

Records Definitions

Record - A record, according to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and the Texas A&M System is “any written, photographic, machine-readable, or other recorded information created or received by or on behalf of the agency that documents the activities of the organization. Records include books, letters, documents, printouts, photographs, film, tape, microfiche, microfilm, photostats, sound recordings, maps, drawings, and a voice, data, or video representation held in computer memory.” Records are retained for administrative, financial, historical, or legal reasons.

Records may include such items as:

- General Correspondence of administrative records
- Financial transcripts
- Significant working papers, drafts, and versions
- Databases and tables
- Personnel and employment documentation
- Student and class documentation
- Web sites
- Electronic media, tapes, disks, hard drives, and portable storage devices
- Electronic messages, including email, Instant Messages, and voicemail
- Metadata associated with records
- Annotations such as sticky notes affixed to documents

Items that are not records include:

- Stocks of publications or printed brochures
- Library and museum materials
- Preliminary drafts, worksheets, memoranda, and information notes that do not represent significant steps in the preparation of record documents
- Routing slips or memos that contain no pertinent information or approvals
- Duplicate or convenience copies held for ease of reference and accessibility
- Blank forms, files, and office supplies
- Unofficial bank notes, unsolicited announcements, invitations, or other materials that are not filed as evidence of official business
- Personal items which pertain solely to an individual’s affairs and do not relate to or influence the conduct of the agency business. However, using personal funds to purchase an item, such as an appointment book that is to document work activities, does not make the item personal. Also, it is important to note that personal items kept at work or on an agency/university computer may be subject to legal discovery in legal proceedings. By the same token, work-related items removed from the agency are still the property of the agency.

A record should correctly reflect what was communicated or decided or what action was taken. It should be able to support the business needs and the accountability of the agency. An authoritative record consists of the structure, content, and context, which should be apparent and intact.

In addition, records need to be:

- Authentic - a record that can be proven to be what it purports to be, was created, sent by, or received by the indicated person, and created, sent, or received at the time purported – records are protected against unauthorized addition, deletion, alteration, use, or concealment
- Reliable - a record whose contents can be trusted as being the full and accurate representation of the transaction
- Complete and unaltered, with clear and traceable indications of authorized additions, annotations, or deletions
- Useable - a record which can be located, retrieved, presented, reproduced, and interpreted

Other ways to evaluate records include:

- Value to the unit
- Documentation of a transaction
- Information should be retained if it will probably be needed at some future time to support a legitimate legal or business objective, the consequences of its absence would be substantial, and the retention period has been evaluated in terms of costs, risks, and benefits.

Archival records - a record of enduring historical value that will be preserved by declaring it an archival record in the Laserfiche Electronic Document Management System and/or University Archives (paper records). The records retention schedule requires that some records be retained or reviewed by the archivist. Your unit may have other historical records as well.

Vital records - any record necessary for the resumption or continuation of business operations following an emergency or disaster. Vital records should be kept in a location separate from the place of business and updated on a regular basis. (Note: vital records maintained in Laserfiche are backed up and are accessible from any operating location which meets these requirements)

Litigation hold - a process to stop the normal disposition or processing of records as a result of current, pending, or anticipated legal action, audit, or investigation. Once a litigation hold is instituted, records cannot be destroyed or altered. Penalties can be severe for failure to comply. A litigation hold could affect one department or could possibly involve all AgriLife. Refer to the AgriLife Litigation Hold Procedures and contact the AgriLife Records Retention Officer if your unit becomes involved with such an action.