

Records Management

A Guide for the Clarification of Record vs Non-Record Materials

Introduction

All physical and electronic materials received or generated by Western Illinois University which pertain to the transaction of public business are “public records” which are available for public inspection unless specifically exempted by lawⁱ. However, only those “public records” which are also University Records must be managed according to the requirements put forth by the Illinois State Records Actⁱⁱ. Although they are still “public records”, Non-Record materialsⁱⁱⁱ are not subject to the management and disposal requirements of the State Records Act and, therefore, greater flexibility exists for their management in support of efficient business processes. Because most materials at the University are Non-Record materials, efficient use of resources and compliance with State law necessitate a clear distinction between University Records and Non-Record materials. What is a Record?

Records are defined by the [Illinois State Records Act](#) as:

"books, papers, digitized electronic material, maps, photographs, databases, or other official documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made, produced, executed or received by any agency in the State in pursuance of state law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its successor as evidence of the organization, function, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the State or of the State Government, or because of the informational data contained therein".

The simplest definition comes from [ARMA International](#) which says that a record is any recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received and retained by an organization in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

In the simplest way, Non-Record materials, as compared to University Records, do not require State approval prior to their disposal^{iv}. Referring to the definition of **Records** provided by the Illinois Administrative one can define University Records as anything that is received or generated by the University in the transaction of University business as evidence of the activities of the University. **Non-Record** materials may be duplicates of University Records materials used merely for reference purposes, or materials that communicate information of short-term value. Most Non-Record materials should be disposed of as soon as possible after their primary usefulness has expired.

Examples of Non-Record Materials

- Academic research data
- Personal correspondence and junk mail/spam
- Non-University publications and catalogs
- Working papers and drafts of papers or reports that have been published.
- Duplicate material including recipient copies of internal communications.
- Blank forms and stocks of printed or reproduced documents kept for supply purposes.
- Material created and preserved only for reference or convenience purposes.
- Books, periodicals, newspapers, posters, and other library and museum materials.
(exceptions: books, periodical and newspaper articles which are written or about WIU faculty,
- Private materials neither made nor received by the University in the transaction of public business.
- Material used to facilitate operations but not to support, enable, or document administrative action.
- **Material considered as University Records that has been duplicated or migrated to another format in accordance with the requirements put forth by the State.**
- Transitory messages created primarily to communicate information of short-term value. Transitory messages are created in many formats such as email, instant messaging (IM), text messaging (SMS), or paper correspondence. Examples of transitory messages include, but are not limited to,:
 1. reminders to employees about scheduled meetings or appointments;
 2. telephone messages (whether in paper, voicemail, or other electronic form);

3. announcements of office events;
4. recipient copies of announcements of campus-sponsored events such as exhibits, lectures, workshops, etc.

Non-Record materials may still be valuable.

Non-Record materials may still be valuable to the workflow of many units and, as such, they may still be expected to be kept locally within a department to facilitate future business processes. For example, some units may want to have ready access to reference copies of contracts for use when drafting new contracts for similar goods and services. For this reason, departments may intentionally retain Non-Record materials for specified periods of time, recording retention information as part of the process of documenting how the department manages its information resources in order to dispose of the materials as soon as possible after their primary usefulness has expired.^{vi}

ⁱ “Each public body shall make available to any person for inspection or copying all public records, except as otherwise provided in Section 7 of this Act.” ([5 ILCS 140/3](#))

ⁱⁱ General recordkeeping requirements are found in the Illinois State Records Act ([5 ILCS 160](#)) and Administrative Code ([JCAR 4400](#))

ⁱⁱⁱ Non-Record materials are still typically public records according to the [Illinois Freedom of Information Act](#).

^{iv} “Nonrecord materials...may be destroyed at any time by the agency in possession of such materials without the approval of the Commission.” ([5 ILCS 160/20](#))

Definitions for Record and Non-Record material are found in State Records Commission rules. ([JCAR 4400.20](#))