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Original Paper

Records and Archival Management System: Case of a Lebanese Private University

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Abstract

The importance and necessity to keep an archive of important records at universities is highly needed to maintain reasonable efficiency, transparency, and accuracy. This study used the life cycle and records continuum models to examine the records and archives management methods utilized at a selected Lebanese private university. The study capitalized on and explored records and archives management at the university and assessed practices considering recommendations from "The World Bank Group Records Management Guide". The main objective was to assess current practices and procedures concerning the abovementioned guide. This work recommended a plan based on the evaluation results to control documents and archives at the university. A mixed-method research approach was used and primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, a focus group, semi-structured interviews, and personal observations. Purposive sampling was used where 38 respondents were chosen to answer the questionnaire including staff who interacted with records daily; five members of the Information Technology (IT) team were involved in the focus group, and 11 interviewees (chosen from the 38 questionnaire respondents) were interviewed. Key findings support that the university lacked sufficient records management practices, and documents were managed informally. There was also a paucity of skilled records management professionals, which created problems with the development, circulation, utilization, preservation, and destruction of records, putting the university at risk of losing valuable information. The study recommended a procedural plan for records management system integration, reviewing the practices, and implementing new policies and procedures based on the universal and legal requirements to ensure that important records are kept and archived consistently.

Keywords

Records and archives management, Records Life-cycle Model, Records Continuum Model

1. Introduction and Background

The term record comes from the Latin word "recordari," which Cox (2001) defines as an "extension of human memory that is used to record information, document transactions, and express thoughts, validate claims, provide justifications, and provide long-term documentation of events." Also, Lewellen (2015) citing ISO 15489.1 (2002, p. 3) defines a document as "any recorded information or object that could be treated as a unit." These information units will be considered records when placed under systematic control that guarantees using them later as evidence of activities. According to Akor and Udensie (2013), "A record is any information source in any format, including written forms, films, electronic processes, and others, that is made and retained, or even received and kept in the course of a public office's official activities and purposes."

1.1 Records Management

Miller (2013) identified records management as "the general administrative management that aims to achieve economic value and increase the efficiency of the organization through handling the life cycle of records in terms of their formation, preservation, use, and disposal. It is about making information available in support of business organizations." Records management, according to the standard ISO 15489-1:2016, entails "tasks such as establishing guidelines and rules, assigning responsibilities and authorities, establishing procedures and guidelines, providing access to records management and use, and incorporating record keeping into business systems and processes" (ISO, 2016). Also, Musembe (2016a) stated that "universities are judged as effective according to their records management procedures, and that any university should strive to demonstrate 'guarantee' attempts throughout all aspects of their records management processes."

1.2 Archives Definition

The Public Archives Act popularized the term "public archives" in 1912. Contributors defined public archives as "all such public records, documents, and other historical material of every kind, nature, and explanation as, under this act, or the authority of any ordinance made by virtue thereof, are placed under the care, custody, and control of the Dominion Archivist" (Bailey, 2013, p. 12). Henry (1998) created a new paradigm in defining archives. She explored several fresh ideas and the distinctions between classic archiving authors and those who favor the modern technological records approach. The importance of archives is according to Henry (1998), "intellectual as well as humanistic, not just institutional." Private papers may never give "confirmation" of "contractual relationships," but they do supply a lot of evidence of the activities and interactions. Doylen (2001) also encouraged us to think of archives as "deserving continuing maintenance rather than perpetual value—a solution that warrants reappraising present holdings and revising the criteria by which archivists valued those documents in the first place."

Gilliland (2014) supported the new paradigms that the "archival field refers not only to records obtained during organizational activities that are no longer new but still useful, but also to the collection that encloses those historical records and the systems that guarantee their survival and accessibility." Later, Archivists (2023) "clarified that the archives locate, obtain, and preserve records of lasting significance that document the advancement of the organization and guarantee its ongoing survival. The records chronicle the process of institutional development by preserving both the information that influences choices and the choices themselves" (p. 20).

1.3 Archives Management

Beneden (1969) discussed the relationship between records management and archives where he stressed that a business should state its ultimate aim first to arrange for the maintenance and retrieval of its important records and that archives management is a main stage of the previously classified records, which should not be seen as the last step. Adding to the above, Nash (1997) highlighted that the connection between recordkeeping and archiving control had been accepted in the business world, where archives had previously received little or no attention.

Joshi & Singh (2017) talked about archives management by stating that "in circumstances of data gathering, certain information may be corrupted or difficult to retrieve. So archiving, in the new electronic world is not moving the unused records to a place of scheduled or infinite storage. It is the process of shifting information from the various active systems to certain other appropriate storage areas, such as disks, servers, and cloud storage." The suggestion proposed by Abdel Malak (2024) was that "Archives management involves the organized procedure of gathering, arranging, safeguarding, and facilitating access to records and documents that represent an organization's history and activities. It guarantees adherence to regulations, improves information availability, and safeguards essential institutional knowledge in analog and digital forms" (Abdel Malak, 2024, para 2).

1.4 Purposes of Records Management

"Records must be handled like other organizational resources, i.e., finances and employees. Proper record management is crucial for achieving institutional objectives" (Touray, 2021). Important records that offer proof of University operations are "classified according to their purpose in four categories: Confer credentials, convey knowledge, carry out research, or sustain the institution" (Samuels, 1992).

Honig (2024) posits that "Records management guarantees that this information is structured, reachable, and preserved in alignment with legal, regulatory, and operational standards. Businesses, non-profit organizations, educational establishments, and governmental bodies must adhere to retention standards. The procedure includes safely keeping records, eliminating them once their retention time has ended, and maintaining records that need to be retained indefinitely" (para 2). In addition, InStream (2014) contends that "Successful records management programs manage information so it is timely, accurate, complete, cost-effective, accessible and usable. This makes for better business in general" (para 1).

Norris (2002) asserts that "Records management also reduces operating costs by improving the management of an organization's network resources, leading to decreased spending on materials and services. This reduces expenses while delivering valuable information for making short-term decisions" (Norris, 2002). Moreover, according to ImageAPI (2025), "A high-quality records management system offers various advantages for the institution, incorporating simpler compliance, improved workflows, savings on costs, efficient retrieval, risk reduction, data protection, knowledge preservation, and enhanced morale" (para 5). Touray (2021) posits that "Implementing proper records management fosters effective administration since an organization's operations rely on accessing the information within its records. Effective record-keeping is essential for achieving an institution's vision and mission, encompassing teaching, research, consultancy, innovation, and community service."

1.5 Importance of Records and Archives Management at Universities

Even though records and archiving management problems exist at universities just as they do in corporations and governments, approaches in higher education continue to lack continuous assistance due to academic concerns.

According to Nwankwo (2001), educational institutions are "Universal locations for data generation and, by consequence, records keeping." The records management domain has taken further steps as university programs have been viewed as extremely complex. "The majority of parties who care about this intricacy and realize the necessity of recordkeeping require students' information to facilitate accurate, fast decisions."

