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International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

TEAM Canada

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and Tools for E-mail Management and
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Case Study Report

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Case Study Report

A. Overview

In November 2008, Facilities Development at Simon Fraser University (SFU) was abandoned as part of the tri-university study of e-mail management and preservation studies for the InterPARES 3 Project (IP3). The other test-beds originally participating in this study were the Office of the University Secretary (USEC) at the University of Victoria (UVic) and the School of Music at the University of British Columbia (UBC).¹ The tri-university case study was designed to examine three different contexts common to all universities. UVic would examine e-mail management in a governance unit, UBC in an academic unit, and SFU in an administrative support unit.

The main objectives of the Facilities Development case study were to create resources that support and facilitate the:

- effective management of e-mail records by their creators for on-going administrative, legal, fiscal, and audit purposes;
- appraisal, identification and selection of e-mail records of enduring value;
- long-term preservation of authentic and reliable e-mail records selected for permanent preservation; and
- provision of access to e-mail records selected for permanent retention.

This report outlines Facilities Development's involvement with IP3 and offers reasons this case study failed as a test-bed.

B. Statement of Methodology

The Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) worked closely with SFU's Archives and Records Management Department to complete the study of e-mail in this unit. As required by the procedures of IP3, information regarding Facilities Development, its records and its operations were compiled through interviews with SFU's archivists and the Assistant Director of Major Projects at Facilities Development. In December 2007, a contextual analysis of the Facilities

¹ Information regarding the Office of the University Secretary (USEC) at the University of Victoria (UVic), is available at http://www.interpares.org/ip3/display_file.cfm?doc=ip3_canada_cs10-3_final_report.pdf. Information regarding the University of British Columbia Archives: (UBC) Policies, Procedures and Tools for E-mail Management and Preservation in an Academic Unit, is available at http://www.interpares.org/ip3/display_file.cfm?doc=ip3_canada_cs10-1_final_report.pdf. The UBC School of Music test-bed has also been abandoned and, at the time of this report, no replacement has yet been identified.

Development test-bed was completed, but further data collection was postponed several times following the initial drafting of this document.

In March 2008, SFU archivists alerted IP3 researchers that Facilities Development had purchased DocuShare, an electronic document management system (EDMS) developed by Xerox. This software is a user-friendly directory application that allows records (including e-mails) to be dragged and dropped into folders. While this purchase indicated a commitment to records management in the unit—which was an ongoing concern—it also raised a number of questions around Facilities Development’s continuing viability as a partner in the IP3 tri-university e-mail case study. Since none of the other universities were implementing an EDMS during the IP3 study, would Facilities Development truly act as a comparable records context to these other e-mail studies? Would this EDMS negate the work of IP3 since it ostensibly would help resolve at least some of the filing and active maintenance issues with which Facilities Development had been contending in its decentralized, uncontrolled recordkeeping environment?

Of course, no technological solution can act as “silver bullet” for e-mail management and preservation. The technology offered by DocuShare and other applications are merely tools that still require staff buy-in and the consistent application of standardized procedures and guidelines for them to work. Successful implementation requires a fundamental shift in the idiosyncratic records creation, use, management and preservation practices observed in Facilities Development by the IP3 GRAs. If the successful implementation of an EDMS were to occur, a closer examination of all record-making and recordkeeping requirements would be needed. Facilities Development would still require expert advice to select the electronic records management system that best suited its needs, while also fulfilling archival requirements. As such, even though the Archives and Records Management Department had not been consulted on the purchase and upcoming implementation of DocuShare, they felt that their work with IP3 still had a great deal to offer to Facilities Development and so decided to continue working with this test-bed.

By the end of March 2008, twenty licenses for DocuShare had been purchased. In conversation with the SFU archivists, management in Facilities Services recognized that DocuShare was a document management and not a records management tool and agreed that it was only an interim solution to the long-term and reliable management of the Department’s digital records. However, DocuShare was seen as an improvement on the shared directory

strategy that the Archives and Records Management Department initially offered as an inexpensive e-mail management solution. In addition to the price factor, DocuShare was being promoted and supported by SFU's Document Solutions, the University's reprographics department, which had made it particularly attractive despite its admitted shortcomings.

At TEAM Canada's May 2008 plenary workshop, the GRAs presented the Facilities Development's contextual analysis and described the developments within the test-bed. The TEAM Canada researchers recommended the following action items be completed for the November 2008 plenary:

- update the contextual analysis to reflect the changes to the test-bed recordkeeping environment that have occurred since the original contextual analysis was drafted; and
- begin data collection in the new environment beginning in early fall.

