

Record Keeping Best Practices

9/18

All State University of New York (“SUNY”) employees have an obligation to properly manage records created, received and maintained by Fredonia, State University of New York (“Fredonia”) and to dispose of records that no longer serve a legal, operational, or historic value.

Is your office the “office of record” or are you the “record custodian”?

A record custodian is any officer, employee, or agent of Fredonia who possesses, controls, or maintains any record, information, or data of the University. **Only an office or person who is the official custodian of a record has an obligation, legal or otherwise, to retain the information.**

Are you maintaining convenience/courtesy copies?

Any office or person that is in possession of records for which they are not the official custodian should dispose of those records once the record has no operational value to the office. **Maintaining records that are not the responsibility of the office only causes redundant sets of records and confusion about which sets of records are accurate and complete.**

Drafts vs. official copy

When drafts are created in the preparation of University records, the final version is considered the official copy for retention purposes. **Temporary drafts that were not reviewed, circulated or used to make decisions may be discarded when no longer needed.** This should be done at the earliest opportunity following approval of the final version.

Personal working papers

Most personal working papers, such as notes taken at a meeting or annotations on a draft record that is ultimately superseded by a final version, have no legal, operational, or research value that warrants retaining them beyond their moment of immediate usefulness. **These records should be discarded at the earliest opportunity, generally within one (1) year after the purpose for which they were created has been fulfilled.**

Official University records in your possession as the record custodian

University records must be retained and may not be destroyed unless in accordance with applicable records retention schedules. For SUNY specific records (for example, student records and academic records), campuses shall adhere to the [SUNY Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](#) (SUNY schedule). For records not covered by the SUNY Schedule and which involve common types of state agency records (for example, financial, personnel, technology), campuses must adhere to the “[General Retention and Disposition Schedule for New York State Government Records](#)” (state schedule). The SUNY and New York State (NYS) record retention

schedules cover the majority of all records of the campuses and the University. For any record not listed, the custodian of the records should contact the University Records Management Officer for assistance. **To schedule a record assessment or for additional information, please see [Fredonia's Records Management Web page](#) for assistance.**

Permanent and Historical Records

Both the SUNY and NYS Record Retention Schedules identify **permanent records** that campuses and the University must keep permanently to meet their fiscal, legal, or administrative needs. **Responsibility of the maintenance and preservation of these records belongs to the record custodian and/or the office of record.** While certain records are not required to be kept permanently, they may contain **historical** and significant information. A record has historical or other research importance if it provides significant evidence regarding how the campus or University functions and/or if it provides significant information about people, places, or events that involve the campus or the University. This information can be very valuable to staff, researchers, and the public, but only if the information itself is significant. The significance of the records will depend on:

- **When the records were created.** Records created during a time of momentous change, which are scarce, or which cover a long period of time tend to be more significant.
- **What kind of information the records contain.** Records that contain more in-depth information are more likely to have enduring value.
- **Who created the records.** Records that reflect an employee's perspective or individual point of view may be more significant.
- **What other records exist.** If the information in the records exists in other records within a campus or the University or elsewhere, then the records are less likely to be significant.
- **The unique history of the campus or the University.** Records created during important time periods or events can provide clues to how the events affected the development of the campus or the University and the community it serves.

The usefulness of these records depends on the ability of the campuses and the University to preserve them, retrieve the information they contain, and make that information available to researchers. The University Archives **acquires and preserves the most significant, publicly accessible materials that have historical value to the University.** If you or your department is the creator/custodian of such records, you may wish to schedule an assessment with [Director of Internal Control](#).

References: [Stony Brook University](#)