

SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ELECTRONIC RECORDS RETENTION PROCEDURE	Procedure 8.03.01
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I. PROCEDURE

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for the retention, storage, and lawful disposal of electronic records, including emails and instant messages, in compliance with the North Carolina Public Records Act, applicable laws, and the approved [Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](#) ("the Schedule") for community colleges. This policy ensures that the College maintains trustworthy, accessible, and compliant records while promoting efficient records management practices.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all electronic records created, received, or managed by College employees, contractors, and third-party service providers. It encompasses emails, instant messages, documents, spreadsheets, databases, system logs, and any other electronically stored information (ESI) used in conducting College business.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Electronic Records:** Information recorded in a digital format, including email and instant messages, that are used for conducting College business.
- B. **Records Retention Schedule:** The official document specifying the required retention periods for various categories of records.
- C. **Litigation Hold:** A directive to suspend the normal retention schedule and preserve records that might be relevant to ongoing or anticipated litigation or investigations.
- D. **Records Custodian:** The individual responsible for maintaining, archiving, and disposing of records in accordance with the Schedule.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. **Records Custodian:** Maintain and update the College's Records Retention Schedule in alignment with state requirements. Provide training and guidance on records management to employees.
- B. **IT Division:** Implement technical systems for secure storage, archival, and deletion of electronic records. Maintain fail-safe mechanisms to archive all email and instant messages for a minimum of five (5) years. Ensure backup and disaster recovery systems adequately protect critical records.
- C. **Users:** Adhere to the retention and handling requirements of this policy. Properly categorize, store, or transfer emails and other records for archiving as necessary.
- D. **Supervisors:** Ensure the electronic records of departing employees are properly archived or transferred in compliance with this policy.

V. RETENTION REQUIREMENTS

A. Retention Categories:

- **Limited or Transitory Records:** Records that serve no long-term administrative, legal, or operational purpose. Examples include

SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ELECTRONIC RECORDS RETENTION PROCEDURE	Procedure 8.03.01
-----------------------------------	---	----------------------

scheduling emails or routine inquiries. These records may be deleted when they no longer serve their purpose.

- Operational Records: Records that must be retained for 3–7 years based on the content and applicable retention requirements in the Schedule.
 - Permanent Records: Records that must be retained indefinitely, such as board meeting minutes and accreditation reports.
- B. **Content-Based Retention:** The content of a record determines its retention, not the device or medium used to create or store it. For example, work-related emails sent from personal accounts must be transferred to College systems for proper retention.
- C. **Litigation Hold:** Records subject to pending litigation, audits, or investigations must be retained until the issue is resolved. The Vice President of Technology and Campus Safety, in collaboration with legal counsel, will issue and monitor litigation holds.

VI. STORAGE AND ARCHIVING

- A. **Secure Storage:** All records must be stored in secure, College-approved systems that ensure their integrity, confidentiality, and accessibility.
- B. **Archiving:** The College maintains an archival system for emails and instant messages as a fail-safe mechanism, retaining copies for five (5) years.
- C. **Backup and Recovery:** Backup systems must preserve critical records to prevent data loss. The IT Division will ensure that backups align with the College's Disaster Recovery (DR) Plan.

VII. DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

- A. Records that have exceeded their retention period must be securely disposed of in accordance with the Schedule. Prior to the disposition of any record or record group after the applicable retention period, the records custodian will create and maintain a destruction log.
- B. **Acceptable Methods of Disposal:**
- Digital Shredding: Overwriting or securely erasing electronic files.
 - Physical Destruction: Shredding or destroying storage media that contain sensitive records.
- C. **Documentation:** Disposal must be documented in a destruction log that specifies the type of records, retention period, and method of destruction.

VIII. ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE

Non-compliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or contract termination. The IT Division and Records Custodian will conduct regular audits to ensure adherence to this policy.

IX. REVIEW AND REVISION

This policy will be reviewed every five years or as needed to reflect changes in regulations, technology, or College operations.

SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ELECTRONIC RECORDS RETENTION PROCEDURE	Procedure 8.03.01
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LEGAL REFERENCES:

- N.C.G.S. § 132-1 et seq. (North Carolina Public Records Act)
- N.C.G.S. §§ 121-5, 132-1 et seq.
- State Guidelines for Managing Trustworthy Digital Public Records
- Records Retention & Disposition Schedule (May 15, 2019)
- CIS Controls v8, Control 8 (Audit Log Management)
- NIST SP 800-53: Security and Privacy Controls for Information Systems and Organizations

CROSS REFERENCES:

- Policy 4.02.14 - Personnel Files
- Policy 6.04.07 - Student Records - FERPA
- Policy 8.11 - Information Classification and Handling

Previously Referenced as: 4.05.02 Electronic Records Retention (2014)

Adopted: September 2025

Revised: N/A