Records Management Misconceptions

1. UTMB has a state certified Records Retention Schedule, we can just file it away because we now have a Records Management program.
   Reality: Certifying the Records Retention Schedule with the state is just the beginning of the program, it is not enough to simply list our records and say what we intend to do with them, we must actively, aggressively, and conscientiously apply the retention periods to the records life cycle. When a records series has met its retention period, if there is no litigation, negotiation, claim, audit, open records request, or administrative reason that existed prior to the retention date, then we must process the records. If the record has historical significance or needs to be reviewed, process the Disposition Log accordingly. All disposition activity must be documented as required by law.

2. In a typical workday I don't have time to waste on records management. If I'm doing my job 8 hours a day, there is no time for unrelated activities.
   Reality: Records management is perceived as an "unrelated" activity, when in fact, it is the only activity in one's Work Plan that is directly fulfilling a responsibility of the President of UTMB that is mandated by state law - Texas Government Code 441.

3. I keep the items I think are important and discard the rest [without reference to a records retention schedule].
   Reality: Department Records Coordinators come and go frequently at our UTMB departments, the incoming DRC’s are not properly informed as to what constitutes an official, vital, or archival record, and are, perhaps, making poor judgment calls

4. I do not store records with the records center, so the records retention schedule does not apply to my department records. Or, only paper records are governed by the records retention schedule.
   Reality: ALL information received and/or created by a UTMB department in the performance of it’s job that documents activities in the conduct of business is a state record and as such is governed by the certified Records Retention Schedule, regardless of the media it resides on, for example: Any written, photographic, machine-readable, or other recorded information created or received by or on behalf of a state agency or an elected state official that documents activities in the conduct of state business or use of public resources.

5. These are not university records; these are just things I do.
   Reality: Just because an activity is routine or at a work area level, does not mean it should not be captured in the records system. Routine and work area practices and activities need to be captured on official file. There is usually decision-making involved and provides a good history for the area of what they do. Too often areas of the University end up reinventing the wheel because a corporate memory has not been captured. Records of business activities, even at a work area level, are official, and must be captured on an official file.

6. These records are not important.
   Reality: Just because the records of an activity may not seem important to you, that does not mean we can ignore our legal responsibilities in relation to legal retention requirements. Even if records have a short life in relation to our administrative requirements, they may still have legal retention requirements, and should be placed in the official records system.

7. Records management is a moot point since there is no storage facility to handle paperwork.
   Reality: Some departments are using the storage issue as an excuse not to practice records management, instead of making theirs a more productive work environment by weeding their files of inactive records and sending them to storage or dispositioning records that have met their retention. The UTMB Records Center provides storage at no cost to UTMB departments, and manages the retention periods for the departments. When a records series has met its retention, the staff at the records center will complete a Disposition Log, obtain the DRC’s signature and the Archivist signature if needed before the records are dispositioned.

8. I print and save everything.
   Reality: This may show a lack of decision-making skills for what constitutes an official record.

9. If I scan my paper to a digital image, I have to keep both the paper and the electronic copy.
   Reality: Get rid of the paper as soon as possible. Contractors and subcontractors that provide supplies or services to the Federal Government should retain original paper copies of scanned images for one year after imaging. A record in electronic form will usually be admissible if it can be shown to be “accurately represented” – ie the record must have remained complete and unaltered from the time it was first generated in its final form; apart from minor changes which may arise in the normal course of communication, translation, conversion, storage or display. Where records are required for legal or regulatory purposes, an electronic record is acceptable if it is maintained in an accessible, perceivable form. It must also be accompanied by contextual information (metadata) which substantiates the provenance of the record – confirming the time, place and the person(s) responsible for creating or receiving the record. The Electronic Records
Rules also state that if the records series has a retention period greater than 10 years, the records must have a clear migration path to assure readability as technology evolves.

10. I want to keep these records just in case someone in my department might need them.
   Reality: Keeping records "just in case" is risky business. In American law, discovery is the pre-trial phase in a lawsuit in which each party through the law of civil procedure can request documents and other evidence from other parties and can compel the production of evidence by using a subpoena or through other discovery devices, such as requests for production of documents, and depositions. It is best to systematically disposition records according to the records retention schedule. See also misconception 13 below.

11. I have not followed the Schedule yet, but will do so when we run out of room.
   Reality: This is a prime example of crisis management. Obviously, there is still much education and enlightenment necessary to bring about good records management practices.

12. We have an empty four-drawer filing cabinet for archival material.
   Reality: Number one, expensive office file drawers are not an efficient and cost effective use of state funds, and number two, all archival documents should go to the archives where they can be properly stored, kept together, and finding aids and catalog records created to know what exists, to give researchers due access to these materials.

13. I do not have any "original" records in my department – all of the records that I have are convenience copies.
   Reality: The use of the words "original" and/or "convenience" is frequently misunderstood and often overused. A "Convenience" copy is defined as: Duplicate copies used primarily for information purposes, routine transmittal copies, convenience or tickler copies. They do not have ongoing value and should be destroyed after their initial use. However, an "Official" record is defined as: The record which furnishes the most conclusive information on a particular business function or activity. It is usually the original record, but a duplicate copy may be legally recognized as the official record. Texas State Retention Schedule defines convenience copy as a duplicate used for reference purposes. As long as it is needed for convenience, it may be retained in the department. However, it must be destroyed no later than the original record's retention period. If it survives after the original is destroyed, it becomes the official record and is subject to discovery and requests for public information.

14. I do not think any paper documents should be saved. We are in the year 2010 where servers being backed up should be adequate.
   Reality: While this sounds good in theory, Records Management needs to work with Information Services to develop university wide policy and practices with failsafe methods to identify, manage, preserve and disposition electronic records using the certified Records Retention Schedule as a resource. If a form or letter requires a handwritten signature, it will need to be scanned to be saved and back up on a server. Not all paper records merit the time and expense of imaging. There are still very few jobs that can be done without a paper trail.

15. Our department keeps everything for 5 years.
   Reality: The certified Records Retention Schedule is a document that lists all department records by categories with the respective period of time that they must be retained. The retention period is the period of time during which records must be maintained because they are needed for operational, legal, fiscal, historical or other purposes. The certified Records Retention Schedule is the legal document that gives UTMB authority to dispose of records. Records that are not listed on the schedule require a special review and approval of the state records administrator to be destroyed or sent to archives. Departments must document their records disposition, as a requirement of Texas law, and should use UTMB's Records Management Disposition Log when dispositioning records.

RECORDS ARE BOTH AN ASSET AND A LIABILITY.
   As long as you need them for administrative and/or legal purposes they are an asset.
   Once the retention time has been met the value of those records quickly turn to a liability.

PLEASE MANAGE THE LIFE CYCLE OF YOUR DEPARTMENT RECORDS BY THE CERTIFIED UTMB RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE