

Information about the audio file

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Production date: June 2015
Title: Episode 2: How to read a retention schedule
Production location: Simon Fraser University
Time: 12 minutes 28 seconds

Introduction

Welcome to this audio podcast from the Archives and Records Management Department of Simon Fraser University.

[music of SFU Pipe Band playing bagpipes during the 1969 SFU Convocation ceremony]

The purpose of this podcast is to answer frequently asked questions from records creators around the university about records management. Every employee of the University is responsible for creating records in the course of their work, and we want to answer your questions quickly so that you know all you need to know to create great records that can be used today, tomorrow, and maybe even 50 years in the future.

[music ends]

Episode Introduction

This is episode two: how to read an RRSDA.

In this episode we will cover

- what is an RRSDA
- the alternative names for the RRSDA, and how it's useful to you
- We will also look at each section of the RRSDA and talk about the information that's presented in each section

To start out what is an RRSDA?

RRSDA is an acronym that stands for Records Retention Schedule and Disposal Authority.

This **very** long name accurately captures what an RRSDA is: it's a policy document that's approved by the University Archivist that describes a group of records, defines how long they should be kept, and indicates what should be done with the records when are no longer useful to the everyday business activities of the University.



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However, an alternative name for RRSDA is simply “retention schedule”. All kinds of organizations have retention schedules including corporations and government organizations. For the remainder of this podcast I'm going to use the simpler term "retention schedule".

Employees across the University use retention schedules to answer all kinds of records questions, including questions like:

- How long the records should be kept in your office?
- For digital records, when should you delete the records?
- Also for digital records, should you transfer these to the digital repository so they can be permanently retained by the University?
- For paper records, the retention schedules help answer if you send the records to an off-site like the University Records Centre and how long will they will be kept there.
- And for all types of records, retention schedules help answer what's going to happen to them at the end of their life cycle. Are they going to be destroyed confidentially, are they going to be transferred into the Archives' custody so that someday future researchers can use them?

Now that we talked about what a retention schedule or, an RRSDA, is and how they can help you in your work, I'll now talk about the different section of the retention schedule and the kind of information each section contains.

There are six main sections of the retention schedule.

1. The basic information section
2. The retention period
3. A description of the records section
4. The authorities section
5. The retention rationale and
6. Lastly the retention and filing guidelines section

On the very top of the retention schedule, you have the **basic information section**. This includes the **number** of the retention schedule as well as the **record series** which is like a title. The record series is the name of the group of records that the retention schedule is describing.

Also in the basic information section you have a statement of Who is the **OPR**. OPR stands for Office of Primary Responsibility. This is where you find out if your department is the office that has the official and authoritative version of this type a record for the university. If your department is not the OPR, that usually means that the document that

you have is just a copy. This is really important to know because you can't apply a retention schedule to document that is just a copy.

As an example, for most financial records– but not all of them – units like Financial Services or Payment Services are the OPR that record. This is because it is the primary function of a department like Financial Services to maintain the official and authoritative versions of financial records for the university.

Most retention schedules have just one office that is the office of primary responsibility for that type of record. However, you need to watch out because there are also some retention schedules that apply to every department of University. These are called **general records retention schedules**. That means any department that produces those kinds of records has the official and authoritative version of that record and they **are** considered the OPR.

So, the main questions that you want to ask yourself when you're looking at the basic section of a retention schedule are:

- Is this the right number or does this retention schedule have a title that makes sense for the type of record that I'm looking at?
And
- Is my department the OPR for this type of record?

If not, keep on looking for other retention schedules, because this is not going to fit your type of record.

The second section of the retention schedule includes information about **retention periods**. This is the real meat of the retention schedule so pay attention to this section.

The information is presented in a table form to make it easier to understand.

In the retention period section, you'll find information about the different retention periods or PHASES of the record. For any record, you may have any of the following phases: the active period, the semi-active retention period, the total retention period, and final disposition.

The active retention period tells you how long you should keep this type of record in your office. The active retention period is expressed as CY plus some amount of years or terms. CY means current year, and it means the year that you stop using the file.

For instance, if you're keeping the minutes of a committee, then you close the file at the end of each year. You start a new folder at the beginning of the new year, whether it's paper or digital, and in the new year, you add the new records to the new folder, and

you stop adding minutes to last year's folder. At that point, last year's folder is now closed, and you can apply the retention period.

Or, if your records are about a certain project that goes longer than a year, you would keep those files open until the project is finished. In that case, CY refers to the year that you close the project. Basically, overall, CY refers to the year that you stop adding records to the file.

If you're unclear about when to close the file, you can often get some tips from another section of the retention schedule that we'll talk about later called the retention and filing guidelines.

Another phase of the record is called the semi active period.

The semi-active period may or may not exist for a given group of records. If there is a semi-active period for your group of records, that means that you can box up the paper records, if they are paper, and send them for storage in the University Record Centre. The semi active period tells you how long those records will be kept in the University Records Center. Your department can retrieve those records from the URC anytime they like during that semi-active period.

Then we have the total retention.

The total retention is the total amount of time that your department should retain the records, whether they're in your office, whether they're on a shared drive, whether they are stored on back up, or whether they are stored in the university record center. When the total retention has been reached, your department should no longer have the records.

And that brings us to the last part of the retention section of the retention schedule. Final disposition. Final disposition tells you whether those records should be transferred to the archives, permanently deleted, or whether they should be confidentially destroyed. If the final disposition column says selective retention or full retention, that means that those records need to be sent to the archives. For paper records, this means that you just need to box them up and send them to the URC during the semi-active period, and the archives will take care of the rest when the total retention has been reached.

If your records are digital however, AND the final disposition column says selective retention or full retention, then contact us about how to transfer your records to the digital archives, so that they can be permanently retained.

And finally if the final disposition column says destruction, that means that the paper records will be destroyed, either by you or by us if they are in the University Records

Centre. This also means that your digital records need to be permanently deleted when the total retention has been reached.

And that's the end of the retention section and the basic information section of a retention schedule.

Now, I told you that there are six sections. Luckily the next four are very straightforward.

We have the third section, the **description of the record series**. In the section, we captured some basics about this type of record, including what purpose it serves, and how it gets created at the University. In the section you also often find cross references to other related retention schedules that might be applicable.

In the fourth section we have a **list of the authorities**. The authorities are the laws, policies, regulations, or other rules that need to be followed for this type of record. The authority section lists the laws and regulations that have been consulted in determining how long the record needs to be kept.

The fifth section is called the **retention rationale**. This section is a brief explanation of how the total retention period was determined and what laws and regulations apply.

Lastly the **retention and filing guidelines section**. This section often contain helpful tips on how to organize records of this type so that it is easier to either pull the records and send them to the University Records Centre, to identify them for deletion, or to identify when it's time to transfer them to the digital repository for permanent preservation.

In the retention and filing section, you'll also find information about how to transfer paper records to the University Record Center, as well as why it's important to delete or transfer the records when the total retention has been reached, or other useful information that is particular to this record series.

And that covers all the sections of retention schedule including the basic introductory section, the retention period, the description of the records, the authorities section, the retention rationale, and the retention and filing section.

Credits

[music of SFU Pipe Band playing bagpipes during the 1969 SFU Convocation ceremony]

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Archival audio clip

Speaker: Male voice

Production date: 1969

Production location: Simon Fraser University

SFU is still young enough to create its own traditions. It remembers the explorer, Simon Fraser, and this is why you'll hear the pipers playing on our campus at important events such as convocation, when graduating students receive their degrees.

[music ends]