Ngulube (2004) assured "the importance of such an attempt especially in times of uncertainty, since according to his study records makes the decision-making during uncertainty possible. Otherwise, the information will be likely unreliable, unorganized, unsustainable, and lacks transparency." In addition, Osahon Uwaifo (2004) stated that "Universities should take a giant step into result-oriented records and archives management. It should be towards effective use of information in planning decision-making and control."

"Records are an important resource that results in the realization of an institution's mission and help facilitate its decision-making process" (Chinyemba & Ngulube, 2005). Chinyemba (2011), "pointed out that universities should have proper records and archives management systems to be accountable to the government and to ensure that the university captures and preserves the required evidence."

Kaczmarek (2006) argued that "A university should focus on the administrative requirements of the needed information and relate the functions of personnel working on the campus to an electronic process." She added that "referring only to regulations will increase the risk of missing some vital data. She assured that any university should take its employees' experience and definitions of their core tasks as a starting point in implementing the archives management system" (ibid).

Coetzer (2012) also mentioned that "there are still several issues with the building of archives management in colleges and universities, impeding the normal growth and development of archives data management creation in these institutions. He concluded that those in charge of nearly any sort of data in universities must understand the recordkeeping rules and practices every employee must understand why information management is crucial to him or her as well as to the university. He advocated for the creation of a single network, a records management policy, an ordered file system, the migration of original documents to digital evidence, and employee training" (Coetzer, 2012). Information arising from the authorized duties of universities, according to Asogwa (2013), "should be appropriately controlled and protected." Freda (2014) revealed that "good records management is required in universities as a social and professional advantage and should not be forgotten or ignored. Confusion of recordkeeping can harm the University's reputation and deplete financial backing, which will hurt production and services." Further, "Universities require record management administration to make sure knowledge is in the right place at the right time for the responsible people at the least price possible" (Chigariro & Khumalo, 2017).

1.6 Records Life-Cycle

The life cycle of information is "A collection of well-defined stages that all records must traverse through to be controlled effectively, regardless of their format or function" (Newton, 1986). Gill (1993) defined it as "a gradual progression of a record from production to utilization and preservation, and finally destruction." According to Penn, Pennix, & Coulson (1994), Roberts (1996), and Corporate News (2022), "Following World War I, this method was implemented in the United States when the National Archives and Records Administration released a handbook that categorized phases of records management based on a document's life cycle. Documents underwent three phases: Creation, semi-active, and inactive." Figure 1 represents a record life cycle (Azameti, Annan & Adjei, 2014).

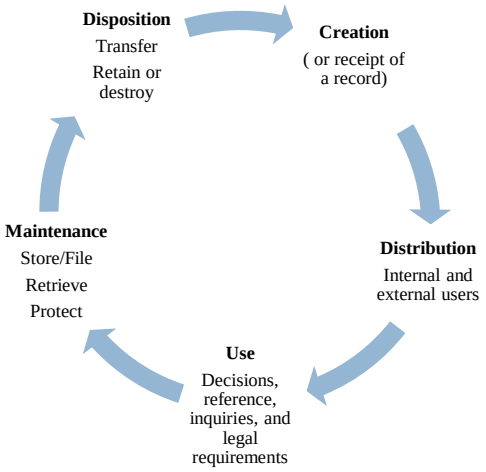

Figure 1. Records Life Cycle

Source: Azameti, Annan, & Adjei (2014, October 8), Slide 7.

The life cycle theory serves as "A conceptual framework for developing and implementing recordkeeping policies" (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003; Azameti, Annan & Adjei, 2014). This idea describes the stages of a document, from the time it is made or acquired by the entity, to being used, preserved, and eventually destructed. Any recordkeeping system will be created around the life cycle of its records, laying out the structures and techniques those employees and technologies must adopt at every stage of the record's life cycle. Yusof and Chell (2000) pointed out that "Concepts related to the life cycle of records do not pertain to the use of digital documents, necessitating a system that effectively captures the unique characteristics of these digital files" (Yusof & Chell, 2000). However, Atherton (1985) argues that "The life cycle theory of records created a separation between archivists and administrators, and it needs to be revised into a more cohesive four-stage model. He continued by stating that a weakness in the hypothesis was its disregard for the various methods by which the documents and archives were interconnected." Recently, McKemmish (2017) pointed out that "The life-cycle theory is criticized for being inappropriate for digital records and archives because it disconnects the organization that creates the archive from the archival institution. For example, it does not consider the intricacies of sharing digital records in common systems" (p. 131). Because of these flaws, the records continuum model was created.

1.7 Records Continuum Model

Frings-Hessami (2022) posits that "The Records Continuum Model was created in the 1990s at Monash University in Australia by Frank Upward and his associates as a means to illustrate the contexts of records creation, management, and utilization across time and space" (p. 115). The paradigm has been ranked as the leading model for handling collections all around the world. Gilliland & White (2009) talked about the integration between processes of records management and archives. Xiaomi (2001) quoted in Musembe (2016b) stated, "Since the continuum model integrates various techniques, management strategies, and a structured approach, it is best suited for studies focused on the handling of both paper and electronic records." The four steps of the records continuum model according to Atherton (1985) were: Production, categorization, planning, preservation, and informational use." As a result, records managers and archivists will be engaged in all aspects of record keeping.

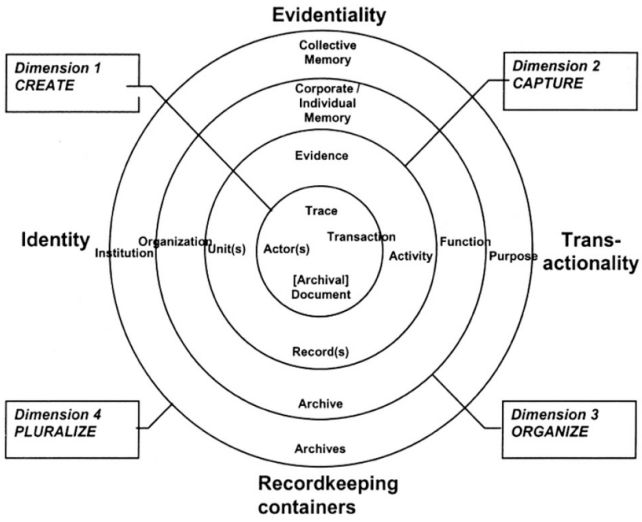

Figure 2. Records Continuum Model

Source: Upward, 2004, p. 44; Runardotter, 2007, p. 20.

Gilliland (2014) supported a definition that talked about Frank Upward's (1996) development of the records continuum and stated, "The life cycle model is divided into eight stages and two phases, the first of which is records handling and the second of which is archives." The first phase includes construction or reception; categorization, up-keeping and using, and finally disposal (destroy or transmit to archives). The identification, characterization or classification, storage, and later use as a resource are all part of the second step." Dimension 1 or *Create* focuses on the primary actors and the document itself, while Dimension 2 *Capture* focuses on the organizational ability to ensure that all vital records are stored, Dimension 3 *Organize* stresses the accurate memory of the organization, and the fourth Dimension *Pluralize* ensures that records can be carried beyond the life of the organization (Upward, 2005). Moreover, Klareld & Paasch (2023) assert that "Records management began establishing the concept of digital preserving information which would be needed to make electronic archiving practicable after creating the records continuum model."

