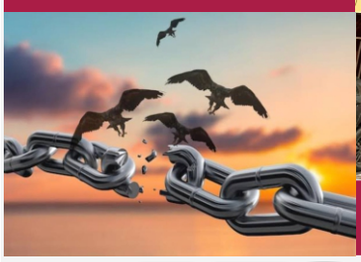
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS



UNIVERSITY of LAGOS

UNLEASHING HUMAN POTENTIALS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT
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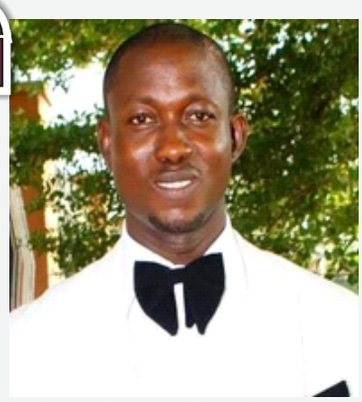
RECORD KEEPING AND RETRIEVAL

IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION



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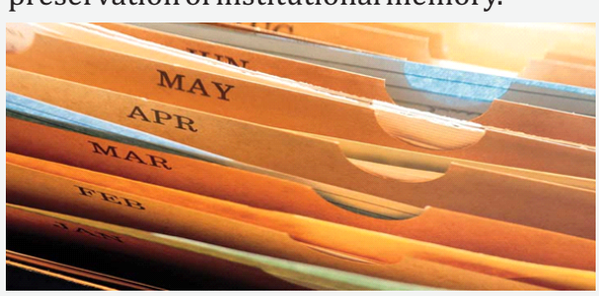
INTRODUCTION

Universities generate and rely on vast amounts of information daily to support teaching, learning, research, governance, and the delivery of administrative services. The effective management of this information depends on a reliable system of record keeping and retrieval that ensures records are accurately created, properly organised, securely preserved, and readily available when required. Beyond routine documentation, records management is a critical administrative function that underpins institutional accountability, continuity, transparency, and informed decision-making.

Our previous edition explored Workplace Harmony: How and Why, emphasising the importance of cooperation, communication, and shared responsibility in creating a productive work environment. Sustaining this harmony also requires efficient administrative processes, including the systematic management of records. When records are properly maintained and accessible, university administrators can respond promptly to enquiries, support policy implementation, safeguard institutional knowledge, and deliver services more efficiently. Conversely, poor records management can lead to delays, loss of vital information, weak accountability, and disruptions to institutional operations.

In an era of digital transformation, universities must continually strengthen their records management practices to address the growing volume of information, evolving technological demands, and the need to protect sensitive data. This edition examines the types of records generated in university administration, the tools and technologies available for their management, the challenges associated with their storage and retrieval, and the best practices for improving efficiency, security, and accessibility. It highlights the need to view records management not merely as a routine clerical responsibility, but as a strategic function essential to effective university administration and the preservation of institutional memory.



Types of Records

Each day, the university receives applications and records of different types, each serving a specific purpose:

1. *Academic Record*: These include applicants' files, admission files, registration files, examination results, transcripts, degree certificates and academic progress reports. They constitute the permanent record of students' educational experience and should be maintained with the highest levels of accuracy and security.
2. *Employment Files*: They contain personnel records (contracts, recruitment, performance appraisals, promotions, leave applications, retirement documents). They must be kept confidential yet accessible for legitimate administrative use.
3. *Financial Records*: These include budgets, vouchers of expenditure, grant documents, auditors' reports, procurement records and payment plans. Just as these are important for financial responsibility, they are also important for regulatory compliance.
4. *R&P Records*: Research Proposals, Ethics Approvals, IP Agreements, Scholarly Processes & Outputs. These services support the university's Research and Publication (R&P) functions while protecting intellectual contributions and research projects.
5. *Institutional records*: Minutes of meetings, policy documents, correspondence, strategic plans, and reports from committees and working groups that document collective decision-making and governance processes.
6. *Infrastructure and Assets Records*: Records that track the university's physical facilities, equipment, maintenance activities, and property documentation to support effective asset management and accountability.
7. *Medical Records*: These can be seen in hospitals presuming personal, biological and medical records are stored under lock and key.

