HIM Students Help Build an Innovative Path to Information Governance

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Getting started with information governance (IG) requires research, documentation, and understanding what information and applications need to be included in the IG program. There are times when students can be used to help with this IG preparation, an act that benefits the healthcare facility while also exposing future HIM students to cutting edge HIM practices.

The following case study taken from the work of AHIMA's IGAdvisors[TM] shows the value IG can provide to both organizations and health information management (HIM) students when the right people take IG seriously.

Information Governance Adoption Model
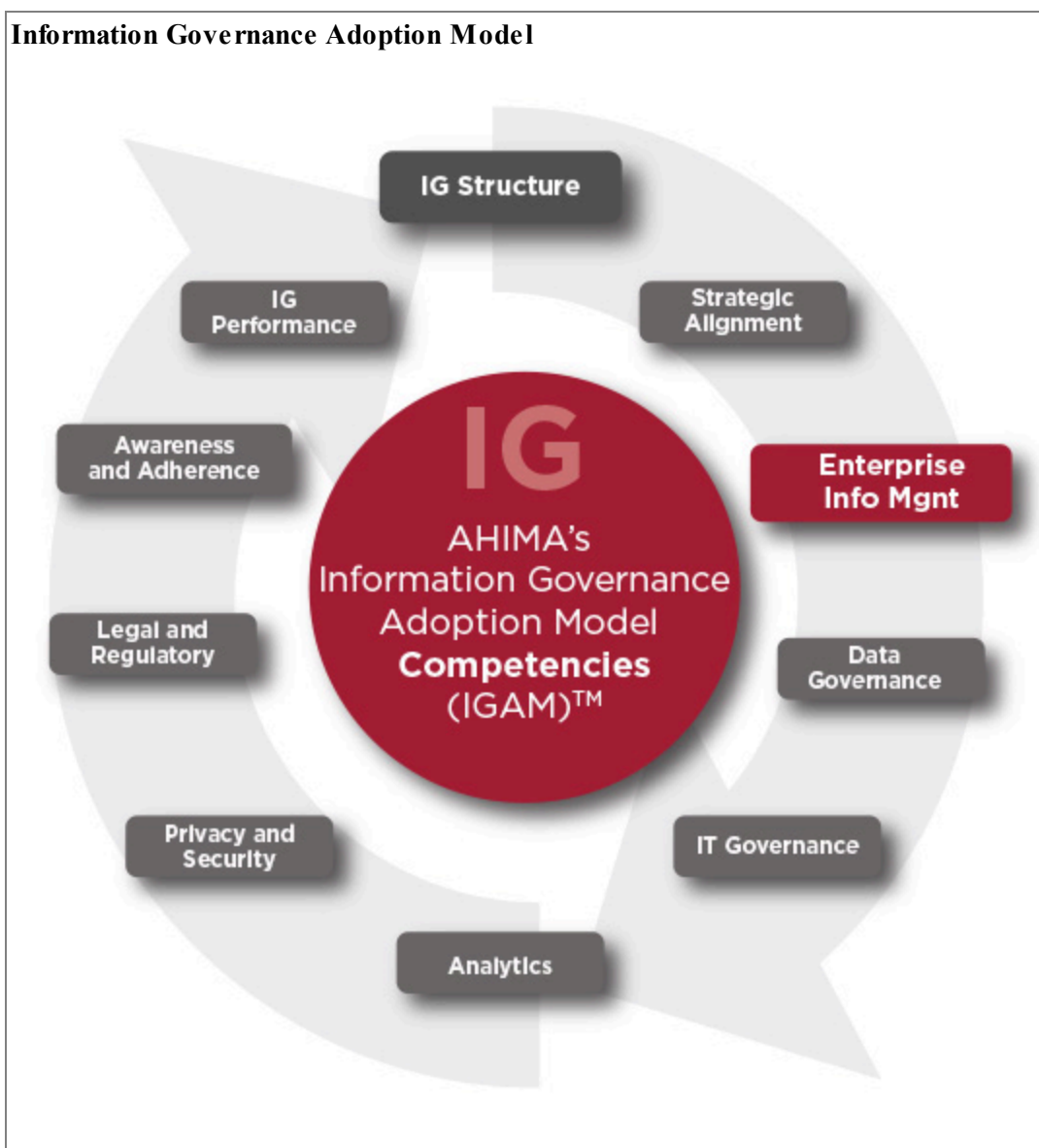
IG Case Study: University of Washington Medicine Health System

The purpose of this case study is to illustrate the process in which UW Medicine Health System (UW Medicine) used HIM students to conduct interviews about database applications at UW Medicine for information governance purposes. This is also referred to as UW Medicine's "Information Asset" project.

Organization Profile

UW Medicine comprises eight entities:

1. Harborview Medical Center (HMC)
2. University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC)
3. Northwest Hospital and Medical Center (NWH)
4. Valley Medical Center (VMC)
5. UW Neighborhood Clinics (UWNC)
6. University of Washington School of Medicine
7. University of Washington Physicians (UWP)
8. Airlift Northwest

The health system employs more than 26,000 employees, all of whom contribute to a strategic plan that supports the three major activities advancing UW Medicine's mission. That mission includes providing outstanding patient care and health promotion programs; advancing medical knowledge through research; and training the next generation of healthcare professionals and scientists. Patient care, teaching, and research activities are integrated to support better care for individual patients, better health for the population, and reduced per capita costs for patients.