1.8 Statement of the Problem

There have been some rumors recently about a few Lebanese universities issuing fake diplomas. As a result, the Lebanese Minister of Education & Higher Education (MEHE) promised to prosecute all those involved. "MEHE in Lebanon imposed fines on three universities and suggested that one should have its license revoked. A judicial inquiry examined claims that the institutions participated in cash-for-degrees schemes" (Trtrian, 2018; Daily Star, 2019; Stacey, 2019). This raises the issue of accountability at Lebanese universities and urges the need for a periodic governmental audit of archives and records to assess any gaps in the universities' archives, activities, and procedures. Based on the above, this study aims to shed light on the gap of mismanaging records and archives in a private university, which would put the university at risk of losing some of its vital records and eventually being accused of corruption if the evidence of its activities is not kept.

1.9 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess University X's (called UX in this study) present records management practices and provide a procedural strategy for implementing a central records and archives management system.

The specific objectives are to:

1) Determine the sorts of records created at UX and the format in which they are stored.

2) Investigate the function of information technology and electronic records in the management of records.

3) Evaluate the university's present records and archives management practices.

4) Provide recommendations necessary for developing acceptable records management for UX.

2. Contextual Setting: University X Case

University X is a private, not-for-profit university in Lebanon that was founded in 2011 by a decree issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and began academic operations in 2015. The university's vision, mission, and values are centered on empowering students of various origins and abilities to become future leaders with up-to-date knowledge and technical skills while adhering to a code of ethics. The university has about 3,000 students and about 250 staff and academics. It established five faculties: The Faculty of Business Administration (FBA), the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts (MCFA), the Faculty of Religion and Humanities (FRH) which includes the Translation and Languages department, the Faculty of Engineering (FoE), and the Faculty of Sciences (FoS). Moreover, eight administrative Directorates work closely and concurrently to support the academic process and fulfill the administrative requirements of the university. These are: The General Services Directorate, Information Technology & Systems Directorate, Public Relations and Media Directorate, Human Resources Directorate, Financial Affairs Directorate, Libraries Directorate, Procurement Directorate, and Student Affairs Directorate.

Given the above, the University generates various important records which are fundamental for its progress. Hence, to ensure its accountability and increase organizational efficiency the university should have a records and archives management system that preserves, secures, retrieves, archives, and disposes of its records when needed.

2.1 World Bank Map Group Requirements

This entity is an international collaboration constituting 189 member nations that work on major development issues. The toolkit of records and archives guidelines was designed and initiated in 2020 to help public sector organizations implement record management systems. The researchers had chosen it since the components of the guide come together to provide a bundle that will help in examining procedures, giving recommendations to attain records management objectives, and will help in the creation of a strategic plan to implement a records management document system. It is rather a developed practical procedural guideline than a manual of requirements (World Bank, 2020a, 2020b).

2.2 The Assessment Themes and Dimensions

The World Bank's (2020a) toolkit offers a structured and comprehensive methodology to guide the step-by-step implementation of a records management document system. Therefore, the researchers of this study adopted the guidelines with some modifications to suit the case in question. Table 1 presents the specific details that will guide this research.

Table 1. Discussion Categories

	Theme	Dimension
1.	**Awareness of Records Management**	1.1 Importance to Higher Management
		1.2 Senior Management Support
		1.3 Legal Requirements Awareness
		1.4 Support from Allied Agencies
2.	**Strategic Management of Records Management**	2.1 Strategic Plan of Records Management
		2.2 Formal Policies And Procedures
		2.3 Responsibility of Staff
		2.4 Monitoring Records Management Practices
3.	**Adequate Resources for Records Management**	3.1 Financial Resources
		3.2 Physical Infrastructure and Equipment
		3.3 Training and Qualifications
4.	**Information Technology As a Key Factor To Records Management**	4.1 Management of All Types of Records
		4.2 Information Technology Support To Records Management
		1.3 Information Technology To Support Security
5.	**Efficiency And Accountability of Records Management**	5.1 Need for Records
		5.2 Logic of Records
		5.3 Description And Identification of Records
		5.4 Responsibility of Records
		5.5 Staff Training
6.	**Records Privacy**	6.1 Releasing Records To Public
		6.2 Protecting Vital And Personal Information
		6.3 Protecting Sensitive or Secret Information
7.	**Records Retention And Disposal**	7.1 Records Retention

Note. Themes are extracted with modification from World Bank, 2020a, p. 7, and dimensions are extracted with modification from World Bank, 2020b.

Table 1 marks a systematic and structured division of steps that are needed to carry out the next step which is an action plan to collect data from a sample of the University staff. The aim is to explore how

participants plan, create, organize, implement, monitor, and archive the resultant reports or paperwork in their respective University X's directorates.

2.3 The Assessment Categories

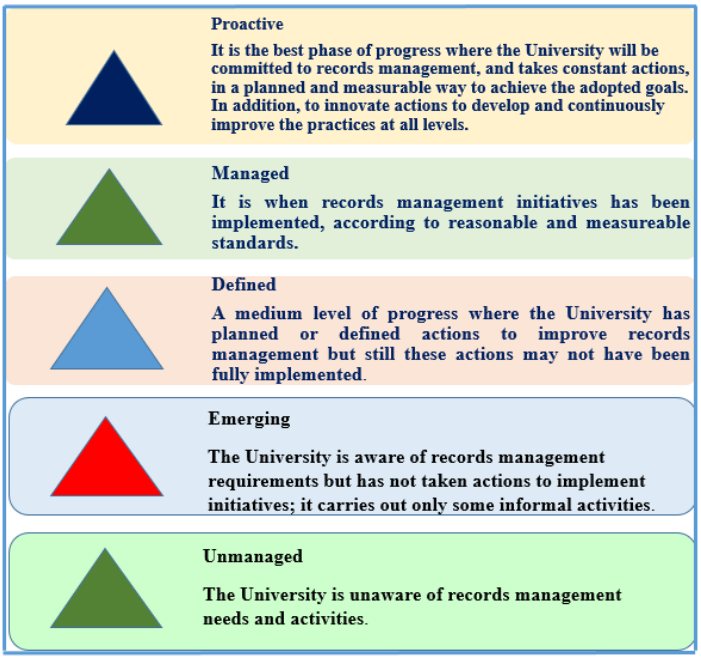

Figure 3. Assessment Categories According to WMG

Source: The researchers extracted, modified, and prepared the information from the World Bank, 2020a, part 1, page 9.

Regardless of the method chosen for the assessment, it is necessary to go through all the levels within a manageable timeframe (see Figure 3). Reevaluation of the dimensions with the corresponding milestones and locations needs to be consistent to evaluate processes and pursue ongoing enhancements. The roadmap is intended to assist in the creation of a proprietary strategic plan, which should consistently be examined and updated regularly. Evaluation of the records management program is regular, possibly every 3 years, to examine and assess the advancement and establish new priorities.

This research seeks to characterize and assess the current practices followed in the implementation of a records and archival management system in a Lebanese Private University X.

This paper is segmented into four sections. The initial section provided a thorough overview and context. Section two describes the research methodology. Section three presents the outcomes, the discoveries, and the discussion, concluding with section five, which includes a conclusion, limitations, and recommendations.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). It is exploratory, employing a pragmatic paradigm and a deductive-inductive approach.

3.1 Research Strategy

This research uses a case study. According to Hejase & Hejase (2013), "The advantage of case studies is a certain case may be investigated in detail, producing plenty of information that helps in clarifying many ambiguities involved in the research problem at hand." (p. 112). In this research, the researchers aim to find solutions for the problems of records and archives management practices in the selected university. Also, Yin (2017) talked about two dimensions of case study strategies, namely "A single case versus a series of cases and cases that are holistic versus cases that are embedded."

This study applies a single case study aiming to identify the actual case of UX records and archives management and not to compare it with other universities. The researchers used a holistic view since the analysis of data was concerned with the university as a whole, and not as sub-units.

In addition to the above, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of the university's staff. The aim was to collect primary data about the records and their management practices. Also, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions were utilized to validate the survey's outcomes. Table 2 provides a summary of the data collection tools.

3.2 Sampling and Sample Size

The total number of university staff is 204, including academic and administrative staff. They were not all involved in records management practices, so the study used purposive sampling to choose participants carefully. Part-time instructors, security guards, and hospitality services personnel were excluded from the study since they are mildly involved in the formation, usage, or control of records at UX.

Three groups were involved in the collection of primary data:

1) Quantitative research was based on a sample of 38 participants.

2) & 3) Qualitative research included two groups: A focus group with five (5) participants and a group of six participants who were subject to semi-structured interviews.

Table 2. Summary of Data Collection Tools

Data collection tool	objective	population	Sample size	Criteria of purposive sampling
Questionnaire	Determine records and classify them	204 (all staff)	38	Staff involved in records management practices
Focus group	Assess the electronic programs used	7	5	Staff involved in programming and utilization of electronic programs and software used by the university
Interviews	Assess records and archives procedures			Staff with utmost use of records and with administrative
Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions	according to World Map group guideline	11		knowledge of procedures implemented in the university (chosen from the 38 respondents)

To increase the credibility of the quantitative sample size, Hardwick's (2022) findings were used to calculate the approximation reliability error values. Therefore, calculations were based on the population size of 204 and the sample size of 38. The calculations utilized the methods of El Takach et al. (2022), Masoudi and Hejase (2023), Hejase et al. (2023), Chehimi & Hejase (2024), Rammal et al. (2024), Hejase, El Dirani, Haidar, et al. (2024), and Rkein et al. (2024), to determine the reliability error values of the approximations. Table 3 demonstrates that with a population of roughly 200, a standard error of 5%, and a reliability of 12.5% ± 0.2%, the required sample size is around 40. Thus, at a 95% confidence level, the study's sample size of 38 participants results in an error margin of ± 12.5%. This implies that in 87.5 out of every 100 instances the survey is carried out, the results will vary by at most 12.5%. This level of reliability would be suitable for this type of exploratory research.

Table 3. Statistical Reliability versus Sample Size

[50/50% proportion characteristics]					
			Population		
Sample Size	**100**	**500**	**1000**	**5000**	**10000**
30	**±14.7%**	**±17.1%**	±17.3%	±17.6%	±17.7%
50	**±9.7%**	**±13.1%**	±13.5%	±13.8%	±13.9%
75	±5.6%	±10.4%	±10.9%	±11.3%	±11.4%
100		±8.8%	±9.3%	±9.7%	±9.8%

Note. At a 95% confidence level (standard error is 5%).
Source: Modified from Hardwick Research, 2022.

3.3 Survey Creation

The questionnaire is structured in three parts. The first section includes four demographic questions in dyadic and multiple-choice formats. The second section includes an open question where participants enumerate records and describe their category, i.e., paper or electronic. The third section contains two open questions where participants provide a list of electronic programs they use, and tell the type of records they manage. These questions were developed to evaluate participants' views, knowledge, and awareness about records, their type, and their use.

3.4 Focus Group

A Focus Group was used to analyze the Electronic Records Systems used in university UX. The survey used in the previous part included a question about the electronic programs that the staff uses during their work. Another aim is to assess the Information Technology & Systems team's input on the sufficiency and efficiency of the current electronic programs.

The focus group consisted of the Information Technology & Systems manager, two programmers, and two Information Technology (IT) support persons. The researchers capitalized on the information collected earlier from the survey. This helped the researchers to moderate the conversation. The researchers chose the IT team since they are a key reference for the university programs and what electronic records systems are used by the staff. Their wide experience will help the researchers validate the possibility of integration of a unified records and archives management system.

The focus group session lasted for approximately 1.5 hours on UX premises. The focus group session consisted of brainstorming subjects concerning electronic records systems, their use at the university, and the possible barriers to their implementation. According to Chehimi (2012), "Participants freely express their ideas and constructive criticism with absolutely no intervention from the researchers" (p. 787). The researchers summarized the main ideas that were supported by the majority of the participants.

Five participants (chosen from the 38 respondents) were free to discuss and deliberate about their use of records. They were also free to discuss their administrative knowledge of procedures implemented in the university.

3.5 In-depth Interviews

According to World Map Group guidelines, eleven participants were invited to assess records and archives procedures. They were selected based on their high involvement with records and administrative knowledge of methods implemented in the university. Appendix B presents a set of questions categorized and based on the World Map group guideline. Interviews were set in the university conference room away from their official locations to provide them with a calm environment. Interviews took about one hour and twenty minutes each. Participants were informed about the objectives of the exercise and they were told that they were free to stop with no further inquiry.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants were provided with adequate information regarding the study topic. The researchers informed them that participation in the study is optional, their identities will be kept private, and they have the right to withdraw at any time without any inquiry. Moreover, the participants were assured that their data and identities would remain confidential and anonymous and that the results would only be used for educational objectives. To avoid any ethical breaches, participants were made aware of these guidelines in the initial survey directions.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Demographics

The majority of the participants are males (80%) and 20% are females. The average age of the male participants is 41.5 years and that of females is 34.5 years. 53.3% hold a doctorate and 46.7% hold a Master's degree. 33.3% are academic deans and the rest hold administrative jobs. All the participants have been in the University for 8 to 10 years.

