

Archives and records management strategies to support academic service delivery at the Universities of Witwatersrand and Universities of Venda

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the alignment of archives and records management processes with the overall university management strategy. The South African universities' strategies are not aligned with records management processes. A qualitative method was used to collect data from the source points through purposeful sampling. At both universities of Venda and Witwatersrand, the study revealed that records management is not align aligned with the university's broad strategy. The findings have practical implications for academic service delivery, governance, compliance and risk exposure. Other related institutions can also use the findings as a reference point in planning the implementation of similar studies.

Keywords: Records management, University management strategy, Archives and records management, Measurement

1. Introduction

Proper care and management of records throughout their entire life cycle are of critical importance towards good governance and transparency. Even though universities are not obliged to comply with the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (NARSSA Act), they are interested in records management to support key programmes such as research and student administration. However, what still seems to be a gap in the body of knowledge is the integration of records management practices into the university's overall university corporate strategy. The university management has to demonstrate that they meet its objectives and perform its role of teaching, learning and conducting research. Hence, records are created and used to meet institutional mandates (Kulcu 2009). Records management occupies a strategic position in the university system, meaning it is central in the administration of universities. The records management function is a key enabler that supports governance, risk management and compliance. The relationship between risk management and records management is central to the records management discipline (Phiri & Tough 2018). The information management landscape requires universities to adopt strategies to manage records as a resource meant to serve the university community. Apart from records management, risk management remains a vital process of risk assessment within an institution that has an impact on the success of the organisation (Ferguson-Boucher & Convery 2011:233). According to Erima and Wamukoya (2014:24), the key risks faced by the universities are non-compliance with statutory obligations, lack of records management support and lack of access to information.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Frank (2013:239) indicated that the risk associated with records stored in the Electronic Records Management System relate to security, the privacy of information and the completeness and authenticity of records.

1.1 Background of the study

Although South Africa has 26 public universities, this study only focused on the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Venda. The rationale for the selection of these universities was mainly based on their respective representation as previously advantaged and disadvantaged universities. At both universities, records management practices were not used as a performance measurement of the university. This confirmed the finding of the study conducted by Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) confirming the neglect of records management in South Africa.

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) was established in 1982 in a rural area of Venda and served the previously disadvantaged black communities in South Africa. The apartheid government established the former black universities to be inferior in all aspects to other racial universities. The University of Venda is situated in the Limpopo province, which is one of the underdeveloped provinces among the nine provinces in South Africa. The university served mostly the disadvantaged former Venda homelands students, which are predominately disadvantaged black communities.

On the other hand, the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) was established in 1922 in Gauteng for the previously advantaged white students in South Africa. This university was supported by the National Party government and its apartheid higher education policies (Bunting 2006). During the apartheid period, this university was not permitted to admit black students because of the apartheid legislation. According to Bunting (2006), the university took academic freedom to imply that the university could teach whatever they deemed to be essential and that they could admit all who qualified for admission to any of their academic programmes.

2. Problem statement

There are limited studies on records management practice as part of the overall university management strategy. For example, Adom-Nyankey and Andoh (2021), Phiri and Tough (2018); Asogwa, Ezeani and Asogwa (2021) conducted research on university records management strategies. Records management functions are not fully recognised as strategic functions (Lowry 2017). Despite their significance, they are ignored in the records management programmes (Adom-Nyankey & Andoh 2021). Khumalo and Chigariro (2017) state that a lack of records management strategy could lead to risk exposure concerning the inaccessibility of information. At both selected universities, lack of recognition of records management led to a low profile of the records-keeping functions, resulting in poor funding and low investment in personnel. It also contributed to recording backlog, poor storage facilities and small budget. Records management should be considered a strategic function within a university with the necessary objectives, responsibilities, mandates and resources (Dikopoulou 2011:128).

3. Purpose of the study

The study aimed to investigate archives and records management strategies as key enablers of academic service delivery. The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To find out records management practice as part of the university management strategy

- To assess the measurement of records management performance in the university.

