records must be reported immediately to the **Records Management Officer (records@westga.edu)**.

K. Unit Specific Guidelines

Units may develop supplemental procedures aligned with this University-wide procedure.

UWG Policy #1008 and this procedure **supersede conflicting unit-specific guidance**.

Definitions

Data - facts about an object; organized. numerically, graphically, or textually.

Disposition (disposing) - removal of inactive records for storage, archival, or destruction.

Electronic Record - machine-readable information (i.e., information that only a computer/machine can process and which, without a computer/machine, would not be understandable to people). Examples include but are not limited to email, digital/text messages, and instant/text messages.

Form - document facilitating procedure implementation or objective.

Non-Records - reference materials or duplicate copies not subject to retention schedules. *Non-record documentation does not appear on a records retention schedule and may be destroyed without authorization*.

Official Record - the complete (final), authoritative version, retained for business or legal reasons. Official records must be retained for the entire retention period. Records are considered official when they are in their final form and held by the designated Office of Record.

Permanent Records - records with enduring historical, administrative, or research value to the University.

Public Record - a record open to public inspection by law or custom. According to the Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. 50-18-70), (public) records are "all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, computer-based or generated information, or similar material prepared and maintained or received in the course of the operation or a public office or agency."

Record - information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligations or the transaction of business.

Records Management - the systematic control of an organization's records throughout their entire lifecycle, from creation to eventual disposal.

Retention Period - minimum length of time records must be kept for legal, regulatory, operational, or other purposes.

Retention Schedules - document defining retention periods and disposition instructions for the University's official records.

Unofficial Records - records that are not required to be retained for business or legal reasons. These may include duplicates or "convenience" copies of official records that have not been annotated and may be destroyed when no longer referenced.

Vital Records - official documents required to restore operations, meet legal obligations, and protect rights after a disaster. Examples include birth, death, and marriage certificates, contracts, legal documents, and financial or insurance records.

Guidelines/Related material

- Georgia Records Act (O.C.G.A. §§ 50-18-90 – 50-18-103)
- University System of Georgia Records Management Policies webpage
  - Records Retention Schedules
- UWG PL #1009 Legal and Regulatory Compliance
  - Legal Holds and Records Preservation
- UWG Records Information Management webpage

Form

- Certificate of Records Destruction

Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date