4.2 Electronic versus Paper Records

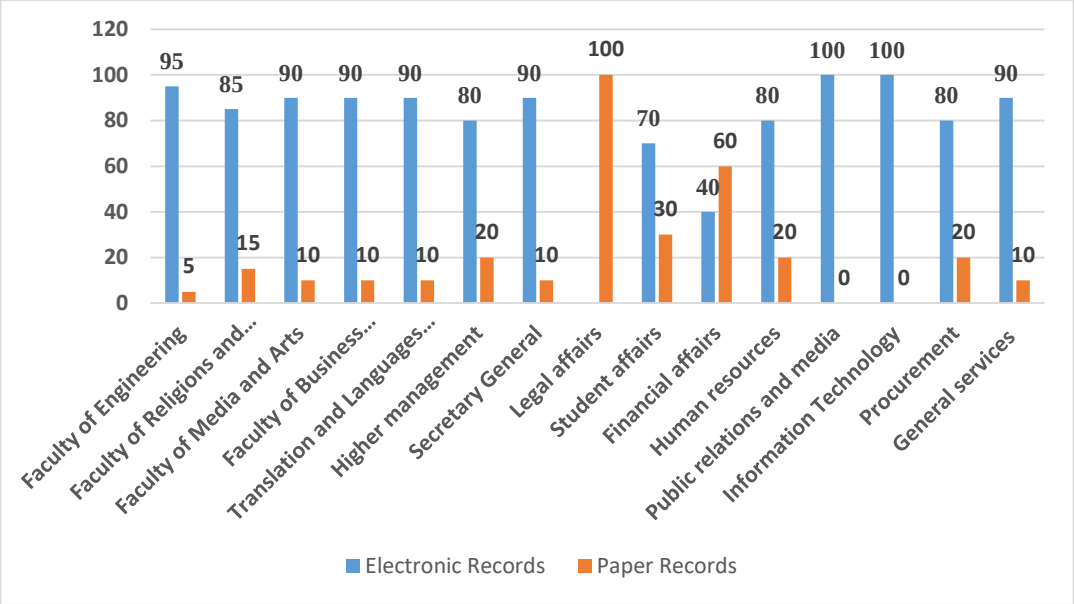

Figure 4. Electronic versus Paper Records by Directories or Departments

Figure 4 demonstrates the classification results of the generated record per entity, i.e., faculty, directorate, or department. The results illustrate the percentage distribution of electronic versus paper records. Results show that most of the academic faculties and administrative departments have made great use of electronic records exceeding 80%. It is noteworthy that the Student Affairs Directorate is the only department that recorded 70% usage of electronic records, with a remarkable weakness in the legal affairs department where all the records are preserved and archived with papers.

4.3 Distribution of Electronic Versus Paper Records

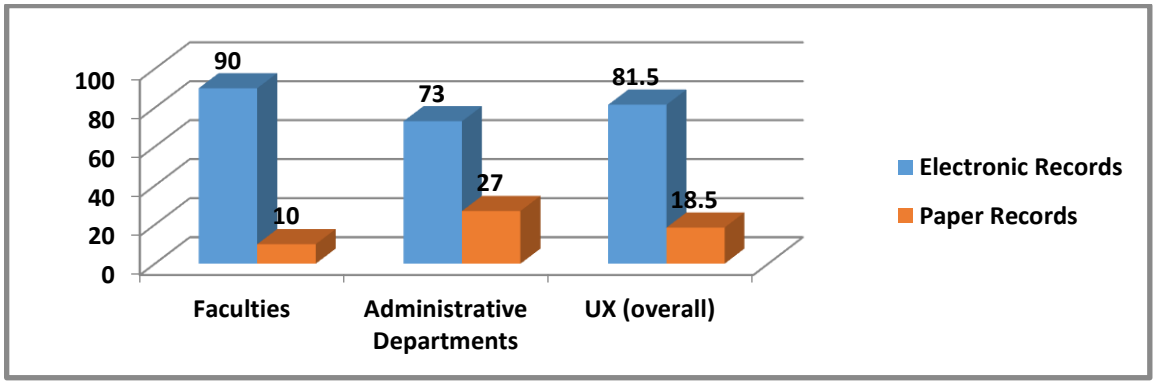

Figure 5. Electronic Versus Paper Records Percentage in the University

Figure 5 provides a clear view of the distribution of electronic records per main entities, i.e., academic versus administrative as well as the university as a whole. Results showed that 90% of the generated academic faculties' records are electronic while the administrative directorates and departments score 73% of records are electronic.

However, the overall average usage of electronic records at the university is 81.5%. This result is significant and helpful to the process of establishing an automated system to manage records and archives.

4.4 Distribution and Classification of University Key Functions Records

Based on the questionnaire's open questions and supported by the focus group and in-depth interviews, participants were cautious not to miss any details related to the types of records maintained by UX. Table 3 presents both key functions and university practices commensurate with each key function. Results are congruent with Samuel's (1992) and Ngulube's (2004) research outcomes.

The most prevalent records series kept in the offices were those supporting the university's functionality. These are followed by records that provide evidence of the university's fundamental activity of transmitting knowledge, which falls into the category of conferring credentials. With regards to "confer credentials," UX has also a recorded admission policy, kept track of applications received through a digitized system, keeps records of enrolled students, student personal data, registration records, student aid rules, available scholarships and awards, and photographs and videos of graduation ceremonies. However, Table 3 also shows some of the vital records that are not established. UX was not performing so well in the area of conducting research, which is also a critical area. Faculties kept more administrative records that fall under the "sustain the institution" category. However, faculties need to put more effort into creating records that are considered critical for them to work more on conveying knowledge and conducting research.

The abovementioned indicates some of the problems in the region of the creation and preservation of some records at the university.

Table 4. Documented Key Functions of UX Compared

Key Function		Assessment of university practices
1	**Sustainability of the Institution**	1. Keeping evidence of unit establishments, 2. Maintaining an overall mission statement of the university, 3. Governing board minutes and reports, 4. Maintaining unit committee minutes and reports, 5. Organizational charts, 6. Proposal and submissions, 7. Expenditure records, 8. Personnel policy, 9. Current employment regulations, 10. Staff recruitment, 11. Staff development and training, 12. Architectural drawings of buildings. Note: There is no evidence that the university kept a facilities plan, evaluation of strategic yearly plans, key performance indicators, or audit reports.
2	**Conveying Knowledge**	1. A digitalized University Management System, which records the courses run by units,

		2. Curriculum of the courses, 3. Lists of teaching staff, 4. Attendance lists, 5. Student continuous assessment marks. Note: There is no evidence that the university kept staff evaluation records, student files auditing reports, indexed policies, and procedures for each department, or unified forms.
3	**Conferring Credentials**	There is no evidence of student evaluations of lecturers, peer evaluations by other lecturers, samples of assignments, examination questions, or course modules for each department.
4	**Conducting Research**	Only the office of the translation and languages department indicated that they maintained records of accepted research proposals and dissertations.

4.5 Most Commonly Used Records at the University

Table 4 gives a clear identification of what are the vital paper records that are used frequently in the offices. This will enhance the plan of implementing an electronic document management system.