4. Research methodology

This study was based on a qualitative case study approach. Secondary and primary sources of data were used to analyse the use of records management practices in the university strategy. This study was based on key respondent interviews with staff at the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Venda, as well as a literature review. The findings are summarised in a table and comparisons made to generate insights into the factors that influence records management performance in universities. Data were collected through a questionnaire, which was in line with the objective of the study. As reflected in figure 1 below, some participants were available for the interview and to complete the questionnaire, while others were only available for one option. In the figure below, "No" indicates that tools were not used while "Yes" indicates tools were used to collect data.

Table 1: Population of the study

Division, Departments, Units	Positions	Interviewed	Questionnaire
Communications and Marketing	Director of Communication and Marketing- 1 UNIVEN	No	Yes
	Director of Communication and Marketing- 1 WITS	Yes	No
Human resources	Human Resources Officer – 1 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Human Resources Officer – 2 WITS	Yes	No
Financial services	Heads of Division – 1 UNIVEN	No	Yes
	Heads of Division – 1 WITS	Yes	No
Facilities management	Head of Division – 1 UNIVEN	No	Yes
	Deputy Director: Facilities and Infrastructure – 1 WITS	Yes	No
Information Communication Technology services	Chief Information Officer – 1 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Information Officers – 2 WITS	Yes	No
International Relations	Acting Director: International Relations – 1 UNIVEN	No	Yes
	Acting Director: International Relations – 1 WITS	Yes	No

Division, Departments, Units	Positions	Interviewed	Questionnaire
Institutional planning and Quality Assurance	Quality Officer – 2 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Quality Officer – 1 WITS	Yes	No
Legal services	Director: Legal Services – 1 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Acting Director: Legal Services – 1 WITS	No	Yes
Library Services	Library Officers – 2 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Librarian – 4 WITS	Yes	No
Director of Research and innovation	Acting Director – 1 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Research Officer – 1 WITS	No	Yes
Dean of students	Acting Director of students affairs – 1 UNIVEN	NO	Yes
	Acting Dean of students – 1 WITS	Yes	No
Office of the Registrar	Head of Department: Records and Archives as well as Archivist – 2 UNIVEN	Yes	No
	Records Manager and archivist (including the retired records managers and archivist) – 3 WITS	Yes	No
Grant Total Number of selected study respondents	15 from University of Venda and 19 from the University of Witwatersrand	17	7

There were few participants from the University of Venda because it is a small university. This means that the total number of staff who participated in the interview processes was 34. Important questions raised in this regard based on the research objectives were as follows:

- Why is records management practice not part of university management strategy?
- Why measure records management performance in the university?

5. Literature review

This section presents the literature review for the study.

5.1 Records management practice as part of the university management strategy

As universities become increasingly interested in improving governance to achieve strategic outcomes, alignment between records management practices and university management strategy is of critical importance. Understanding the nature and role of records management practices within South African universities is critical for good governance. The rationale for universities to develop a strategic plan is to measure performance and be accountable for the utilisation of resources. Records are considered a vital asset that must be well managed to realise an institution's strategic objectives (Chinyemba & Ngulube 2005; Keakopa 2013). Therefore, WITS and UNIVEN manage their records as assets to support the university's strategic objectives. A study by Asogwa (2013:15) found that universities can only be effective and efficient if records management is viewed as a business process designed to support an institution's objectives. Asogwa's (2013) study at three federal universities in Nigeria found that records created by the institution were at high risk of misuse and loss without university-wide strategy and standards for e-records and digital preservation.

According to Van Wyk and Du Toit (2016:109), the lack of an integrated records management strategy was a risk for universities in developing countries. A case study conducted by Momoti and King (2019) at the University of the Western Cape revealed that the records management function was not fully implemented, nor fully integrated with other business processes. There was a lack of fully integrated university functions, implying that records management was not contributing to the universities' strategic objectives. Lack of records management strategy is cited as the cause of ineffective accountability and transparency governance in universities such as the Moi University in Kenya (Erima & Wamukoya 2012:31). A study by Seniwoliba, Mahama and Abilla (2017) found that most higher education records management programmes were not incorporated into the corporate strategy. The above-mentioned scholars recommended that records management programmes should be incorporated into the university-wide strategic initiatives. This statement is alluded to by Musembe (2016) who states that placement records management in organisational structure is an indication of responsibility and commitment by the management and organisation towards uplifting the records management programme. This implies that the executive management of universities embraced the records management function to ensure its effectiveness and should be incorporated into their performance targets.

