Good Morning!

The Ohio State University is a public institution of higher education in the State of Ohio, as such it must comply with the State's public records laws. The Ohio Revised Code states that,

“The boards of trustees of state-supported institutions of higher education shall have full responsibility for establishing and administering a records program for their respective institutions. The boards shall apply efficient and economical management methods to the creation, utilization, maintenance, retention, preservation, and disposition of the records of their respective institutions.”

Therefore, at OSU we are mandated by the State, and authorized by our Board of Trustees. It is a program that fortunately for us is one that is unified within a records continuum, where the records management and archival programs are under the auspices of the University Archives.
Founded in 1870, it wasn’t until October 1965, that the University Archives was created. In a memo to Dean’s, Department Chairs, and Administrative heads, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, John Mount, announced the appointment of Bruce Harding as OSU’s first full-time archivist and that his role was to provide leadership for

"...the development of a program which is designed to produce an effective system for the creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of University records..."

In 1966 Mount convened the Archives Advisory Committee that represented the financial, academic and administrative leadership of the University, which developed a charge for the University Archivist

“...to prepare a chapter for the 'Procedures Manual' and submit it to the Committee members for consideration...[noting that]...The concept of using 'Schedules of Records Retention and Disposition' was approved and the Archivist is to include the procedure for their development in the procedures manual.”
By April of 1967 Section 9 of the University Operating Manual or “Green Book” had been written, approved, and distributed to all units of the University. It included our first “General Schedule.”

Originally reporting to the Secretary of the Board, the University Archives came under the supervision of the Vice President for Educational Services until 1978 when we came to live within the University Libraries, placing the Archives within an administrative unit whose mission was to acquire, preserve, and make available information continuing value.
It was throughout this era and until the early 1990s that the University Archives served two “masters” the Board of Trustees and The State of Ohio’s records management program. In the late 1970s in addition to the general records retention schedules identified in the Green Book, the university started to create unit specific schedules that not only needed OSU approval, but approval through the State Records Commission.
However, by the early 1990s with a weakening and unresponsive state records program, higher education in the state of Ohio was bifurcated—some would say liberated—from the State’s program. As previously stated, the Revised Code—associated with that liberation—mentions that:

“…boards shall apply efficient and economical management methods to the creation, utilization, maintenance, retention, etc, etc, etc,…”

This led to the creation of a model records retention schedule developed by representatives of the Inter-University Council of Ohio. Founded in 1939, the IUC represents Ohio’s 14 public universities, and its

“…purpose is to facilitate the development of common interest and concern of its members and to assist in sustaining and improving the quality of public higher education.”

The model schedule has evolved over the 25 years, but is still our guiding document for establishing retention and disposition at OSU.
Since, archivists and records managers have no official standing within the IUC, they had to accomplish this initiative through the IUC’s legal counsels’ group. The Task Force engaged a consultant to conduct the necessary legal research and assist with the development of a model schedule in 1992. Underlying the Model Schedule is a matrix of functionally-based retention rules that theoretically should enhance the consistency of schedule development. The consultant updated the initial model schedule several times, accounting for review of current legal research up until 2000.

The model schedule’s development would languish for eight years. In 2008, we at OSU spearheaded an initiative with the IUC to jump-start the Model Schedule process and recommended purchasing the consultant’s software offering. By purchasing the software, the IUC is able to potentially update the Model Schedule several times a year, as opposed to once every several years, at least from a legal impact point-of-view. Further, by utilizing the tool that has the retention rules hard-coded into the system, we could enforce integrity of the use of those rules across and with-in the IUC institutions. Throughout this process OSU took on the hosting of the software and maintaining the currency of the schedule.

We took this opportunity to consolidate records series in the Model Schedule into more functional “big buckets.” This overhaul also allowed us to identify potential
gaps in the Model Schedule as compared to the OSU General Schedule and vice-versa. While we did consolidate records series and added a handful of new series to the Model, the new Task Force recognized the need to develop more functionally unique records series—public safety and medical records among others—that do not exist in the Model or in OSU's General Schedule.

In the seven years since the implementation of the software, we’ve found that the majority of the legal updates we’ve received are inconsequential, and almost all of the substantial changes have been identified OSU and its partners within the IUC. Additionally, two attempts to move forward on truly updating the Model Schedules to include student financial aid, public safety and medical records have stalled—face-to-face meetings have been positive, however, keeping momentum once back at our respective institutions has faltered.
So as we look back on nearly a quarter of a century of the IUC Model Schedule, it is a good and valuable collaborative project. The obstacles on the road, inhibiting this from being a fully successful project right now are threefold:

1. The lack of standing of archivists and records managers within the IUC keeping them from controlling their own destiny.

2. The institutional priority to just get it done; if we could just throw a few of us at it for a couple of weeks solid, we could knock it out. However, there are far more pressing things at most of our institutions keep us from making the commitment.

3. Finally, we are dealing with an antiquated software application, that requires extracting the information through a bit of a hack to import it into another database where we can actually include disposition codes so that we can adequately articulate the lifecycle management to our record creators.

Fortunately, these obstacles (and I'll paraphrase a sentiment expressed by Michael J. Fox) these obstacles are “on the road” and we can see them, react to them and deal with them, as opposed to “in the road” where they can wreck us without seeing them. So I have hope we will find safe and appropriate ways around these obstacles in the future.
We’ve come a long way in the University Archives at OSU over the past half-century—even in the decade I have been here. It’s clear that while we do an admirable job of providing records management services to the university, an institution our size needs a full time records manager and staff. One could also argue that records management might be more appropriate/adequately placed within an administrative unit such as OCIO or Compliance, but we feel that providing a continuum of services for—as Mount stated in 1965—“...the development of a program which is designed to produce an effective system for the creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of University records...” is best served by the Archives; and the Archives benefits from its relationship to the Libraries and its mission to preserve and provide access to information of historical value. Further, with the University Archives tied to the academic side of the house, we have inroads with a more challenging group from an archives and records management POV – the faculty. And with the partnerships we have cultivated on the Administrative side of the house, we are poised for future success with the program.