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To: Research Functional Area Digital Imagery Infrastructure Working Group
CC: Steve Smith, Randy Weaver, Mike Bates
From: Russ O'Hare
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Re: Electronic Imaging Applications

Universities are turning to electronic imaging, electronic document management, as solutions to manage documents which have traditionally been on paper. Implementing an imaging system that can capture student correspondence, bills, statements, transcripts, handwritten notes, and other documents then organize them on a computer network results in those records being almost instantly available. Universities are more likely to prosper when they have almost instant access to records related to their students. Research personnel who can turn to a PC and instantly access applications, transcripts, and other student information can often almost immediately meet student's needs. As a high performance retrieval technology, document imaging is most suitable for records that will be referenced frequently (Saffady, 2001).

Once on a network, digitized documents can be retrieved effortlessly in seconds. Document imaging often revolutionizes the management of information and provides the means to rapidly find retrieve and share all documents in a system. Document imaging systems often provide tremendous value because of the fast access they provide to information within organizations' documents. Other competitive advantages can be obtained by using computers to access data and documents from remote locations and to communicate simultaneously with staff members through work-flow processes. Any and all uses of electronic imaging technologies and systems can ultimately result in the abilities to provide faster and higher quality service to students and consequently result in positive effects on the University's mission.

What is electronic imaging?

Electronic imaging systems enable the conversion of paper documents into electronic images on computers. These systems consist of computer hardware, software, network, and work-flow components that are used to convert (scan and digitize) paper, microfilm, and other records so that graphic images of those records can be processed, distributed, stored, used, and managed electronically. Electronic imaging systems capture and preserve the visual and spatial characteristics and appearance of original paper or other records. The documents can then be retrieved and displayed on computer screens and can be printed on paper in seconds wherever they are needed. All types of documents such as handwritten notes, typewritten pages, computer-printed records, faxes, blueprints, engineering drawings, photographs, medical x-rays, fingerprints, transcripts, applications, and other records can be captured, stored, retrieved, used, and managed electronically.

Electronic imaging technology provides almost instant access to store files. Scan paper to a computer system and you can almost instantly retrieve the files whenever and virtually wherever you want them. It can be that simple. This accessibility alone is enough to move many business, industry, government, universities, and other organizations toward electronic solutions (Langemo, 2002).

Why Should UA Student Services Consider Using Electronic Imaging?

Students Services personnel and UA leaders should consider implementing imaging systems because of the following potential benefits as discussed by Dr. Mark Langemo, CRM, FAI, Professor Emeritus (October 2, 2004).

1. Better, faster, and higher-quality customer service is readily achievable because use of imaging makes possible finding documents quickly without leaving desks or workstations;
2. Measurable increase in staff productivity is attainable because management, staff and personnel at all levels can remain at desks and workstations working with and sharing digitized records on their computer screens instead of physically moving about to locate and access paper files;
3. Business process improvement is possible because of the imaging system functionality allowing preplanning, streamlining, and simplifying the student services business processes from their start to completion;
4. Potential distributed capture of records for central processing is possible when records can be scanned at many geographical locations of multiple campuses for centralized processing at a MAU;
5. Distribution through the Internet or intranets is possible once records are in digital form – providing options for distribution of and access to student records depending on needs within the university;
6. Almost instant access to high volumes of student information is possible because of the tremendous amount of digital storage media space that can be online or near-line;
7. Simultaneous access to documents and records from multiple locations is available because any record can be accessed at the same time from multiple locations-the next desk, workstation, office, floor, building, across the campus, or other side of the state;
8. Almost instant distribution of information is possible because of the ability to e-mail or otherwise electronically transmit digital information or to fax from any point in the business process;
9. Powerful indexing capabilities allow users to build computer databases with as many fields or search parameters as necessary to enable location and retrieval of records 100 percent of the time;
10. Integration with other information systems can be accomplished;
11. Greater audit capabilities exist because it is usually easier to track entries of records through electronic systems than it is to discover and follow paths taken by paper records through office systems;
12. Secure and simple digital archiving to protect vital records can be accomplished through development of quality business continuation plans through which vital records are backed up regularly and consistently in the normal course of business;
13. Improved security compared to paper filing can be achieved because of electronic systems capabilities to restrict access to sensitive documents;
14. Easier disaster recovery can be done because with paper files, once they are gone, they are gone for good – while digital systems can easily and economically be backed up in multiple geographic locations;
15. Reduce storage space requirements and costs because converting to digital images minimizes the need and space to store paper records;

16. Improve active records management because of the ability to have large volumes of active records available online or near-line and to minimize many time-consuming filing and refilling operations common with paper records systems;

UA can benefit in multiple ways from the assistance of technology to efficiently and cost – effectively manage and secure their documents. Paper records are cumbersome and are more vulnerable and sensitive to disaster. Electronic imaging is often an excellent shorter – term records management solution in situations where document capture, distribution, storage, retrieval, use, and management demands require speed and access by many people.