Integrating records management with university strategy does not translate into the transformation of records management. According to Vehkalahti (2016:434), even with universities that have approved records management policies, such strategic documents were not implemented. This implied that records management is not valued or managed properly in most universities. Based on the above context, the researchers are of the view that records management must be placed under the strategic wing of an organisation. Hence, university records need to be managed at a higher level of the university echelon in such a way that the

institutional repository can be recognised and incorporated into a university's governance process.

According to Giba-Fosu, (2020), records management programmes in African universities have not been documented as is done in developed countries. A study conducted by Muchaonyerwa and Khayundi (2014:47) indicated that most African organisations lacked integrated records management strategies. For example, in their study of the National University of Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe, Khumalo and Chigariro (2017) found non-effective records management strategies. Netshakhuma (2019c) highlighted the challenge of lack of records and archives management within an institution. This implied a possible bridge in accessing personal and confidential information. There was a need to develop a records management strategy that must be fully integrated into the university's corporate-wide strategy to promote access to and security of information. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005:41) suggest that access and information security must be identified and classified as a risk, which led to the failure of capturing and preservation of records in East and Southern African universities.

Strategic risks arise from the decisions that the university council took concerning institution objectives. A university council may decide on the risk elements that impact the university's functions. This is because the university council is responsible for developing an institutional strategy (De La Rey 2015). According to Brown (2014:3), universities keep records of property and insurance. However, other organisations ensured that commercial records, trade records, geological and mining research were protected in line with the national legislation (Asogwa & Ezema 2017:333). Records managers and archivists value commercial records when providing access to archives (Masanes 2006:142; Harries 2012:113).

A study conducted by Vehkalahti (2016:438) stated that records management programmes provide information about decision-making to prevent strategic risk. These implied universities establishing a records management strategy to document council decisions. Section 14 of the Higher Education Act of South Africa, No. 107 of 1997, requires universities to preserve council decision records. Nevertheless, many South African universities lack records management strategies to preserve university records as a result of a lack of records management strategy. This statement referred to Jones and O'Neil (2014:114) who state that a lack of records management strategy implied ineffective records management system.

5.2 Measurement of records management practice performance in the universities

Performance measurement generated interest in universities. Quality performance, task accomplishment and measurable outcomes depend on the accessibility of records (Amanchukwu & Ololube 2015). A functioning records management system is important for the university to conduct fulfil their teaching, learning, engagement and research mandate (Phiri & Tough 2018). Records and information management is regarded as the pillar of the university because institution's activities are based on access to the information contained (Nwaomah 2017). The international standards for records management (ISO 15489 1; 2001) indicate access as the right opportunity and means of finding, using or retrieving information (Namukasa 2017). Luyombya and Sennabulya (2012) state that national standards are useful to benchmark records-keeping performance. It is recognised that the right to information is a key to the fulfilment of other rights such as privacy (Ndenje-Sichalwe & Ngulube 2009). This statement refers to Netshakhuma (2019) who indicate that establishing a records management programme enhances accurate retrieval and timely availability of records needed, and this would reduce the challenge of access and preservation of university records management.

In a study conducted by Mukred, Yusof, Alotaibi and Mokhtar (2019) it was found that, in Yemeni universities and community colleges where there is higher professional education (HPE), records are generated that need to be managed to increase the performance of the education. This is because records can be differentiated from successful and failed organisations. Records management is key to institutional performance. A study conducted by Tagbotor, Adzido and Agbanu (2015), Abdulrahman (2015), and Aramide, Ajibola, Olatunji and Oduroye (2020) found that records ensure that the organisation met its defined financial, legal, social or moral obligations. A study by Akporhonor (2011) found ineffective records management and recommended that state university libraries create records because of their historical, financial and evidential value. This implied that the development of a records management strategy must be based on ISO 15489 -2016 (Mosweu & Rakemane 2019). ISO 15489 – 2016 emphasises linking records management strategy to legal, policy regulatory framework, an appropriate organisational structure, awareness, raising, capacity building and proper records storage. Records should be managed to ensure they are protected for administrative purposes and to serve concerted action from groups of people (Seniwoliba et al. 2017). Records are consulted as proof of business activity by executive managers, auditors or by anyone inquiring into a decision, a process or the performance of an organisation or individuals.

