

# Building a Better Classification System: A Case Study

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# Well-Designed Classification Systems

- promote faster, more systematic filing and retrieval
- accelerate decision making and research
- make records available quickly to those who have the need and right to see them
- contribute to the ability of records to serve as legal evidence

# Effective Classification Systems

- provide greater protection of information
- space, equipment and human resources used to their best advantage

# Continuum of Care Model

Services include:

- integration of recordkeeping rules into business processes
- records classification design
- retention and disposition scheduling and archival appraisal
- arrangement and description of archival records
- reference services and public programming



## Continuum of Care Model (contd.)

- Two programs:
  - Information Management Program
  - Archive Program
- Specialized training and experience in each program
- Staff collaborate on both program operations

## Service Goals of Continuum

- Provide timely access to reliable and authentic records
- Increase employee efficiency
- Improve ability to create, share, copy, send, store and transform information



## Service Goals of Continuum (cont'd)

- Protect privacy rights of clients and employees
- Meet recordkeeping obligations under government legislation
- Ensure permanent preservation of archival record

# Recordkeeping Crisis

- Severe filing and retrieval problems in Executive Suite
- Discrete, unique classification systems although each based on subjects and administrative structure
- Transitory records and operational records filed together
- Unworkable systems

# Analysis of Records Related Problems

- Inefficient, ineffective retrieval and storage
- Backlog of outdated records
- Unnecessary duplication of filing systems
- Increased record volume due to photocopying



## Analysis of Records Related Problems (cont'd)

- Private filing systems due to lost faith in main system
- Loss of time, energy, money
- Poor staff morale

# Choosing a Classification System

- Researched types available
- Inventories to identify, analyze and evaluate size, scope and complexity of records
- Interviewed users to:
  - define needs and expectations
  - understand responsibilities of different units and functions represented in record series

# Classification System Requirements

- Provide natural, easily understood way of classifying
- Provide rational, standard framework for classification across organization
- Facilitate the application of retention rules



# Classification System Requirements (cont'd)

- Facilitate access and retrieval throughout the life cycle of records, including records in archival repository
- Allow for continuous organizational change
- Function-based system fulfills requirements

# Proposed Classification System

- University Classification System (UCLASS)
- Uniform system used by all units
- Based on functional analysis
- Hierarchical structure of organization's functions, activities and transactions
- Active records stored and maintained in units' office spaces

