Managing the Digital University Desktop

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) has awarded the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-CH with preliminary funding to investigate the desktop management and email practices of faculty and staff in academic units and administrative offices. This research will result in a compilation of best practices and realistic recommended guidelines for management of email and electronic records based on user needs and behaviors. In addition to electronic records management guidelines the project team will also be producing both classroom and web-based training modules.

The study will be conducted here at UNC-CH, across the 16-campus UNC System, and at Duke University. SILS faculty member Helen Tibbo and Duke University Archivist, Tim Pyatt, will lead the research project. "Information overload and email management are issues that universities across the country are dealing with right now," says Tibbo, "It's great that our two universities can join together to research this issue."

Management of electronic records is difficult due to the ease with which users can create, copy, and distribute electronic information. Since none of the typical desktop applications such as word processing or e-mail, have electronic records management (ERM) features, employees lacking any records management training are left to their own devices. The success of desktop records management and subsequent archiving of material from the university environment presently depends on the individual and his or her specific information management behaviors. UNC's current email retention policy, designed for compliance with the North Carolina Public Records Law, requires employees to print out a paper copy of email of lasting archival value.   In addition to the creation of best practices guidelines, this research project will lay the foundation for exploring the appropriateness of electronic records management systems (ERMSs) for the University.

Phase one of the potentially three-year long project involves conducting a short survey of faculty and staff through email. "The point of this research is to design best practice guidelines around the way people really work," says Dr. Tibbo, "To do that, we need to know how real faculty, administrators, and staff deal with their digital desktops."

Look for the survey in your e-mail inbox the second week of September.

For more information see the project's website at http://www.ils.unc.edu/digitaldesktop.

****

Contact: Dr Helen R. Tibbo, Associate Professor, SILS, UNC-CH, (919) 929-6246, tibbo@ils.unc.edu