Ngoepe and Ngulube (2014:148) indicate that the records management function was considered inadequate because most of the financial officers were not trained in records management, which implied that they would not manage records according to the principle of retention of financial records, implementation of systematic disposal of records and access to information. It was noted by Netshakhuma (2019b) that without effective records management, the university could not reach its objectives. Good governance informs decision-making and records management is the source of information that can be used to make meaningful decisions.

Most records management divisions, departments or units in South Africa are not part of an audit committee (Netshakhuma 2019a:64). The risk related to mismanagement of records was identified by external auditors during auditing processes in Southern Africa (Asogwa 2013:805). Furthermore, most of the finance departments in an institution's financial business processes were not aligned with records management processes to respond to the audit queries. For example, developing countries such as Jamaica experienced ineffective records management in their banking system and a weak regulatory framework. The lack of records management audits contributed to the collapse of Jamaica's commercial banks as a result of a lack of business processes integration to ARM processes (Cox & Wallace 2002:268). An effective bank system is dependent on a records management system (Cox & Wallace 2002:217). Hence, a good basis of records management for accountability was essential to maintain internal control. Organisational leadership should play a meaningful role in documenting records. Furthermore, there was no dedicated department responsible for records management.

Paterson (2015:115) states that records management is an integral part of the university strategy. Activities operated within the university require records keeping such as student services, academic staff administration, research, library services, facilities management, marketing, community engagement and management information. Records management is part of universities' broader function and is primarily concerned with managing the evidence of the mitigation of risk.

6. Findings of the study

This section presents the findings of the study

6.1 Records management practice as part of the university management strategy

The records management strategy provides guidelines on records management. As demonstrated in figure 1 below, the records management practices of selected institutions were assessed as part of the university strategy. As compared to UNIVEN where 12 (80%) of the participants indicated that their records management practices are not part of the university management strategy, 9 (47,4%) of the participants at WITS stated that their institutional records management practices are aligned to the university’s strategy. The absence of a clearly defined, articulated and enforced records management practice and the low level or absence of executive commitment to and support of records management practice are a challenge to university development.

Based on data analysis, the university must ensure that there are clear links between the university records management functions and university strategy so that personal performance is directly linked to organisational performance information.