The contextual analysis was revised, but data collection did not begin as planned because the implementation of DocuShare was delayed and the research questions needed to be based on the new records environment. One of the reasons for the setback was that the file plan uploaded into DocuShare was a new one designed for Facilities Services by the Archives and Records Management Department in 2006-2007. There have been ongoing delays in implementing DocuShare across the Department, in part because the conversion from the old file plan to the new one is labour intensive and time consuming. They have limited resources to commit to the project so it is creeping ahead at a slow pace. As it has been introduced to staff, revisions in the classification plan have been requested, further slowing down the process.

By November 2008, the DocuShare implementation continued to be delayed; therefore, data collection by IP3 researchers continued to be postponed. As roll-out timelines continued to be pushed back, the SFU archivists felt that this case study was becoming increasingly out of sync with IP3 research timelines. A complex interplay between the implementation of a new file plan, the rollout of DocuShare, internal staff resistance, uneven executive support, and limited resources took place, resulting in significant and ongoing delays. Eventually, the SFU archivists made the difficult decision to abandon Facilities Development as a test-bed and began searching for another suitable unit at SFU.

In March 2009, the Human Rights Office was identified as the new test-bed and the contextual analysis and research questions for this unit were underway by June 2009. To date, DocuShare is still not fully implemented in Facilities Development.

At the TEAM Canada plenary workshop in November 2008, the researchers tasked SFU archivists and their GRAs with drafting a final report outlining what had transpired in the Facilities Development study. The primary goals of this report are to address why the test-bed chose to purchase and install the DocuShare document management application shortly after agreeing to be a test-bed for this case study and to discuss how the IP3 researchers intended to assist the test-bed with the implementation of this application. Though DocuShare is sub-optimal for records management purposes, such systems are being adopted by many organizations; to this end, this report also discusses how systems like this can be dealt with to better approach archival and records management standards. Finally, the report addresses why the decision was made to not proceed with the case study using SFU's Facilities Development as the test-bed.

C. Description of Context

Provenancial

Facilities Development at Simon Fraser University was established in 1963 and is one of three business units that comprise Facilities Services, a larger umbrella department. Facilities Development is overseen by the Chief Facilities Officer/University Architect, who reports to the Vice President of Finance and Administration.

This test-bed is composed of a number of employees including a Director, an Assistant Director of Major Projects, several Development Managers, a Development Planner, various Project Managers and a Building Technologist. In addition to these permanent employees, Facilities Development also hires temporary, contract professionals who specialize in areas related to new projects that are undertaken. Employee qualifications and specializations range from landscape architecture and building architecture to interior design, mechanical engineering and structural engineering. The contract employees hold a wide range of certifications and specializations in various areas of construction.

Facilities Development provides the management and planning expertise for major new buildings on the three SFU campuses as well as planning support for future campus development. This mandate includes maintaining building records, setting design and technical

standards, and providing direction for university facilities in meeting the sustainability goals of the University.

Juridical-administrative

Given its functions, there are a number of laws, bylaws and standards that affect construction and renovation to which Facilities Development must adhere. These include the BC Building Code and National Building Code, Canadian Construction Law, provincial building standards and municipal bylaws and guidelines. It also abides by any University Board of Governors resolutions.

Due to their status as vital records, and the fact that they relate to building structures, Facilities Development is required to keep all of the contracts and blueprints that it generates to document legal obligations. The test-bed believes that it is also required to retain these records for at least seven years according to legislated retention requirements for financial records.²

Since SFU is defined as a public body by the British Columbia *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPOP), all records generated by University employees are subject to that legislation, meaning that all e-mails are subject to FOIPOP. Facilities Development, however, rarely receives requests for its records under this Act. When a request is received by Facilities Development, it is handled by the FOI officer, who is employed by the SFU Archives and Records Management Department.

Procedural and Documentary

Facilities Development did not exhibit a commitment to good records management practices and no workflow rules or codes of administrative procedures for managing its records were observed. An outdated file classification plan exacerbated the chaotic records environment as the department had not yet implemented a new department-wide file classification plan and had rejected the shared directory strategy presented by the Archives and Records Management Department.

Facilities Development, like all bodies within SFU, is subject to records and information management policies developed by the Archives and Records Management Department. The University Archives has developed a number of policies related to information management but

² It is not clear what laws, regulations and/or codes dictate this retention requirement or if staff are correct in assuming such authorities in fact apply.

few were observed to be ‘implemented’ or ‘practised’ during the research period. It appeared that individuals were largely using their own idiosyncratic records management procedures.

Technological

The digital records generated by the three business units in Facilities Services are not centrally managed. Some digital records are stored on a shared server, while others are stored on individual hard drives: there is currently no formal classification structure or management program for digital records. Many of the digital records are large files, such as architectural drawings and digital photographs and there are often multiple copies of these records stored on the shared server; consequently, the shared server has inadequate storage capacity.

Recognizing that there was a records management problem, Facilities Development purchased licenses for DocuShare, an electronic document management system, to standardize the organization of its electronic records. Since its purchase, this system has experienced several delays and is still not fully implemented. In addition, the absence of records retention and disposal schedules for operational records created by Facilities Development is also contributing to recordkeeping and records storage issues.