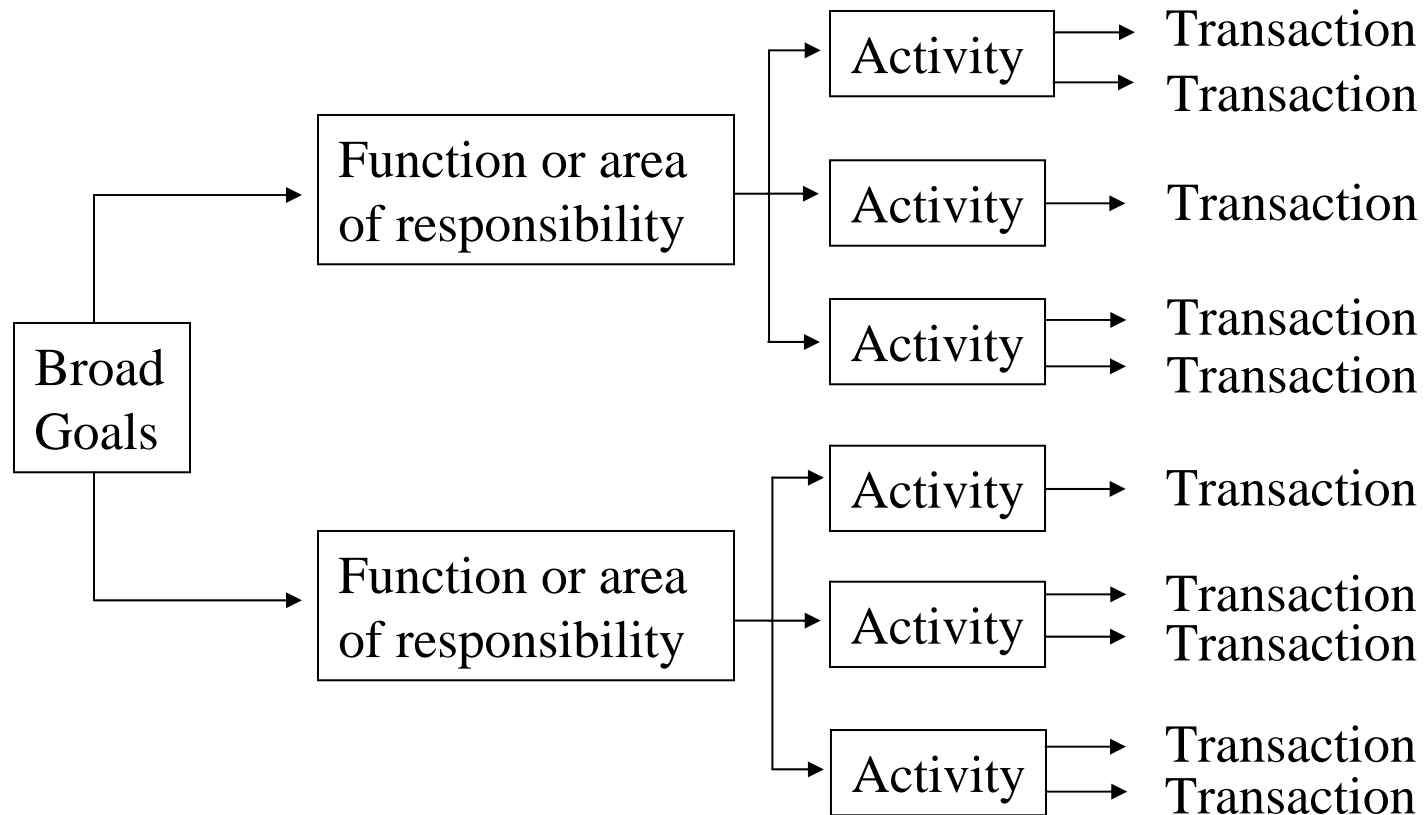
## Records and Activities

- Material evidence of activities
- Product of particular actions in time
- Created and maintained in context of other records relating to same activity

# Functional Analysis Definitions

- Broad goals/purposes: organization was created to accomplish them
- Functions: major areas of responsibility managed by the organization to accomplish goals
- Activities: major tasks performed by office/officer to accomplish a function
- Transactions: smallest unit of business activity

# Functional Analysis of Business Activity



# UCLASS Structure

First level of  
classification

**BLOCK =**  
Function (or area  
of responsibility)

Second level of  
classification

**PRIMARY =**  
Activity (or major  
task)

Third level of  
classification

**SECONDARY =**  
Transaction (or  
smallest unit of  
business activity)

**AC**  
Academic Programs

**AC570**  
Program Development

**AC570-3**  
International Program  
Approval Process

# UCLASS Blocks

AD Administration

FM Financial Management

GV Governance

HR Human Resources

HR001 Human Resources – General

HR050 Appointments, Promotions, Reviews  
and Dismissals

HR080 Benefits Administration

# Principle for Classifying Records

- What is the main function reflected in the record?
- Within the identified function, what is the activity that is being discussed or documented in this record?
- Within the identified activity, what is the transaction or matter being discussed in this record?

# Initial Rollout – Problems (1)

## Problems:

1. Pushed to implement early due to haste of senior administrators
2. Lack of supporting documentation
  - No training program
  - No online access to system

## Initial Rollout – Problems (2)

### Problems (continued...)

#### 3. ‘Exploding’ files

- Tension with concept of ‘original order’
- Office had created too many ‘General’ or ‘Miscellaneous’ files
- Office had created too many files according to administrative origin or structure

## Initial Rollout – Problems (3)

### Problems (continued...)

4. Lack of consultation
  - Did consult with senior administrators
  - Did not continue to consult with record-keepers
5. Lack of conversion documentation
  - Create a *'Before & After List'*

# Conversion Documentation

- Create a '*Before & After*' List
- Include name of unit, original location of files, date of conversion

Previous Name	Previous Classification	UCLASS chosen
Personnel Administration	11.05.04	HR190 – Employment & Staffing
Miscellaneous Enquiries	11.05.07	AD060 – Appreciation, Complaints, Enquiries
Works of Art on loan	11.05.11	BP060 – Art for Public Spaces
ARMA	11.06.04	AD065 – Associations (External)

# Consultation with Recordkeepers

Discuss the '*Before and After*' list with recordkeepers

- Gather contextual information
- Make appropriate changes to initial Block and Primary choices
- Encourage recordkeeper involvement
- Opportunity for grassroots training in functional analysis

# Initial Rollout - Results

## Results:

1. Captured potential permanent record series
2. Refined work process via functional analysis
3. Practical application of functional analysis to records