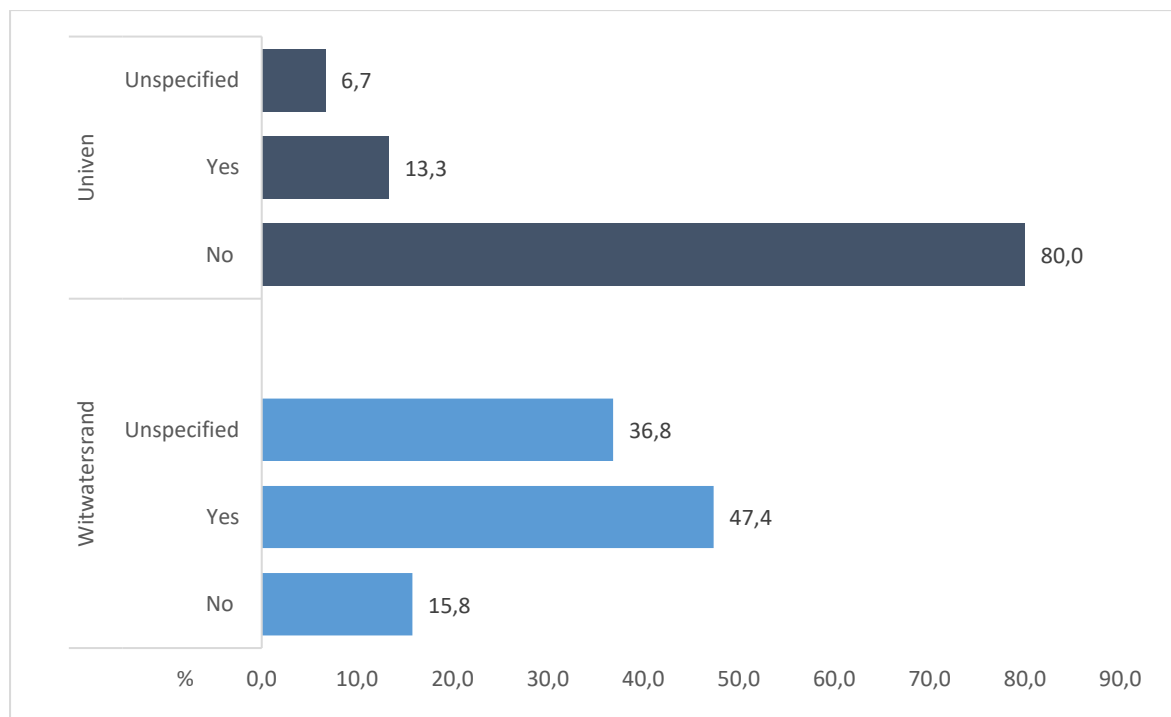


Figure 1: Records management practice as part of the university management strategy

Source: Field data 2019

Based on data analysis, the researchers found that the WITS records management practices as part of the university strategy compared to UNIVEN. At WITS, it appeared that there was no implementation plan on records management practices. Furthermore, WITS lacked a records management operational plan, which implied that records management practices were not part of its strategy. The fact that there was no operational plan implied that the university’s records management division did not value records management practices. The fact that UNIVEN did not have a records management strategy posed a strategic risk because the issue of the records management practices could not be prioritised by a higher level of the university committees, such as the council committee, management committee and risk management committee.

UNIVEN had to develop archives and records management strategies to improve governance, transparency and accountability. Neither of the universities had a strategy that is linked to the university strategy.

6.2 Measurement of records management practice performance in the university

Participants were asked about the measurement of records management practice performance in the university. As compared to UNIVEN where 7 (46,7%) of the participants indicated the availability of an approved risk management strategy, 13 (68,4%) of the participants at WITS acknowledged the availability of an approved risk management strategy. This information shows the level of poor internal controls, which meant that managers did not pay attention to how records were managed at the divisional level. Thus, this gap was also an indication of management inefficiencies in record management where operational activities were carried out without paying attention to proper records management. However, the researcher found that both universities established a risk management committee in line with the risk management strategy, which includes information security management elements. However, records managers from both universities were not part of the risk management committee.

Both universities lacked information security controls to protect the confidentiality and integrity of records. Universities lacked internal controls to prevent, limit and detect unauthorised access to computing resources, programmes, information and facilities. The review of the universities' master risk plan confirmed that the information security classification register was not yet developed despite the availability of the risk management strategy. However, the majority of participants in both universities thought that records management programmes were important for achieving efficiency and effectiveness in the administrative systems of universities.

