

**THE NATURE AND INFORMATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE ARCHIVES OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA:
THE OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY EXAMPLE.**

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Abstract

This paper reviewed the definition of archives and its relevance to research and learning in the universities and higher institutions in Nigeria. It attempted to analyze the various record groups in the university system with a view to identifying their research values and significance to literature using the archives of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, as an example. The paper proffered recommendations such as the inauguration of the records and archives management committee and the establishment of records and archival management policies in Obafemi Awolowo University and other higher institutions in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: RECORDS MANAGEMENT, INFORMATION MATERIALS,
UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, RESEARCH

Introduction

The continuous flow of information is an indispensable tool for survival from generation to generation. In the course of human existence, records of different kinds are created to serve as living evidence of people's transactions from time to time. These informational materials that are so created vary in origin, purpose and relevance to human activities over time. In addition, their nature also determines the manner in which they are stored and kept for posterity. It is in an attempt to conserve them that institutions like libraries, archives and conservatoires have been developed throughout the world.

The existence of archives generally is not new but the development and management of academic archives in universities, colleges and other higher institutions in Nigeria is a relatively new phenomenon. Some attempts made over the years by some universities to develop archives for their institutions have not gone beyond mere proposals. Historically, even in advanced countries such as America, the development of college and university archives was a much more younger phenomenon than that of the conventional public archives and only dates back to the 1950s (Maher, 1992). The development in the U.S. however underwent three phases. The first was as a result of the Society of American Archivists' attempt to professionalize and systematize archival work, the second was as a result of the extension in the size and diversity of American higher education from the 1945s - 1970s and the third was as a result of the growth in higher education and the attendant need to source for funds to improve the control of institutional records as well as write their histories (Maher, 1992).

In the same vein, the history of university education alone among other higher institutions in Nigeria dates back to 1948 with the establishment of University College of Ibadan (now University of Ibadan). The geometric growth of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other higher institutions calls for the need to fashion out an archival programme in order to manage institutional documents for administrative effectiveness, efficiency and research.

The rationale for this paper therefore focuses on the fact that universities and higher institutions of learning in Nigeria generate a wide range of records that are of great archival value. Nevertheless, the consciousness or awareness that these documents are of tremendous research value is lacking. Consequently, the inherent values in these archives remain untapped, underutilized and are being lost to posterity. It is also pertinent to mention that these alternative sources of information in the areas of higher educational planning remain unexploited as a result of ignorance and apathy being displayed in the area of management of these archives. This development is analogous to 'suffering in the midst of plenty'. There is an explosion of information in the academic system, yet there appears to be so much dearth of information. This trend is not also without its economic and financial implications. Researches that could easily be done by utilizing information from the academic archives are belaboured by the search for more time consuming and more expensive means of data collection. This is neither cost effective nor resourceful enough.

Having discussed the rationale for this paper; the main objectives of this study are the following:

1. To create an awareness of the research and informational values of archives of universities and higher institutions in Nigeria;
2. To analyze and enumerate the research and informational significance of the various record groups available, using Obafemi Awolowo University as an example; and
3. To propose steps for the establishment of an archives in Obafemi Awolowo University and other higher institutions in Nigeria.

Definition, Values and Relevance of Archives to Universities and Higher Institutions

Before proceeding to define and give an overview of what university and college archives are, this paper will examine two general definitions of archives, both having a relationship with each another.

Firstly, Cook (1983) defined archives as: “documents (or other media of information) which were originally kept for reason of administrative reference and have turned out to have an enduring or long term value for research”. From the above definition, one clear deduction that could be made is that not every record created is of archival value. In most cases, records that are described as archives are appraised on two values namely:

- a. **Evidential value:** These are records that “document how an organization came into being, how it developed, how it was organized, what its function has been and the results of activities (Maedke, *et al.*, 1981). An example of this is a copy of an Act of Parliament that provides for the establishment of an institution.
- b. **Informational value:** This category of records simply gives information as the name implies. They are otherwise referred to as records of research value (Maedke *et al.*, 1981). Examples of these are an institution’s calendar/prospectus or the students’ enrolment register/record for a particular session.

On the other hand, Maedke *et al.* (1981) explained archives as “an area utilized for storage of inactive records, manuscripts, papers, and memorabilia which are retained permanently for the benefit of the scholar and posterity” There is a link between the two definitions; the former are eventually housed for storage and the latter for posterity and are accessible to researchers.

However, Maher (1992) in his definition of academic archives states that:

A college or university archives is a program consisting of policy, personnel, holdings and facilities structured to preserve and make accessible the documentary heritage of an institution of higher education. The documents are selected and handled in a systematic way based on archival theory and technique. The basic goal of the archives is to aid the institution in its survival and growth especially by making sure that the institution's roots in the past are not severed. At the same time, the academic archives contribute to the institution's educational mission by enriching the lives of the campus community. The archives should support teaching and learning and assist scholars and the general public in using documents to understand and explain the past (p.7).

