The HIGHER EDUCATION RECORDS SECURITY *Playbook*

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For many students, their first encounter with their chosen higher education institution is records management – submitting transcripts, medical records, and letters of recommendation. Likewise, faculty and other stakeholders are continually touched by records management throughout their relationship with the institution. Colleges and universities can deliver a positive experience to students, faculty and staff in this area, but many are challenged by lax policies and poor security in many areas, including records management.

As colleges and universities work to address records management issues, while providing a quality experience for students and faculty, it's never been more important to address issues around security in records management. According to Symantec's annual Internet Security Threat Report, 10 percent of reported security breaches involved the education sector. That trails only health care (37 percent) and retail (11 percent), the report said.[i]

Factors driving the need for better, more secure higher education records management include:

▶ Strict regulatory environment governing student records security.

Federal regulations around the privacy of student records include FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and for health information, HIPAA (Health Information Portability and Accountability Act). Both laws have significantly tightened security and privacy requirements for colleges and universities.

▶ High visibility as a target for security breaches of paper and digital documents by foreign actors and others.

In a well-documented trend, colleges and universities present an increasingly appealing target to ever-more-sophisticated attacks.[ii] According to Educause, data breaches in higher education are becoming more common, as attackers realize what a gold mine of poorly secured information colleges and universities can be.[iii]

In response, the annual Campus Computing Project 2015 survey reported that network and data security climbed to fourth place on the list of IT directors' priorities. The attention institutions are beginning to pay to security concerns, according to the online publication Inside Higher Ed, "has been fueled by attacks against institutions [...] as well as highly publicized data breaches at retailers and government agencies. In the wake of those attacks, cybersecurity experts have warned colleges must do more to protect the information on their networks."[iv]

▶ Increasing pressure to reduce costs while providing a secure, positive records management experience with faculty, students and administrators.

According to an EDUCAUSE study on device usage in higher education, 54 percent of institutions predict that the cost of data and security breaches will increase in the next two years.[v]

Even as spending on securing records must increase, administrators can look for cost savings by improving efficiencies in processing, archiving and retrieval of data. In fact, in the same EDUCAUSE report, it is recommended that higher education institutions focus money and efforts on protecting records and data, rather than chasing down devices. "[D]ata are the paramount institutional asset and are therefore the most important consideration" when discussing security issues, the report states. That data includes, of course, student records. "For risk management, plan to focus on securing data rather than devices," the study said.[v]

This playbook includes three examples of how improvements in records management efficiency and security are possible by digitizing legacy information, establishing automated records information capture, and leveraging enterprise-level, coordinated records management workflows.

PLAY ONE:

Analyzing and ensuring document security

The Situation:

With more than 36,000 students and 12,000 faculty and staff, a rapidly growing public university in the Southwest is renowned for its degree programs, location and research. However, campus records management services were in disarray, with different policies for different departments, limited tracking abilities for sensitive documents such as student transcripts and medical records, multiple types of hardware and software in place, and little overarching control. As its rapid growth continues, the university needed to streamline its student records management to prevent security incursions, save staff time, and ensure better compliance with both the federal student information privacy law, FERPA, and the health insurance records privacy law, HIPAA.

The Goals:

- Identify and address areas of records management with potential lax security
- Reduce currently unmanaged “silos” of information by moving records management to a single vendor with services and digital data storage
- Work toward a single set of security policies for student, staff and faculty records

New Approach:

The university brought together a broad range of stakeholders initially, led by its new Chief Security Officer (CSO), to lay out a pilot program for all of the departments that assessed document management processes and identified problem areas. As with many universities, different departments on campus had individual approaches to document security. The athletics department, for example, often handled student transcripts and medical records, sometimes as paper versions, but had no "chain of custody" plan in place. Also, the university's fragmented network environment made enforcing security with online documents challenging.

Working with a professional services team from a records management expert, the stakeholders decided that a plan to eventually move all student records to a single electronic document management (EDM) system would save costs both in the short and long run, and greatly enhance security. The system would be integrated with the Student Information System (SIS), making document transfer easier.

In the process, the services team and university would work together to begin a process of gradually scanning in older student transcripts. Those documents would be added to a records management solution, and paper documents would be destroyed. With correct personnel access settings on the documents, security would be greatly increased. And because storage is digital, security settings and software updates can be handled by an experienced third party.

Significant increases in the security of records management continues, and university officials are now making plans for further moving of documents, department by department, to the digital records storage solution. Besides security, the changes will reduce operating expenses and costs for the rapidly growing university, and improve quality of service for everyone: students, faculty and staff.

PLAY TWO:

Increasing security through a new storage and digitization approach

The Situation:

With more than 20,000 students and growing, and some 150,000 paper transcripts stored in a large vault on campus, Western Kentucky University's registrar's office needed to modernize its document management and records retrieval systems. Also, older transcripts were stored on microfilm, making updates impossible. The human resources department, with over 2,500 employees to track, also wanted to improve its workflow for capturing digital copies of paper records for faculty and staff personnel.