# Learning from Experience (1)

Understanding the recordkeeper's point of view

- Impacted by the physical process
- Impacted by change to functional analysis
- Consultation is key
- Training is key

## Learning from Experience (2)

### Senior Level Buy-In

- Necessary at initial stage
- Necessary to continually revisit
- Necessary to implement institutional policies
  - *Information Asset Identification & Classification Policy:*
    - *“Business information assets owned by and/or in the custody of the University will be identified and classified in accordance with the University Classification System (UCLASS)”*

## Learning from Experience (3)

### Transparent Process

- “*conversion deemed a failure...due to the execution of the conversion*”
- Explain process before conversion
- Explain process during conversion
- Consult following initial conversion
- Acknowledge recordkeepers expertise
- Make changes following consultation

## Learning from Experience (4)

### Tact, Diplomacy & Humor

- Essential ingredients to a conversion
- Acknowledge and discuss issues
- Use 'success' stories to illustrate best practices

## Learning from Experience (5)

### Persistence

- Lack of staff should not = lack of contact
- Conversions can be the equivalent of '*herding cats*' BUT...
  - **It can be done!**
- Keep in contact with units
- Monitor staff changes

## Some Success Stories

- Interest continually generated by mention of UCLASS in other training programs
- Voluntary conversion by new Faculty of VetMed
- Retirees are being replaced by individuals interested in uniform classification system

# Learning from Technology

- Software choices limited in 1996
  - Had to choose a file management system NOT electronic document management system
- Emphasize the classification system and **not** the software to recordkeepers
  - Tension between reliance on technology and understanding UCLASS

# Training

## Group training vs. Individual training

- Choice between 'general' or 'specific' methodology
- Time management issues
- Cost management issues
- Which method gives the better '*Return on Investment*'?

## Training (2)

- Unit-specific training is best
  - Created according to functions and activities of that unit
- Use of on-line training aids
- Inquiry Based Learning
  - Involvement leads to understanding

## What's in it for ME?

### Value-adds for UCLASS

- Standard framework for classifying
- Standardized communication
- Continuity on campus
- Complete, reliable and authentic records
- Retrieval for access requests

## Records Continuum (1)

- UCLASS provides the framework for MaRRS (Master Records Retention Schedule)
- ‘*a-ha*’ or ‘*light-bulb*’ moment for record-keepers
  - Every record series will have a retention schedule
  - Retention rules empower record keepers
- Record-keepers understand function of system at grassroots level

## Records Continuum (2)

- Archival retrieval more easily facilitated
- Less arrangement & description required
- Records culled at office level, not at archives level
- Records continuum model is maintained

# Updating UCLASS

- A functional system = an organic, fluid, and ever-changing system
- Changes in organizational priorities necessitates constant updates
- Constantly evolving functions & activities = constantly evolving classification system

## Example of Updating UCLASS:

### Internationalization

1996 – one primary:

- AC330 – International Centre
- One activity placed within an ill-fitting function

2002 revision:

- New Block for the Internationalization (IN) function
- Five new Primaries/activities added to UCLASS
- Extensive revisions to six existing Primaries/activities in other Blocks

# UCLASS revision through Macro-Appraisal (1)

UCLASS initially designed to document the functions and activities of the Executive Suite, NOT the University

- Initially approached functional analysis from the '*bottom-up*'
  - (ie: deriving functions from records)
- Should be analyzing from '*top-down*'
  - (ie: from the mandated functions of the university)

# UCLASS revision through Macro-Appraisal (2)

- Use of a planned, rational, global approach to continuum of care
- Macro-appraisal
  - Assesses the archival value of records by analyzing context of creation
  - Identifies functions/structures most significant to mandate
- Micro-appraisal
  - appraisal of actual records at identified sites
  - confirms or amends macro-appraisal analysis

# Strategy for Active Records Project

- Functional-structural analysis
- Look at organization's future functional direction
- Revise UCLASS blocks, rewrite primary descriptions
- Complete macro-appraisal decisions
- Inventory records to confirm UCLASS categories, gather retention requirements

## Electronic Recordkeeping & UCLASS

- Electronic Recordkeeping System (ERS) implementation requires:
  - Classification system
  - Retention rules
- UCLASS must be easily understood
  - To promote adoption of ERS by users
  - So that classifying can be accurate – application of the correct retention period depends on it

**If you have questions:**

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**See also:**

**[www.archives.ucalgary.ca](http://www.archives.ucalgary.ca)**