



USC Streamlines Faculty Record Document Management

- By Dian Schaffhauser
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The [University of Southern California](#) has gone public with its use of [Laserfiche](#) document management software broadly across campus. The wide deployment has been part of a four-year effort to expedite access to data contained in faculty personnel records.

In 2005, when the adoption of Laserfiche started, USC had 3,100 full-time and 1,300 part-time faculty, which meant the Provost's Office was straddling a campus-wide legacy payroll system and individual colleges' respective personnel records. According to the institution, this generated inefficiency and confusion--and a mountain of paperwork that took up space and 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," said David Haugland, associate vice provost. "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."

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, for instance, what female faculty members had been promoted in the last five years," Haugland said.

The university chose the Laserfiche suite for its ease of use and customization. The software allows the user to scan paper documents, import electronic documents, or convert electronic documents into images, then add metadata, extract searchable text, or perform optical character recognition. USC is also using several add-on modules from the company. Quick Fields culls through the data from documents and pulls out specific pieces of information. Snapshot converts electronic files into TIFF images and imports them into a Laserfiche repository. A Web Access function lets multiple users work on documents from the repository through a web browser.

Desiree Brown, faculty services coordinator, began the implementation with a single school's set of records, "looking at them like they were in a file cabinet only on my desk."

By 2007, the institution began a backlog conversion of faculty records using [Fujitsu](#) scanners and Laserfiche to scan and index 160 feet worth of files. As the application was more widely used, the Provost's office sought to reconcile its 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.

In 2008, in an attempt to eliminate inefficiencies and redundancies of duplication across schools, a team that included Brown designed a standardized field template, 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," Brown said. "We were able to do all our own scanning in-house using both Fujitsu fi-4340C and fi-5750C scanners." she said. The custom template, for instance, allows a user to update faculty status from active to sabbatical quickly.

Brown has almost achieved a paperless desk. "Anything that comes in, I scan it using the Fujitsu fi-4340C scanner which is fast, accurate, and allows us to scan both sides automatically. Then, I can pass it along as an e-mail," she said. "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 and reducing storage and processing costs) to the critical (disaster recovery, transparency, and compliance).

"Our office is the custodian for all faculty records," said Haugland. "We have to 'mirror' all the files, so we have all 17 schools' personnel records in our office. Now those 17 schools are checking their files against our 'gold files.'"

Now many other USC departments--including the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences, and the USC Keck School of Medicine--are using the system to create electronic archives and workflows.

"The time saving that Fujitsu and Laserfiche have provided us is substantial," concluded Brown. "A lot of the benefits are subjective. But turnaround times, compliance--we know we're better than we were."

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

In the latest stage of use, the university is exploring faculty career management, keeping personnel files current and active even after retirement, said Haugland. "Disaster recovery has really been the catalyst for enterprise-wide adoption of Laserfiche," he explained. "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."

About the Author

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