Table 5. Most Used Records in the University

Most records used by offices	Frequency/ monthly
Transcript or record request form	More than 80
Minutes of meetings	More than 50
Tasks to do/ Agenda	More than 50
Justification for being late form	More than 50
Request to use a mechanism (car or motorcycle)	More than 20
Programming request (new service, modification, error correction)	More than 20
IT Help Desk Maintenance Equipment or Technical Assistance	More than 20
Debt request	More than 15
Request a refund	More than 15
Application to enter the university campus on holidays, feasts, and closures	More than 15

4.6 Electronic Programs Used by UX

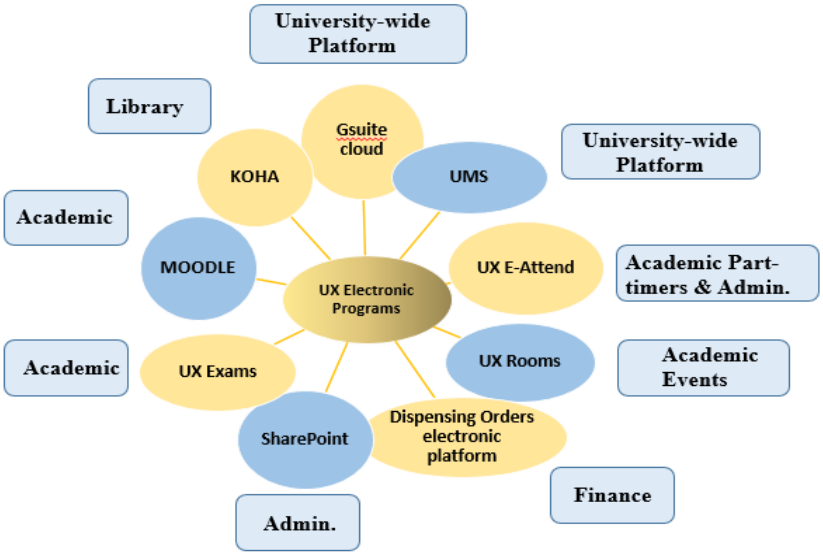

Figure 6. Electronic Programs used at the University

Analysis of focus group responses about the electronic programs used (see Figure 6) showed the following:

- Even the managed electronic records programs at UX need a further view for enhancement and thus create beneficial and evidential records.
- External electronic programs that are bought or created by the university are not linked to an internal unified platform of records management system.
- Electronic forms are created to make decisions most of the time with no further data analysis tools or reports.
- Some electronic platforms are not used because they are not user-friendly according to some employees (such as SharePoint).
- The main interest is in preservation, but preservation with no unified standards between the programs would lead to difficulty in retrieval. Not taking into consideration the organized practices of records and archives management is leading to different electronic programs with different features and gaps and with the absence of efficient reports about the data created.

4.7 Assessment of Results Based on WBG

Eleven interviewees' responses to questions categorized under the WBG management records (Appendix B) led to the creation of Table 5. This table illustrates that UX is managed by a committed leadership which is manifested with a 40% in being proactive. This assessment shows that the university is committed to record management and intends to continuously improve capitalizing on innovation. In addition, results show that UX has defined its role towards records management but it continues to improve to achieve full implementation (25.7%). In third place, the assessment shows that Managed scored 25.7% as well, and Emerging (8.6%), which assures that the university has little progress but the implementation is not completed. Finally, the last score of 0%, being the lowest, indicates that the university (on average) is not fully aware of records management and the needed actions required. An overall look at the assessment indicates that the university needs to give more

priority to the implementation of a fully active records management system. Therefore, a Strength/Weakness (SW) analysis is needed to define or detect possible gaps (weaknesses) in the plan to institute a fully implemented records management system (see Table 6).

Table 6. Calculation of UX's Roadmap Stages Status

Stage	(A) No. of interviewees opting for the specific stage	(B) Scale	A x B	Weighted Ave., %
Unmanaged	4	0	0	0
Emerging	6	1	6	8.6
Defined	9	2	18	25.7
Managed	6	3	18	25.7
Proactive	7	4	28	40.0
			70	

Note. The interviewees used a voting system scale from 0 to 4 to characterize the current status of records management roadmap stages, where Proactive is given a score of 4, Managed a score of 3, Defined a score of 2, Emerging a score of 1, and Unmanaged a score of 0. Followed by calculating a weighted average of the whole roadmap.

4.8 Strengths, Weaknesses, and Areas of Improvement of the University Record Practices

Table 7. Strengths, Weaknesses, & Areas of Improvement

Strengths	Areas For Improvement/Moderate Progress	Weaknesses
- Senior Managers Support - Awareness of some legal requirements - Financial resources - Information technology support for records management - Awareness of staff training: a plan should be modified - Protecting sensitive or proprietary (confidential) information	Putting a strategic plan for records management, - Defining some related records management responsibilities for specific staff, - Providing missing infrastructure and physical needs, - Considering staff training in records management, - Defining a need to protect vital and personal information, - Willing to plan disposal schedules.	- Formal policies and procedures - Monitoring records management practices - Logic and classification of records - Responsibility for records management - No retention and disposal schedules - Lack of archives management

Table 6 provides a realistic view informing that six actions must be implemented along a specific time schedule and the need to set key performance indicators to increase the ability to measure the progress and therefore fulfill the full implementation of an actionable records management system.

4.9 Discussion of Findings

4.9.1 Establishing a Records and Management Policy

UX is in the process of establishing a records and archives management policy and thus there are no procedural manuals and guides to support records practices currently. This contradicts what was mentioned in the literature about the importance of records-keeping policies and practices to universities. Ngeope (2014) pointed out that "those procedures allow organizations to act effectively by enabling them to perform their functions in an ordered and effective flow of data." Moreover, according to Maican and Lixandroiu (2016), "Universities rely on excellent document management and preservation, therefore they need to use classes, publications, investigations, manuscripts, administrative files, videos, and other documents." In addition, Roper & Millar (1999), "Stress that in any situation, a records management program should include appropriate standards, manuals, and guidelines to supplement training and instruction for action officers."

4.9.2 Training University Staff

UX's leadership has shown some proactivity and is aware of the importance of training all stakeholders in records management. However, operationally no action was taken. Only one of the administrative assistants had formal training while others stated they depended on their experience to manage their records. Mnjama (2004) investigated some of the challenges that institutions have in managing records and information and concluded that "many of these issues are caused by a lack of policies and processes, poor infrastructure, and a lack of well-trained and qualified employees." Moreover, Afolabi (1992) opined that "Employees should be in charge of records management and archives." UX's leadership must be in charge of delivering adequate recordkeeping training to University workers." Worth mentioning that all interviewees of UX assured that there is no records manager or even records management staff.

Finally, Picmoto (2022) warns that "Based on lessons learned, failure is due to lack of resources and insufficient attention given to training" (para 3-4).

4.9.3 Having a Documented Filing System

As for having a documented filing system, the University is stuck in the planning phase and, therefore, lacks such a system. According to Griffin and Roper (1999), "records must be managed. The inability to do so will lead to the records management system collapsing."

4.9.4 Having a Written Disaster Plan

UX did not have a written disaster plan although they defined some issues of risk management. The contingency plan should involve the security of records and include recovery methodologies, as well as retrieving material that is readily available.

Millar & Simmermon (1999) assert that "An emergency plan aims to protect employees and assets by ensuring that, in the case of an emergency, prompt action is done to minimize damage and begin recovery operations." Younis, Hejase, Dalal, et al. (2022) posit that "The Leaders' success in efficiently managing a crisis depends on how appropriately the contingency plan was prepared and organized" (p. 64). Thus, "the leaders and the crisis personnel can acquire the needed competencies, knowledge, and best practices to increase an institution's performance" (Drennan & McConnell, 2007).

4.9.5 Records Access

There was a problem accessing records in UX. Respondents indicated that they have to wait some time when requiring a record from another party even when their authority to access records is approved. This leads to time wastage of staff, and even duplication because some may prefer to keep their own electronic or paper copies to save time.

