Public Records: Guidelines for Email
Office of Records and Information Management
January 3, 2011

Public employees should understand that any records they create related to University business—including text messages, voicemail messages, emails, and other electronic communications—are University records. These records therefore (1) should be managed according to University records retention policies, and (2) may be subject to disclosure under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

- **Remember, most of our work is public and is available to anyone upon request.** All University records, including emails, are public unless they contain information that is made private by the law. Examples of private information include private student and private personnel data. Much of our work does not involve private data, and must be produced publicly if requested.

- **The subjects of data almost always have the right to see the data.** With few exceptions, everyone has the right to the data that Minnesota governmental entities maintain about them. For the University, this includes our students and employees.

- **It is important to maintain professionalism in all communications, including emails.** Emails should be written with the same degree of professionalism as other University records. Individuals who are the subject of emails, as well as the public in many cases, have access rights to emails upon request,.

- **Ownership of the computer system does not matter.** The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act governs all records relating to University business, whether those records exist on your work computer, your home computer, your smartphone, your University email account, or your private email account. By the same token, your personal, non-work-related emails are not government data subject to the law, even if they are on a University of Minnesota account. University business—especially when it involves private data—should be maintained on University of Minnesota systems.

- **Keep what you need; delete what you don't.** Emails tend to pile up, which makes it harder and more time-consuming to find what we need and to respond to requests for information. Much email consists of transitory, routine messages that do not need to be maintained. Delete what you do not need. Keep those emails that you need to keep for administrative purposes to document the work of your unit.

Examples of email that should be deleted once administrative use is completed:
Transitory or routine messages that do not make policy or contain significant information.
Telephone messages, either transcribed or downloaded through Gopher messaging
Interoffice or interdepartmental communications that do not result in the formulation of policies
Copied or duplicate messages sent as information only.
Meeting notices
Information request records that do not result in the formulation of policies.
Routine announcements or information such as notices of meetings, queries regarding processes or ideas, general information, and electronic journals or listservs.

Examples of email that should be saved through the retention period:
Email that sets or communicates policy or procedure
Email that communicates who, what, why, when, where and how a transaction or decision was made.
Email that documents or monitors student behavior, consultation or progress
Email that documents personnel or employment decisions
Email that documents or monitors personnel behavior, consultation or progress
Email that documents changes in terms or conditions of contracts, grants, projects or services.