Unfortunately, Management in Facilities Services chose to only purchase the basic version of DocuShare, even though an additional U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)-compliant recordkeeping module is available. The DoD Directive 5015.2 (Design Criteria Standard for Electronic Records Management Software Applications) acts as the benchmark for records management technology applications. It defines mandatory requirements for records management offerings and assures data are being stored according to government standards. Without this module, DocuShare fails to meet the recordkeeping benchmarks that support the creation and management of reliable and authentic records. Metadata that would support the long-term preservation of digital records may also be missing without the use of DoD-compliant software. In the end, though, the basic non-DoD version of DocuShare was at a price point that allowed Management in Facilities Services to avoid submitting to a bureaucratic and potentially lengthy request-for-purchase process.

D. Narrative Answers to the Applicable Set of Questions for Researchers

Due to ongoing delays, the data collection process required to answer these questions was never initiated in the Facilities Development test-bed.

E. Narrative Answers to the Project's Applicable Research Questions

Due to ongoing delays, the data collection process required to answer the case study research questions was never initiated in the Facilities Development test-bed.

F. Bibliography of Relevant Material

The following bibliography is divided into two main categories: those documents created as part of this specific case study and a group of secondary literature on e-mail management and preservation. The latter section is further divided into five different sections: Case Studies, Records Management, Personal Information Management, Legal, and E-mail Standards & Guidelines.

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G. Activity Model

Not applicable.

H. Diplomatic Analysis of Records

Not applicable.

I. Findings, Recommendations and Products

The project was not completed as a result of the decision of the SFU archivists to withdraw Facilities Development as a test-bed in the tri-university e-mail management and preservation study; thus, no products can be presented here. However, a number of lessons can be learned from this experience that may benefit present and future InterPARES case studies.

Although an EDMS implementation was not part of the original conception of this case study, InterPARES adapted to the changes and saw an opportunity to study and offer advice for the introduction of DocuShare into the unit. This highlights the need for flexibility in the various InterPARES case studies and the need to adapt as situations in the test-beds shift during their involvement in the research project. For such flexibility to succeed, it is vitally important that the test-bed and the IP3 co-investigators maintain a close relationship and freely communicate any alterations in the record-making and recordkeeping environment. This, unfortunately, was not the case with SFU's Facilities Development department, as was particularly shown when the Archives and Records Management Department was not consulted on the decision to purchase and implement DocuShare. This shows the need to maintain good communication between the IP3 test-beds, co-investigators, and GRAs at all times; a recommendation that speaks to all IP3 case studies.

The ongoing delays in Facilities Development's implementation of DocuShare were a major factor leading to the abandonment of the test-bed. Many of these postponements may be attributed to the lack of staff buy-in, an indication of a much larger issue within the department: an organizational culture uncommitted to good records management practices. The tri-university e-mail study purposely chose different types of environments to study, anticipating that each would approach recordkeeping in different ways, thus allowing IP3 to observe diverse approaches to similar issues. However, the success in any case study depends on an organizational culture committed to making the necessary changes in archival and records management practices that the IP3 research seeks to identify and recommend. Unfortunately, this was not the case with Facilities Development, which opted to implement the DocuShare (EDMS)

tool because it offered a more immediate and expedient solution. However, it does not address the underlying weaknesses in the existing e-mail record-making and recordkeeping environment.

As observed by IP3 researchers, and as mentioned throughout this report, records management (involving e-mail and other records) did not appear to be a priority at Facilities Development, despite its claims that it was. For example, the Archives and Records Management Department has designed a new department-wide file classification plan for the whole of Facilities Services. The plan includes recordkeeping instructions and guidelines such as information on how to create and manage a shared directory structured on the file plan. The file plan is also accompanied by recommendations for addressing areas in need of improvement such as the establishment of departmental recordkeeping policies and procedures. This new file plan has not yet been fully implemented.

Without a commitment to records management, it is not surprising that the DocuShare implementation continues to be delayed; this also raises the question to what extent IP3 recommendations and suggestions would have been adopted by Facilities Development had it continued as a test-bed. Successful implementation of IP3's recommendations would have required a fundamental shift in the idiosyncratic records creation, use, management and preservation practices. As such, it is important for future IP3 case studies to choose test-beds that better exhibit organizational cultures that view records as a priority before including them in the research project.

Although Facilities Development at Simon Fraser University had to be abandoned, the SFU archivists are determined to continue working with the InterPARES study. To this end, they have identified the Human Rights Office (HRO) as a new test-bed and the initial contextual analysis has been completed. As the HRO is a one-person office, it presents another organizational culture to investigate, one that shows a dedication to good records management practices, and is a welcome addition to the tri-university study on e-mail management and preservation.