Laserfiche ECM Blogs

University of Southern California Establishes Records Management Standard

Written by Laserfiche Staff

"We consider our faculty to be our greatest asset," says David Haugland, Associate Vice Provost of the University of Southern California (USC). Trouble was, spread out as USC faculty were among its 17 schools and colleges, for the Office of the Provost, faculty records were increasingly the university's greatest pain in that asset.

David Haugland, Associate Vice Provost of the University of Southern California (USC)

By 2005, serving the more than 3,100 full-time and 1,300 part-time faculty USC employs meant the Provost's Office was straddling a campus-wide legacy payroll system and individual colleges' respective personnel records. This brought an endemic degree of inefficiency and confusion—and a mountain of paperwork that took up space, required constant copying and re-filing. Personnel files that might be housed centrally were used individually by schools spread out across USC's six-mile-wide campus. "Each of our academic centers are independent," Haugland explains. "At bigger institutions, especially research institutions like USC, you're going to find that a lot of control is parceled out simply because of the scale." Factor in constantly changing status with faculty sabbaticals and retirement, and navigating between systems became as labor-intensive as it was inconsistent.

Important documentation was often, as Desiree Brown, Faculty Services Coordinator, puts it, "floating out there." Factor in the potential for breach of confidentiality for sensitive and confidential faculty personnel files, and it was clear that a new solution was in order.

The need for greater speed and efficiency became more pronounced when Provost Marty Levine starting making increasingly specialized queries of faculty records that emphasized the need for more data-driven accessibility. "He'd want to see, say for instance, what female faculty members had been promoted in the last five years," Haugland explains.

Laserfiche was chosen both for its ease-of-use, but also its ease of customization, which was essential to an office working with 17 different schools campus-wide. Initially, adoption was sluggish until a former Dean of the Engineering School became the high-level administrator, which underscored the need to have buy-in from the top down. "We were very fortunate in terms of having management on the project that was very IT-friendly," says Haugland.

Brown notes that the Provost's Office was a perfect pilot office for Laserfiche implementation owing to the fact that her office had already been scanning all incoming mail for a year before installing Laserfiche. "We had a cultural acceptance in our office—no one was afraid of going electronic," she says.

For her part, Brown kept initial implementation manageable and recognizable, beginning with just one school's set of records, and "looking at them like they were in a file cabinet only on my desk."

Owing to the volume of files their office was required to keep as the university's custodian of faculty records, Brown already had a working knowledge of what document management could do—and pretty soon she'd found out how much better Laserfiche could do it. "In the hard files we had a cheat sheet already that kind of summarized what information we'd usually need to see right away. But some of these files could be 300 pages, so if we needed to find something specific it was still a lot of work," she says.

"We had been using something in-house to scan in records, but you could only retrieve them in three categories. Laserfiche just gave us so many more options, especially when you want to search for one particular thing in a hundred page document." – Desiree Brown, Faculty Services Coordinator

But trying to come up with a system that was as centrally controllable as it was locally accessible—the classic ECM paradox—presented its own challenges. On an IT level and

user level, this active document management technology had to reconcile the Provost's needs to centralize and standardize records while simultaneously accommodating the individual schools' unique filing systems and primary applications. Payroll, for instance, was centralized, but not personnel records, which were left to individual departments.

Ease of use was a major factor, Haugland says, for two reasons: First, the system would be needed for multiple and continuous access. Secondly, staff members using the system ranged from Ph.D's to administrative assistants, and even within those parameters, computer savvy varied wildly from gadget-philes to technophobes. "Believe it or not, we have people at USC who don't even read e-mail," laughs Haugland.

Key to resolving both issues was establishing what Brown refers to as "the gold files"—a master set of faculty records that would serve as the gold standard for all schools, eliminating the inefficiencies and redundancies of duplication.

"I call them 'the gold files' because it's such gold to me," Brown explains with a laugh. What gives them their shine is their standardized field template, which Brown helped design based on the naming conventions and filing habits of each of the respective schools and colleges. "That's the beauty of Laserfiche, you can customize it," she says. This helped allow a thorough application of Quick Fields to index and file incoming paperwork. "We were able to do all our own scanning in-house," she adds. The custom template, for instance, allows Brown to update faculty status say, from on sabbatical to active, instantly.

It didn't take long for Brown to all but eliminate paper from her desk. "Anything that comes in, I scan it, then pass it along as an e-mail," she says. "The great thing is that I have a record on my desktop."

The benefits, say Haugland and Brown, range from the simple (cutting down on inter-office mail, reducing storage and processing costs) to the profound (disaster recovery, transparency and compliance).

When she's asked about ROI, Brown hesitates to limit her response to just a number because so many of the benefits are as qualitative as they are quantitative. "I like this question because I want to laugh—in a good way," she says. "Something that used to take me ten minutes to find, now it's a matter of seconds. The time saving is substantial. A lot of the benefits are subjective, but turnaround times, compliance – we know we're better than we were."

So do the other schools and offices, who've had positive experience interacting with the gold files. "Our office is the custodian for all faculty records. We have to 'mirror' all the files, so we have all 17 schools' personnel records in our office," Haugland explains. "Now they're checking their files against our 'gold files.'"

Many now use Laserfiche themselves, including Marshall School of Business, Keck School of Medicine, Career and Protective Services, and Facility Management.

"People that were afraid of the scanner saw that we were green and more secure and we weren't losing anything," Brown offers.

"Disaster recovery has really been the catalyst for enterprise-wide adoption of Laserfiche," Haugland says. "All institutions of higher education – especially when it comes to stimulus funding – are facing higher compliance issues. We're able to report accurately and quickly, and that affects everybody."

USC Provost Office Timeline

- **2005**: Provost Marty Levine's need for data-indexed faculty records searches catalyzes Laserfiche adoption.
- **2007**: Backlog conversion of faculty records scans and indexes 160 feet of files.
- **2008**: 'Gold files' established for use with other schools.
- **2009**: Staff begins using Laserfiche for active faculty career file management.

"It really is stages of enterprise. In 2007, we started with the faculty records in our office, and scanned and indexed 160 feet of files. In 2008, for schools that had other records that needed to be preserved, we made our 'gold files' comprehensive. In 2009, we're exploring what we call faculty career management, where we're able to keep the file current and active even after retirement."

David Haugland, USC Vice Provost
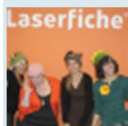
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