Robek, Brown, & Stephens (1996) stated many reasons to manage records. Those are:

- "To manage the production and development of records,
- lower operational costs; - boost operational efficiency;
- absorb new record-keeping technologies
- Assure compliance with regulatory requirements and reduce the risk of a lawsuit
- keep crucial information safe,
- aid improved managerial decision-making;
- safeguard corporate image;
- In addition, foster professionalism in running the business" (Robek, Brown & Stephens, 1996).

4.9.6 Electronic Records

Although UX generates and receives electronic records, there is no centralized system in place to handle them. It was noted that UX is planning to digitize its records and thus to manage the university's documents and archives, a centralized document control system should be explored. According to Roth (2006), "The only way to manage documents in existence and those being created daily is to use an electronic records management system." This ensures the preservation of selected ones as archives.

4.9.7 Disposal and Retention

UX has no retention and disposal schedules and thus an inventory should be established for each department. Young (2005), "Assured that archives play an important role in boosting strategic planning as the members can look back through history to know what attempts were successful and what were not."

In both theories, the life cycle theory and the continuum model theory, the archives are presented. The life cycle theory calls for a central, organized, classified, and not accumulated space for archives where they will be deposited according to an identified timeline, and in the continuum model, effective records will be deferred electronically to a digital repository where some could be directed towards sharing knowledge with the society. Supporting the above, Matlala & Maphoto (2020) assert that "The life-cycle theory posits that records management arises from objective business actions and adheres to a determined timeline" (p. 80), whereas the records continuum model interprets it as "an ever-interacting and developing collection of contingent activities encompassing individual, institutional, and societal dimensions" (Gilliland & McKemmish, 2018, p. 100).

4.9.8 Emergent New Themes

Throughout the analysis process, new themes emerged: "challenges" and "intentions to use the system." The focus group members and the interviewees concluded that the most challenging the staff mentioned were time, space, lack of guidance, and problems with programmed electronic systems. This fits what was mentioned in the literature which states that some challenges in higher institutions were related to the absence of plans, core competencies, security or confidentiality controls, and migration strategies of electronic records (Wamukoya & Mutula, 2005).

4.9.9 Staff's Positive Intentions

Employees have positive intentions to use the system. All interviewees talked about the importance of electronic programs in creating and capturing their records. Senior managers ensure that UX employees have the necessary technical computer skills and know the benefits of a records management system.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study concluded that although UX is aware of the importance of records management and that it has been in its plans for the last two years, not much attention has been given to the subject. One manager said:

> "There is a gap with our records management practices, we're at the risk of losing the access or the retrieval of some records when a personnel leaves, but in the meantime, many more priorities are taking place. Nevertheless, we don't have a referral party to guide us."

He summed it all up. Although the university has been efficiently working with digitized systems, many challenges are still there to implement best practices of the records management system. Those challenges include time, lack of professionals, limited awareness of the subject from higher management, and resistance that may be faced due to changes in records processes in the whole university.

Records management is a broad field that should be incorporated into the university's overall strategic planning objectives and managed by knowledgeable employees. To maintain the enduring value of its knowledge and experiences, UX is strongly advised to consider the project strategy indicated by this study.

5.2 Recommendations

A. Several recommendations are suggested from the Lebanese context perspective:

1- Organizing university records, that have an impact on the quality, accountability, and efficiency of higher education in Lebanon, is the responsibility of the institutions themselves but should be guided and followed up by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education as a part of standardization and calibration. Therefore universities are to agree about records management requirements and should adhere to the highest standards of quality and laws.

2- Based on the study outcomes, it is recommended that universities perform periodical assessments and audits to standardize their practices of records management and to ensure that they are properly applied.

B. Recommendations according to the questionnaire results:

1. An electronic records management system is a must and should be implemented.

Having a records management system will help

1. Streamline administrative work, especially those that require the opinions of more than one party to reach decision-making.
2. Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that help senior management to make the appropriate decision more quickly.
3. Support senior management with the ability to manage and control internal processes based on accurate data (financial and administrative).

4. Raising the level of transparency in all administrative processes so that each service requester will be constantly informed of the progress of the required process.
5. Comply with the principle of minimizing paper consumption.

C. Recommendations according to the focus group with IT team members:

The main question that was discussed with the IT team was: "How do information technology and electronic programs enhance records management in the university?"

The tool resulted in obtaining rich qualitative data that were collected and the interaction between the team members and discussion about the use of each program allowed the researchers to observe challenges in the current electronic programs used by the university.

Special recommendations according to the results of the focus group discussion:

1. Having a central system would avoid the waste of time by the IT staff waiting for other university staff to send some old needed records or to approve an order by mail or electronically (i.e., using Outlook).
2. A records management unit at the university should analyze the current electronic management systems of records and decide how could these be upgraded and centralized. This will promote records preservation, and retrieval, and enhance decision-making.
3. The implemented system should be user-friendly, capture records efficiently, process and produce uploaded reports with backup facilities, ensure security, and facilitate information retrieval.

D. Recommendations According to the World Maps Group (WMG) assessment as depicted in Table 1 where theme recommendations were suggested.

I. Awareness of Records Management

1. A broad and diversified team should be formed by UX. Legal advisors, decision-makers, policy-makers, and staff members in charge of developing or implementing programs connected to tasks across the institution should all work together to raise awareness of the value of records.
2. Meetings with important decision-makers, such as directors and deans, regularly can serve to enhance awareness of the necessity of records management. This group will act as influencers in the university.
3. UX is recommended to identify the laws, and regulations, and review all records that are used in those legislations.
4. UX may contact certain agencies to identify examples of best practice approaches to archives, access and privacy, and information security.

II. Strategic Management of Records Management, UX should:

1. Set a project framework and timeframe to design the strategy plan for the records and archives system.
2. Examine international and national standards to learn about effective records management methods.
3. Document core records management tasks, and update the current job descriptions.
4. UX needs to put a measurable, applicable audit program to assess its practices and foster improvement.

III. Adequate Resources for Records Management, UX should:

1. Reallocate funds for records management to support transparency and raise awareness of records management operations.

2. Identify a list of actions to improve physical infrastructures, equipment, and technology.
3. Communicating with professional associations will help UX identify the qualifications and duties of the position.
4. Maintain professional memberships in professional organizations so that professional personnel can form a support network with their peers.

IV. Information Technology as a Key Factor for Records Management

1. UX should make an inventory of the various types of media of records that exist across the university.
2. UX should identify top executives from across the organization who should be involved in choices on how to manage all types of records.
3. A records manager should collaborate with the IT team to facilitate the links between information technology selection and use and the protection of records and evidence.

V. Efficiency and Accountability of Records Management

1. Inventory may comprise information about activities, categories of records, time durations, locations, privacy or security needs, and so on, in addition to data concerning classification and scheduling.
2. Speaking with staff across the university to determine current processes in creating and keeping records and distinct duties that will aid in determining which unit and which individuals should serve as the Office of Primary Responsibility and Official Record Holders.
3. Begin generating training and guidance for priority records concerns, and external training resources can be tailored to meet needs.

VI. Records Privacy

1. Create a project plan for implementing a systematic proactive disclosure program.
2. Convert personal data to a digital format with stringent security criteria to secure files and maintain privacy protections.
3. Regularly update all processes, particularly when functions, technology, or procedures change.

