

Statement on Email as a University Record

University of California Archivists Council
Common Knowledge Group

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Introduction

Correspondence is a vital element of a University's archival records. It provides a window into the decision-making processes behind major policy changes and documents developments in curriculum and departmental growth. Archiving official correspondence provides a measure of transparency and public accountability.

In 1963, President Clark Kerr established an administrative mandate to ensure the preservation of records of historical importance.¹ In order to ensure that the University Archives at each campus are able to comply with this mandate, a UC-wide practice regarding the archiving and long-term preservation of email is necessary.

The University has identified email as being part of the permanent record, specifically:

“Certain administrative records transmitted by or originating as messages must be retained permanently if they constitute the official record. In general, these are messages and attachments that have significant, long-term administrative, legal, and/or fiscal value.”²

Historically valuable emails should be treated as traditional correspondence and transferred to the archive in order to allow for a comprehensive documentation of the history of our respective campuses. Examples include:

- Certain executive correspondence pertaining to the formulation, planning, implementation, interpretation, modification, or redefinition of programs, services, or projects
- Messages that have historical value in that they explain or document the history of the University or a campus, department, or unit

¹ <https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/content/policies-administration-university-california-archives>

² Information Technology Services, Examples of Messages with Permanent Retention.
<https://www.ucop.edu/information-technology-services/initiatives/records-retention-management/examples-of-messages-for-permanent-retention.html>.

- Correspondence announcing or interpreting UC bylaws, policies, directives, and regulations³

Addressing Concerns

The majority of emails are not written with a broad audience in mind, but rather reveal, discuss and resolve a wide range of matters within a closed network of participants and collaborators. Therefore, the most common concerns that arise when discussing the collection of email records include: privacy, security, and public access or use.

Privacy

The University of California is committed to protecting personal privacy in its operations, activities, and management of information. The University must balance this commitment with other important commitments, including public accountability and the right of people to access information about the conduct of the public's business.⁴ While the University makes every attempt to keep its data secure, privacy is not guaranteed.

To protect privacy more effectively, it is best to be *selective* when transferring email to the university archives. The following actions provide guidelines for staff in key positions to ensure their personal privacy is not compromised when email is transferred to the university archives. For protocols specific to each campus, contact the University Archivist.

Security

Securing email held by the university archives is essential. Access to the unprocessed digital files will be restricted to only those directly involved in accessioning,⁵ preserving, and/or processing the records until it is ready for public use. Electronic communications may be collected or transferred to the archives in a number of ways depending on the comfort level of the transferring office and the technical requirements needed to facilitate the transfer. Once the university archives has received the digital files, the originals are stored on a secured system, with a preservation copy.

When the records are ready to be processed, messages and attachments that are determined to be outside of the focus of the collection's scope will be removed by the processor. Additional communications identified as confidential or protected by law will either be removed from the

³ Information Technology Services, Examples of Messages with Permanent Retention. <https://www.ucop.edu/information-technology-services/initiatives/records-retention-management/example-s-of-messages-for-permanent-retention.html>.

⁴ University of California – Policy BFB-RMP-7 Protection of Administrative Records containing Personally Identifiable Information, <https://policy.ucop.edu/doc/7020462/BFB-RMP-7>.

⁵ Accessioning- the act of acquiring records for preservation.

collection or restricted for a period of time depending on the type of information and stipulations on the records made at the time of transfer. When processing is completed, an “access” or public use copy of the records will be securely stored and preserved. If any portion of the collection has been restricted for a limited term, the restricted copy, held in secure storage, will replace the access copy at the end of the term limit.

Public Use / Access

The access copy will be made available to users upon request, ordinarily viewable on-site in a controlled environment. Duplication of select items may be allowed according to local policies and restrictions. Due to privacy and security concerns, it is not recommended that open access be provided to unprocessed email collections.

Conclusion

In spite of the historical importance of email correspondence, the University of California as a whole does not have a uniform policy regarding the collection and long-term preservation of email in University Archives. There is general recognition among campus archivists and records managers that email in university accounts are the property of the University, and that email and attachments are records eligible for consideration for permanent retention in university archives.

Email determined to be part of the permanent record of the University must be considered for historical preservation according to the Policies for Administration of University of California Archives, the University of California Record Retention Policy, and relevant Information Technology policies.

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This statement has been reviewed by:

UC Records Management Group
UC Born-Digital Archives Common Knowledge Group
UC Heads of Special Collections Common Knowledge Group
UC Digital Preservation Leadership Group
UC Electronic Communications Policy Coordinators
UC Libraries Direction and Oversight Committee