Strategic Direction

UW Medicine's HIM department is directly responsible for managing medical records for HMC, UWMC, and UWNC, and for enterprise information management at UW Medicine. One of the IG projects involving enterprise information management at UW Medicine is to determine the content of the database applications used at the health system. The project involves conducting surveys or interviews with the "owners" of every application database. It also requires collaborating with the IT services department to identify which systems have lifecycle management, and identifying new record series that need to be updated and added to the records retention schedule.

Approach and Implementation

To help with the asset inventory part of UW Medicine's IG efforts, the IG project leads submitted a capstone proposal to local HIM programs in the Seattle area requesting student involvement. UW Medicine decided not to accept more than two students for the information asset project per quarter or semester.

Under this project, the HIM students conducted 30-minute interviews with each application owner, either in person or by telephone. The application owner could be anyone in the organization that is responsible for a particular database application. They could also be content owners or application administrators. Records management services (RMS) developed the questionnaire, and trained the students to conduct the interviews. RMS sat in on the first two interviews for training purposes. Subsequent interviews were conducted solely by the students.

At first, it was difficult for the students to understand the content and workflow of each application owner. However, after a few interviews, students were able to adjust their methods to interview properly. The students used a standardized survey instrument that involved questions related to the specific content and workflow for each database. Students were then responsible for analyzing the content and storing completed work in SharePoint. Metadata fields were developed in SharePoint to track and analyze these survey results to determine the next steps for records management.

Creating an Organization Survey Tool

Each of UW's eight sites has different needs when it comes to the desired end result of their survey tool. The creation of this tool must accommodate those specific needs of each organization. It must be customized so that all application owners can gauge the current state of their organization's applications.

Some application systems are more complex than others and thus the answers to the survey can vary. Aside from general application information, the survey tool should include questions about an application's purpose, content, workflow, outputs, and legacy systems.

Furthermore, the tool should also ask if the application's information is readily available, if it has integrity, and its category. Category types could include information about staff members' health, human resources information, physician contracts, or protected health information. The tool also addresses who has access to an application, where it can be utilized or viewed, whether there's a system to purge the information after the retention schedule obligations have been met, and whether the information should be sunsetted or archived.

Once the survey tool has been developed, organizations can use students to gather and analyze the information. This new analyzed information can be used to determine areas of improvement and target areas for further information governance work.

Return on Investment

Now that UW Medicine RMS has reached the halfway mark of the Information Asset project, trends are emerging. The project has identified that while the majority of the applications surveyed thus far have legal retention periods, there is a clear need to develop new retentions. In addition, content requiring long term digital preservation has been documented, and will provide the jumping off point for RMS and IT to work toward solutions for that content. Opportunities for process improvements related to data workflow have also been highlighted. However, the most challenging thing to quantify in terms of return on investment is the shift in culture this project is accomplishing. RMS and the students are using the interviews with application "owners" as a chance to emphasize collaboration, and underscore the meaning and importance of enterprise information management in terms of supporting compliance and mitigating risk to the enterprise.

Sample Database Inventory Tool

This sample tool shows the wide range of content that can be reviewed during an information asset inventory IG project.

	Organization/Area Name			Information Asset Details
Name of Asset	**Operating Unit / Function**	**System Name**	**Process Owner**	**Description of Asset**
Employee Application System	Human Resources	Lawson	Ann Downing	Application completed to apply for employment
PACS Imaging and storage	PACS Imaging System	McKesson PACS	Susie Zink	PACS Image and long-term image storage

	Information Asset Details	
Name of Asset	**Description of Asset Content**	**Type of Information Asset [Hard copy, Electronic File (specify type), removable media/device (specify type)]**
Employee Application System	Contains application, resume, background check results, etc.	Electronic .xls template file
PACS Imaging and storage	Contains mammograms, ultrasounds, etc.; Contains monitoring data	Electronic .ti template file

	Information Asset Details				
Name of Asset	**Personal Data (Y/N)**	**Personal Sensitive Data (Y/N)**	**Sensitive Customer Data (Y/N)**	**Classification**	**Integrity**

| Employee Application System | Y | Y | N | | Confidential | Medium |
| PACS Imaging and storage | Y | Y | Y | | Sensitive | High |

| | Information Asset Details | | | Current Level of Protection | | |
Name of Asset	Availability	Data Steward	Data Retention Period	At Origin (description)		
Employee Application System	Low	Kristi Doupnik	–	High - Access resticted and password protected at user level		
PACS Imaging and storage	High	Kathy Jones	–	High - Access resticted and password protected at user level		

Asset Inventory Project Details

Overall, the students dedicated three to five hours per week to the asset inventory project and conducted over 10 interviews in a four-week period of time. Having students do this work was beneficial for both parties. Not only did it help UW Medicine conduct organized interviews, it also gave the students a sense of scope and inter-relationships of the content as well as the applications. Going forward, UW Medicine will continue to use students for the Information Asset project as information governance continues to mature at the organization.

IG-related projects take planning and resources. However, with creative thinking around these projects, organizations may be able to tap into HIM and other healthcare-related students; absorb the work into other related projects; or carve out the needed time as the IG program streamlines other processes by increasing efficiency and productivity. A formalized information governance program will enable proactive work to ensure operational efficiency. HIM professionals can take pride in offering students the opportunity to get a head start on a meaningful healthcare career by taking part in IG projects.

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