



---

## **Electronic Records Management: Are Student Emails Public Records?**

**Purpose:** Provide student email retention guidance to schools and higher education institutions.

### **Are schools/higher education institutions responsible for retaining student emails?**

**Typically, no** – Chapter 40.14 RCW governs the retention of public records. Public records are “... made by or received by any agency of the State of Washington **in connection with the transaction of public business**....” (RCW 40.14.010; emphasis added).

Generally, students do not conduct business on behalf of the school/institution, so their emails are not public records, even if the school/institution is the one providing the email account.

If a student emails staff or faculty, the staff/faculty’s reply is a public record and subject to retention requirements, but the student’s original email is not.

Student emails should be retained and destroyed in accordance with the school/institution’s policies and/or agreements in relation to providing the email service.

**In certain situations, yes** – If students are conducting business **on behalf of the school/institution**, however (for example, fundraising or Associated Student Body activities), their associated emails **are** public records, and subject to retention.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from  
Washington State Archives:**

**[www.sos.wa.gov/archives](http://www.sos.wa.gov/archives)  
[recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov](mailto:recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov)**