

## MEMORANDUM

To: President Richard Lariviere  
From: Elizabeth Denecke, Public Records Officer  
Date: October 6, 2011

Re: **Annual Report of Office of Public Records, 2010-2011**

The administration established the University of Oregon, Office of Public Records on July 1, 2010. I assumed my responsibilities as Public Records Officer on October 11, 2010.

### Public Record Production

The public records process itself is not complex. On receiving a request, the office provides an initial response, locates different university constituents with responsive records to develop an estimate of the request's cost, provides that estimate to the requester or waives the fee, waits for payment if required, and finally, obtains, prepares (redacts), and releases responsive documents to the requester. Requesters who object to any part of this process may appeal the office's decision.

After my October arrival, the office substantially reduced the response time for public records requests in the areas of initial response, estimate provision, and document delivery after payment. (Exhibit 1) By March 1, 2011, the office was restructured to provide for more organizational capacity while reducing personnel costs.

To create a meaningful estimate of response times, the office developed a four category rating system for request complexity, depending on the state of the documents, the number of locations from which they must be gathered, and the complexity of required redactions. (Exhibit 2) Most requests fell in the second category, that is, documents were located in one or two campus locations. (Exhibit 3) As expected, response speed decreased with request complexity.

As to fees, in the first year the office responded to 263 requests from 136 distinct requesters, waiving fees on 51%, or 133, of those requests. (Exhibit 4) With payment, the office responded to 207 requests in its first fiscal year.

After reopening a dormant solicitation for office document management software, the committee selected a product that facilitates electronic file creation, online PR requests, and a public records reading room. This approach conforms to recent national trends in FOIA request document management. *See, e.g.* <http://www.omwatch.org/node/11847> Out of 5 responses, the committee chose the least expensive product from three finalists. (\$15K, \$50K, and \$200K.) The new software substantially reduced the time required for file creation and request management. It also allowed the office to move to all-electronic files, which improved employee resource allocation.

## Other Progress

In the summer of 2011, the office developed its first website articulating existing practices and began researching comparable public universities websites for best practices. The office particularly liked the content of the public records websites for the University of Iowa and the University of Illinois, which posted all public records requests in a completely transparent format that was highly accessible to the public.

The office restructured the website to include these new practices,<sup>1</sup> including a PRR Log, trial fee waiver, guidelines for employees, FAQs, Online Resources, and the Public Records Reading Room located under the “Request/Check Status Public Records” link. The office particularly thanks Athletics for allowing some of its frequently requested documents to be publically posted.

For an undefined trial period, the office has established a practice of waiving all fees under \$200 subject to certain criteria relating to commercial vs. nonprofit enterprises. In 2010-11 alone, this practice would have resulted in responding to at least 229 public records requests.

## Challenges

The decentralized nature of the university defies easy document production. Decentralized records require additional time to locate and produce. A move to centralized records requires a cultural change well beyond the charge of the office.

The office routinely handles requests characterized as public records requests that are not, e.g. student records requests; faculty members’ requests for their own records; and, grievants’ requests for pertinent records. In the last fiscal year, these requests required review of well over 8,000 pages of materials. This kind of document production is extremely time-consuming, detracts from the primary work of the office, and slows production time for requests from the public. However, it promotes consistency in production of released records.

Working with the newly created UO Senate Transparency Committee (STC) and its Chair presented the office with time-consuming challenges. The office genuinely seeks input from constituencies on policy matters. It appreciates efforts by the Senate, Committee on Committees and President to enable the STC to effectively fulfill its advisory role.

## Future Endeavors

There is always room for additional innovation, and the office looks forward to implementing those innovations as consensus is reached on direction and as our technological capacity allows. I thank the administration for the opportunity to promote transparency in the greater university community.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://publicrecords.uoregon.edu/>