

University Records Management
Special Collections Research Center
University Libraries
George Mason University

August 2020

Records Management Practices during continuing COVID-19 efforts at GMU

The situation with COVID-19 has meant that duties and services at Mason are - and may continue to be for some time – in flux. We understand that many of us have not only had to adapt to working from new devices and new locations, but that our work and work processes may have also changed. As we look towards the future, our records management policies and practices may need a refresh as we continue to endure during these changes. (Please note: terms or phrases with an asterisk * denote the definition is located in the Addendum at the end of this document.)

[University Records Management](#) serves as a compliance unit for the University at large. This memo has been written as a reminder that during this time we are still subject to the records regulations set forth by the Library of Virginia under the Virginia Public Records Act (VPRA) as well as other laws and agreements. The sudden rise in our digital-born documents and data is an opportunity to reflect on our units' policies and practices regarding their records (retention periods*, security and access, etc.). We hope that this memo provides guidance as we adjust to working primarily within a digital landscape.

A **record*** is captured information (paper, digital, or otherwise) that serves as evidence of a transaction of business. *Personal papers*, copies, and printouts from databases are not considered records.*

In addition to the guidance below, we ask that you please reach out to University Records Management with any questions or concerns regarding your records, whether they are for you position only or your unit at large. Inappropriate records management not only increases our risk of litigation but the exposure of our patrons to security weaknesses.

At your service,

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GENERAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19

- Do not conduct Mason business from a personal account (e-mail, Google, Apple, etc.).
- Ensure that correspondence and collaboration are taking place on Mason approved platforms. If you are unsure if your platform or service has been approved by [ITS](#), please confirm with them.
 - YES to Office 365, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Webex (closing out March 2021), etc.
 - NO to Google, Apple, DropBox, etc.
- Records, regardless of format, cannot be destroyed/deleted without a Certificate of Records Destruction*, which can only be approved by University Records Management. If you are unsure if you can destroy your documentation or data, please contact us.
- Virginia has its own version of the Freedom of Information Act. If you receive requests for records outside of your normal scope of business (inquiries such as specific documentation on how your unit may be handling COVID-19 precautions), or if Virginia's FOIA is specifically mentioned, [please contact Mason's FOIA Compliance Officer](#).
- The University Records Center is closed for the time being. If you have paper records for storage after the return to your respective buildings, please keep them in a safe, climatized environment until such a time as we reopen for services. As we know some units may be closing, moving, or have personnel retiring during this time, please reach out to us for special circumstances.

If you are working on a University-provided device, and/or connecting remotely to your University desktop:

- Continue to save your work within your department's designated storage
 - i.e. MESA, shared drive, MS Teams, etc.
- Be careful with downloading personal papers* and/or connecting personal accounts to desktop applications.
- Any vital* documentation stored on your hard drive should be backed up elsewhere.

If you are working on a personal device:

- Create another user on your desktop (if possible) for strictly Mason-related business and do your work from there.
- If you are unable to create a user specifically for your Mason-related business, be please sure to create a folder specifically for your work documentation and records.
- Any documentation stored on your hard drive should be backed up elsewhere on a regular basis, at least weekly. Any confidential*, sensitive*, or vital* documentation should *never* be stored on a personal hard drive.

If your office is considering scanning/digitizing paper records for remote access:

- Establish a strong naming convention to increase searchability. All documents should have corresponding dates in the file name, as written month, numerical year
 - i.e. DeptName_GNUMBER_FormName_Month2020
- Scan documents at 300 dpi (dots per inch) for higher quality image. A quality check on all scans will increase likelihood of full capture.
- Documents containing PII or personal identifiable information* can only be stored on secured servers approved by ITS. Access and changes should be limited and tracked.
- Scanned documents should be maintained for 12 months minimum after digitization to protect against possible data loss during implementation of your new process.
- If you are considering a vendor to digitize your documentation, please consult with University Records Management to establish a list of desired outcomes and records requirements.

Additional Resources

University Records Management Website - *Includes mini-guides for records retentions, information on what services are available and when services will be expected to resume, and other FAQs.*

<https://recordsmanagement.gmu.edu/>

Schedule of Online Workshops hosted by University Records Management - *Select Category: Records Management to filter for our classes.*

<https://gmu.libcal.com/>

Highly Sensitive Data FAQ from Mason ITS

<https://its.gmu.edu/working-with-its/it-security-office/highly-sensitive-data/>

University Police 1102: Records Management

<https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/records-management/>

Library of Virginia Records Retention Schedules for State Agencies – *If you are unable to find a records series that matches your records and you need guidance on retention, please reach out to URM.*

https://www.lva.virginia.gov/agencies/records/sched_state/index.htm

Architectural Standards Review Board – *If you are considering purchasing new software or services for your data or document management, requests should be reviewed by the ASRB.*

<https://its.gmu.edu/working-with-its/asrb/>

***ADDENDUM of RECORDS DEFINITIONS**

Certificate of Records Destruction (RM-3): a form outlining the record(s) to be destroyed, the relevant details regarding their eligibility, to be signed and approved by the designated Records Officer prior to the destruction of the record(s).

confidential: restricted from disclosure by statute, court order, or legally adopted rules and regulations

personal identifiable information:

- social security number
- driver's license number
- bank account numbers
- credit or debit card numbers
- personal identification numbers (PIN)
- electronic identification codes
- automated or electronic signatures
- passwords
- any other numbers or information that can be used to access a person's financial resources, obtain identification, act as identification, or obtain goods or services.

personal papers: private papers related solely to an individual's own affairs

record: any document, data, or file created or accumulated during the course of public business, and that provides evidence of public business, regardless of the format in or media on which it may be contained

retention period: length of time a record is held before disposal takes place

sensitive: any numbers or information that can be used to access a person's financial resources, obtain identification, act as identification, or obtain goods or services.

vital record: any record that loss of which could critically damage the unit's ability to operate, impact the unit's reputation, or place the unit at risk of litigation or penalty.