The Goals:

- Expediteand secure retrieval of student and employee personnel files
- Reduce costs and increase productivity and efficiency
- Move from outdated microfilm to digital storage in order to allow updates to student records
- Improve HR digital records capture and transformation workflow

New Approach:

WKU's IT staff partnered with a professional services team with experience in digitization to develop a plan, beginning with 23,000 student transcripts in the registrars' office. The partner scanned the documents as PDFs using optical character recognition (OCR) technology, following a precise chain of custody and careful barcoding of documents in order to ensure information remained secure. The scanned documents were then integrated into the university's existing enterprise database, which has housed all student transcripts since 1990. In the second phase, another 128,000 student transcripts were securely scanned.

Now, when a student requests a transcript, an employee in the registrar's office can find it immediately online and provide it, rather than walking through the vault of paper files. Security is enhanced, transcripts are all backed up in a secure document services scanning center provided by the services team, and changes to transcripts can easily be made.

In the HR department, meanwhile, over 140,000 documents were scanned and imported directly into the department's own existing, highly secure enterprise database, with stakeholders clearly identifying which HR documents were required and which weren't. HR staff can now quickly search for relevant data across the entire document database. The new imaging system allows staff to move through files a click at a time. Meanwhile, physical HR records were moved to the services team's secure document services scanning center. Initially, the WKU team was skeptical of confidential employee information leaving the premises. But the professional services team's work with the Office of the Registrar's bolstered trust and goodwill throughout campus. The Human Resources Department was also assured that the professional services team's processing center was secured with controlled, restricted and monitored access. In turn, security has been tightened, and file preparation time is down from hours to minutes with the new scanning workflow.

The professional services team is now bringing additional value-added services to the WKU campus, proving to other departments on campus just how valuable these services are. The university is using these new digital records file preparation processes from the team to save capture, manage and transform files, thus increasing productivity and locking down file security.

PLAY THREE:

Reducing costs, improving security with electronic records management

The Situation:

A large East Coast community college system faced challenges in records management across all 11 of its campuses. The community college deals with a constant influx of student records, and was challenged with keeping records safe and secure across so many locations. Cuts in state funding had left the institution struggling to ensure documents were accessible to students and staff in a timely manner.

In response, the college decided to gradually digitize its entire records management process, changing from a paper-based system to encouraging students to submit all enrollment documents – transcripts, medical records, and letters of recommendation – electronically via a secure, automated, online records workflow. In doing so, the institution aimed to reduce the growing costs of managing paper documents, provide faster service to students, re-allocate staff who spent time searching for paper documents, and improve security and adherence to FERPA, the federal law protecting the privacy of student records. By choosing offsite electronic document management services, the university also hoped to move tasks from its already overburdened IT departments, while retaining absolute control of the document process.

The Goals:

- Cost savings in better use of staff, more efficient records management
- Better and faster service to students
- Prevent delays, inefficiencies and errors as student records move through the document capture workflow process
- Ensure more secure transcript management
- Adhere to FERPA requirements, make compliance reporting easier

New Approach:

Using the new online automated enrollment workflow any paper-based documents, such as letters of recommendation, health records, and athletic certifications, were converted to digital documents. That enabled secure tracking of sensitive documents throughout the process, including audit trails.

Because the institution integrated student records with its student information system, financial system and its learning management system, changes could be made throughout a student's career on campus. Also, staff and faculty, along with the student, could access the records as needed, to view testing, grading and ongoing course registration information.

Digitization also enables documents to be stored securely, so records from each of the community colleges are now stored in a single location, making adherence to federal and state privacy laws including FERPA and HIPAA far easier.

Summary & Resources

Make Records Management More Productive

Student records are one of the largest and most regularly accessed sources of information your college or university handles -- and one of the most challenging to manage well. That's because students – as well as parents, faculty and staff -- will regularly access a student's records throughout his or her career with your institution, and beyond as an alumni. Partnering with a professional services team that can help secure, automate and streamline records management throughout the student lifecycle is one way to address this challenge.

Improve Security and Peace of Mind

Storing and managing records electronically isn't just a faster and more efficient way to access records. It's far more secure, especially in the face of federal regulations like FERPA, and increasingly common data breaches on college campuses.

Reduce the Vulnerability of Paper

Due to the vulnerability of recently-received paper records, digitizing and storing them securely as quickly after receipt as possible is imperative. Services that support efficiently capturing and transforming records can save staff time, boost your institution's response time to students -- and ultimately help increase security.

CITATIONS

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[iv] https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/10/29/survey-finds-enthusiasm-new-technology-focus-age-old-it-issues

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