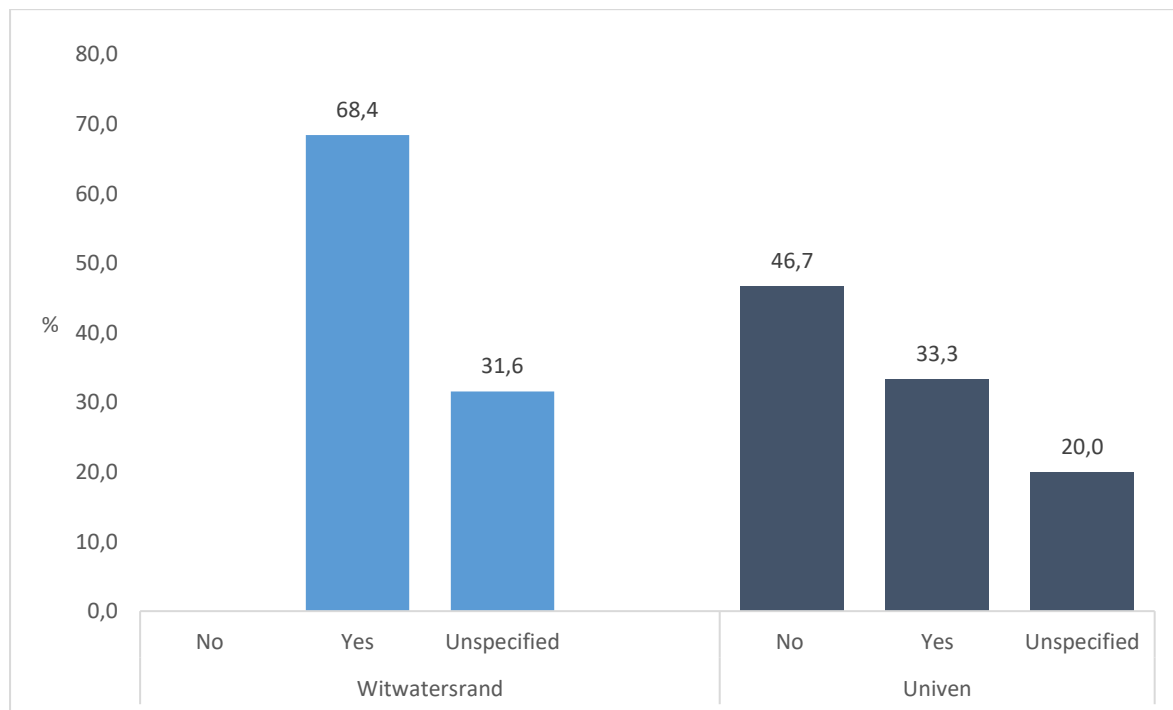


Figure 2: Measurement of records management practice performance in the universities
Source: Field data 2019

The finding indicated shortcomings in the processes of managing records management practice in the university. This is so because records managers were not part of the risk management committee issues related to records security, disaster recovery and unauthorised access to records are not considered. It is incumbent upon the executive management of the university to strive towards understanding and improving their oversight roles and responsibilities in the management of records.

Both universities need to consider records management practices as part of risk management. The records management division must collaborate with the risk management department to mitigate institutional risk based on their approved risk management strategy. The risk found at WITS was the absence of proper and up-to-date records retention schedules while UNIVEN lacked a records retention schedule to implement disposal of records. Furthermore, the appraisal of records was non-existent at both universities.

The value of a risk management strategy to create, process, store and preserve records cannot be overemphasised. Both universities developed a risk management strategy but their strategy lacked records management-related components such as security of records, access to records and disposal of records. This implied that records management functions were not included in the university risk management strategy. The fact that the risk management strategy did not include the records management implied that universities faced challenges of loss of institutional memory and ineffective decision-making. This statement was confirmed by Erima and Wamukoya (2012:32) who indicated that the risk assessment scope covered the record management functions so that university records management practices did not pose any legislative or business risk. Risk management, internal auditing and records management were regarded as records management components (Ngoepe & Ngulube 2013:49). The study also found that some of the staff stored university records on personal computers, which compromised records security. To mitigate the risk of this nature, most organisations opt for the implementation of electronic records management systems. Internal control to manage financial records was not effective, which posed a challenge to the records management of both universities.

7. Recommendations

Records management practice should be considered part of the university management strategy. This would assist in creating support for personnel development, and budgets for equipment and facilities. Records management must be fully integrated with the university's strategic risk management plan.

Universities need to develop business continuity plans and contingency measures to ensure that vital records for the continued functioning of the universities are identified as part of their risk analysis and are protected. The university risk committee should include a records management specialist as a member of the committee and records management should incorporate strategies for disaster management, including vital records management. Records management must ensure that auditing or assessment based on records management standards is incorporated within the university. This means that there is a need to assess their viability and conformance with recognised and accepted ARM standards and best practices.

8. Conclusion

Based on the study findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the lack of alignment of the records management processes with the university's processes and strategy would negatively

contribute to transparency, governance and accountability. To mitigate the risk of poor governance and accountability, records management processes must be defined and embedded in the university's processes and strategy. In principle, records management must be a key enabler for the university's service delivery, governance and research. For the records management strategy to be successful, there is an urgent need for executive buy-in and support. Proper management systems and processes that are fully integrated within the university's system improve the retrieval rate of the records. Taking this integrated approach will ensure that all records, irrespective of the system from which they are generated, are properly preserved. Proper management and care of records throughout the entire life cycle within the university will also contribute to improving the performance of the university, especially concerning student services, research and decision-making.

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