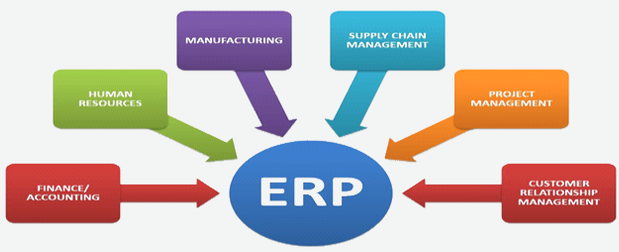
Tools and Technologies for Record Keeping

Today's universities use integrated software packages to organise and control their complex records systems, such as:

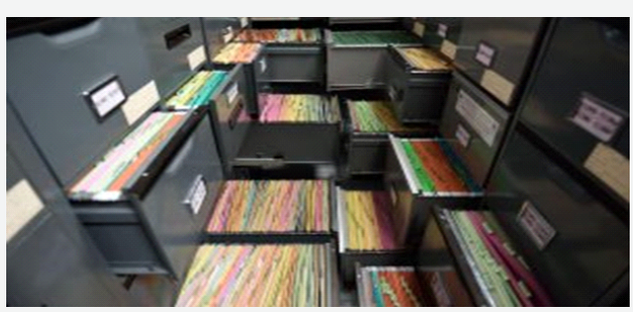
1. Document-Management Systems (DMS) are centralised repositories where digital documents can be stored, organised and accessed along with version control and audit trails.



2. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) Enterprise resource planning (ERP) software coordinates the work of different administrative areas and allows visibility of information across units.



3. Student information systems (SIS) are core to academic records, enrollment information and the student life cycle.



1. Cloud-based technologies provide scale, can be accessed remotely, and provide disaster recovery capabilities, all of which are important to institutional continuity.

2. Electronic records management systems (ERMS) can automate retention schedules, help comply with data protection laws and support systematic destruction of outdated records.

3. New technologies such as block chain offer greater security in verifying credentials, while artificial intelligence and machine learning allow for intelligent search, automated classification, and predictive analytics.
4. Optical character recognition (OCR) technology is used to digitize old paper records, connecting historical and modern information systems.

Challenges in Record Keeping and Retrieval

However, even as technology advances, universities continue to face a range of challenges, including but not limited to:

1. *System Interoperability*: Legacy systems are not always interoperable which makes them information silos and limits the ability to access the data.
2. *Dual Record Formats*: The coexistence of paper-based and digital records complicates the integration and retrieval of information.
3. *Data Security and Privacy*: Cyberattacks and data protection laws require universities to balance accessibility with confidentiality and protection against unauthorized access.
4. *Resource Constraints*: Limited financial, human, and technological resources hinder the adoption of records management best practices.
5. *Staff Capacity and Inconsistent Practices*: Inadequate staffing, limited training in records management principles, and inconsistent departmental practices impede record retrieval and increase the risk of non-compliance with institutional policies and regulatory requirements.
6. Growing Volume of Digital Records: Rapid increase in digital data creates challenges in storage, organisation and preservation, especially for long-term archival purposes.

Best Practices for Improvement

Universities can improve on their records management through the following strategic actions:

1. Formulate clear policies governing the creation, organisation, storage, access, retrieval, retention, and disposal of records, tailored to the university's needs and compliant with applicable laws and standards, such as ISO 15489.
2. Invest in integrated systems that break down silos and allow for the free flow of information throughout all but the administrative units. Emphasize solutions that provide scalability, security, and ease of use.
3. Conduct ongoing training to improve staff proficiency in records management procedures, technology use, and data security. Promote a culture of accountability by emphasising that records management is everyone's responsibility.
4. Create dedicated records management units staffed by qualified professionals to provide institutional support, technical guidance, and quality assurance.
5. Undertake internal and external audits to identify operational gaps and ensure compliance with records retention schedules. Periodically review systems to ensure they remain effective and responsive to evolving requirements.
6. Prioritise frequently accessed and vulnerable records for digitisation, supported by appropriate backup strategies. Ensure digital preservation plans address format obsolescence and technological changes.
7. Encourage cross-departmental collaboration for example through records management committees that promote learning and adoption of best practices.

CONCLUSION

Effective records management and accessibility are essential to university efficiency, institutional security, and mission achievement. By embracing new technologies, establishing robust policies, and building staff capacity, universities can transform records management from a compliance obligation into a strategic asset that preserves institutional knowledge and ensures its secure accessibility and value for present and future generations.