VII. Records Retention and Disposal

1. Confirm the location of all records using the finished records inventory (and classification techniques, if applicable).
2. Implement a frequent monitoring routine to evaluate storability over time.
3. Include officials in charge of managing basic infrastructure such as facilities, offices, and storage areas, as well as any decision maker's disaster response responsibilities.
4. Create timetables for all records across the company.
5. Create disposal authority instruments to facilitate consistent record disposal, as well as a project plan to strategically execute retention schedules and disposal authorities.
6. Create guidance and training materials to assist employees in performing their jobs effectively.
7. Develop formal plans for establishing its archive program, as well as policies, procedures, and processes to ensure that this job is completed.

E. General Recommendations according to the research questions of the study

Appendix A, Table A1 presents a summary of the four research questions process and recommendations. This section presents the resultant final recommendations.

- There is a need for a records management procedure policy.
- Top management should perceive records and archives management as a strategic priority.

- Research on developing software that serves the university should be issued as soon as possible.
- A records manager should be appointed. Later on, UX should consider having a records management team.
- Work on the digitalized records management system should be fast and effective and should consider the records that are mostly used by all departments.
- Training plans on record management for all staff who will work with the system should be undertaken.
- Disaster plan policy should include a section related to records management. Develop contingency information security plans.
- Archives should be directly engaged with the records management process through both electronic and paper record keeping.
- Enhance oral communications, training, and motivation to all staff that will be affected in the transition to the new system. Listen to them, support them, and guide them.

5.3 Limitations

This research uses a mixed approach quantitative-qualitative, and its findings can't be generalized, yet they hold qualitative significance. Certain challenges are identified as follows:

Bias of Interviewees: Some participants may choose not to assess research statements accurately and may avoid being truthful. This fact becomes clear when participants either do not respond or take a neutral stance.

The difficulty in acquiring a larger pool of IT & Systems staff: Drawing more participants to this study was found to be challenging. Researchers relied on the voluntary recommendations of others from the university staff.

Demanding task: Carrying out interviews in the specialized areas proved difficult, limiting access to more professionals and practitioners.

Lack of comprehension of the specifics concerning the subject matter examined: Some participants did not provide in-depth to the particular research question.

5.4 Suggested Future Research

This study started with a rich literature review of the concepts related to records and archives management, and it ended with a plan that was established from the rules concluded from the past theories (records life cycle and continuum model theories) according to UX's needs and requirements. The researchers highly recommend that further practical research be done on each department in UX to investigate their records and put a path for each.

Further studies may be done to assess the status of the records management system among a set of Lebanese universities or to study the effect of a good records management system on the accountability of the university.

It may be also good to study the effect of implementing a centralized records management system on efficiency since we mentioned before that it saves time and costs.

In addition to that, after implementing the new system in a university, change management research could be done to study how the employees reacted to it and how they were affected by it.

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5.6 Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the manuscript.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Summary Table of the Research Questions' Process and Recommendations

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Methods	Sample	Data Collection Tools	Analysis	Findings	Recommendations
RQ1: What are the types of records used by University X and what Key functions do those records serve?	Determine the sorts of records created at UX and the format in which they are stored.	qualitative and quantitative questions	Fifteen questionnaires filled by thirty-eight staff members involved in records	Questionnaires were sent to each department	Data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using Excel Sheet	- A high percentage (81.5%) of UX's records is electronic while only 18.5% are of paper type. - Similar departments as faculties have different types of records. - Most of these records are directed toward institutional management and less towards conveying knowledge or conducting know ledge.	Converting records to a new process through a centralized records management system that follows both the record life cycle model and the continuum model to organize UX's records.
RQ2: What are the types of electronic programs used by the university's staff and what is the role of information	Investigate the function of information technology and electronic records in the management of records.	Qualitative	IT Team	Focus Group	Descriptive Narratives	- UX does not have an efficient digital preservation and archiving strategy. - It has a complicated plan for protecting	It should be analyzed by the records management expert and the IT team to suggest a central software that acts as the main records management system at UX. - Upgrades should be

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Methods	Sample	Data Collection Tools	Analysis	Findings	Recommendations
technology in enhancing records management practices?						UX's records using home and shared network storage. - Separate elements of the records management system.	done to the current programs to continue the path of some records and to create efficient reports and summaries.
RQ3: What is the present situation of the university's records and archives policies and procedures?	Evaluate the university's present records and archives management practices.	Qualitative	Eleven key experts have been chosen purposively	Face to Face semi-structured Interviews & observation	Content analysis	Practices in records management fell below requirements. No awareness of the records' life cycle and continuum model stages to manage records after the creation and preservation phase. Minimal practices of archives management at the university.	- A functional analysis of the university's core tasks and operations was required. - An inventory of all records used in the university was suggested to be done to schedule the preservation and disposition of all records and to manage their transition to a central digital or infrastructure repository
RQ4: What procedures should be followed to	Provide recommendations necessary for	Qualitative		Reviewing past literature and	Descriptive narratives		- The researchers suggested specific recommendations according to the

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Methods	Sample	Data Collection Tools	Analysis	Findings	Recommendations
Implement central records and archives management at the university?	developing acceptable records management for UX.			international guidelines			themes discussed through the last phase were suggested - Researchers concluded with some general guidelines that UX should consider during the implementation

Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Questions:

Does UX recognize the value of managing records effectively?

1.1 Is UX aware of the value of records management for organizational success?

1.2 Do senior managers actively support records management?

1.3 Does UX link records management with legal, regulatory, and policy requirements?

1.4 Does UX work with allied agencies to support a coordinated approach to records management?

Is the UX records management program managed strategically?

2.1 Does UX have a strategic plan for records management?

2.2 Does UX follow formal records management policies and procedures?

2.3 UX conforms records management responsibilities to all staff.

2.4 Does UX monitor and audit records management programs and services?

Does UX commit sufficient resources to support records management?

3.1 Does UX commit adequate financial resources for records management?

3.2 Does UX provide a secure physical infrastructure and acquire appropriate equipment and technology for records?

3.3 Does UX engage qualified professionals to perform records management duties?

UX recognizes the link between records and information technology

4.1 Does UX manage all records and evidence effectively, regardless of form or medium?

4.2 Does UX select information technologies strategically to support records management?

4.3 Does UX collaborate with information technology providers to protect records and evidence?

UX manages records effectively and accountably.

5.1 UX makes records when they are needed.

5.2 How can you tell that UX identifies and organizes records logically?

5.3 Do you think that UX describes records and evidence consistently?

5.4 UX assigns responsibility for records.

5.5 How does UX support staff to manage records and evidence effectively?

UX provides appropriate access to records.

6.1 Does UX proactively release records to the public?

6.2 How UX does protect private and personal information?

6.3 How does UX protect sensitive or secret information?

UX stores record appropriately and dispose of them regularly

7.1 Do you think that UX stores records and evidence appropriately, regardless of form or medium?

7.2 Is UX capable of protecting records and evidence in an emergency?

7.3 Do you think that UX retains records for as long as needed and disposes of records appropriately?

7.4 How does UX destroy records?

7.5 Does UX preserve records and evidence with archival value, so they are available for public use?