Generally, academic archives should be able to satisfy the information needs of the creating institution. In support of this, Maher (1992) further identifies some important things that academic archives should do as highlighted below:

- It should serve as the memory of the institution;
- It should serve as the conscience of the institution through which the institution could reflect on its accomplishments and failures;
- It should give a picture of the management of information resources in the institution;
- It should support teaching and research by helping the institution in the communication and expansion of knowledge; and
- Its resources should serve the information and cultural preservation needs of the community.

Furthermore, on the issue of value, relevance and purpose of academic archives, Maher (1992) opined that every institution should be able to make clear statements on the purpose of its archives. The common elements of the mission statements of university archives repository include:

- Collection, appraisal, organization, description, preservation and dissemination of historical, legal, fiscal and administrative records;
- Provision of adequate facilities for the retention, collection, organization and dissemination of its resources;
- Promotion of the goals of the institution; and
- Facilitation of efficient records management.

Also, Blendon (1975) noted that university archives have been useful for historians involved in quantitative analysis and political history. This is because the materials represent national view points and record natural experiences.

The above exposition reveals academic archives as invaluable sources of research and learning. They form a caucus of primary data and information on administration of universities and higher institutions. They serve as 'irreplaceable' foundations from which deductions can be made, inferences drawn and upon which further researches can be based. There is no gainsaying that there is no better place to get such information than from records generated by these institutions themselves.

The Nature and Informational Characteristics of the Archives of the Obafemi Awolowo University

This section attempts to throw light on the nature, characteristics and the invaluable research materials inherent in the university records as generated by various units of the Obafemi Awolowo University system. It should be reiterated that archives are organic in nature as they are the direct results of the day-to-day activities of the various units in the system. The units listed in this representation (see Appendix I) may however bear different nomenclature in various institutions as the case may be.

In archival administration, the year of establishment of an institution is of great significance as the archives of such institutions date back to this period. In this case, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, took off formally in the year 1962 (Omosini, & Adediran, 1989) and has undergone different administrative changes and procedures over time. However, it should be noted that the dynamism in the system also constituted a part of the history and features of the archives of the University.

Moreover, the basic features of the university system remain the same even though the scope of control might have been enlarged while newer units have been created over time. However, this paper has depended on previous records and personal observations of existing operations in the University in making creative judgments. For instance, the organogram of the University as documented by Omosini and Adeniran's (1989) edited work and the current chart available at the Public Relations Office of the University are revealing. They readily give a panoramic view of the departmental/units responsible for the creation of the University records over time.

As at the time of writing this paper, the University had no archive repository though proposals had been made to establish one. No doubt, over the years, the various offices had generated a lot of archival materials in the system. As the case may be, in most higher institutions, dormant records are just stored as deemed fit by individual offices.

Without attempting to delve into records and archival management processes in this paper, the fact to be emphasized is that archives (as described in the first definition) exist in the University. Attempts will therefore be made to identify and categorize some of these record groups with the ultimate intention of bringing out their research and informational significance or relevance. The illustration is presented in Appendix I.

Appendix I gives an illustration of different types of record groups generated by various divisions/departments/units of the Obafemi Awolowo University (O.A.U.), Ile-Ife. The principle of grouping is based on broad assessment of records peculiar to each creating office. The illustration is not a comprehensive or exhaustive attempt at grouping or describing existing records/archives. This could only be achieved in the actual situation after the University has established as well as commenced a record/archival management programme.

For the purpose of this paper, the first column in Appendix I identifies some major creating offices in the University system; the second column gives a general broad description of types of records/archives emanating from the offices while the third column gives a general analysis of the informational values inherent in the records/archives with a view to creating an awareness of their innumerable contributions to research and learning.

It also suffices to say that the general principle of analysis applies to all categories of record/archives existing in all other creating offices that are not necessarily listed in this work. Also, it should be noted that the analysis is representative and it is applicable to other higher institutions in Nigeria, taking cognizance of the peculiarity of their cases.

Proposed Steps for the Establishment of Records and Archival Programmes in Obafemi Awolowo University and Other Higher Institutions in Nigeria

The work will not be fully executed without giving a green light on the need for the establishment of records/archival programme in the O.A.U and other higher institutions in Nigeria. Achieving this requires a conscious effort on the part of the University management. This can also be achieved by borrowing a leaf from universities in the

advanced countries. Much can only be learnt in this area from actual practice of existing universities' records/archival programmes. The following steps are however desirable:

1. **Declaration of a Mission/Policy Statement:** The declaration of a records and archival policy statement forms the basis of the whole project. This will serve as guidelines for preserving the permanent records of any establishment. Experience in this area could be learnt from other university records and archival programmes such as is available in the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and Harvard University Archives (UNC, Charlotte, 2003, Harvard University Archives, 2003).
2. **Need for Records/Archival Programme:** It should be noted that the archives of any establishment are not made in a day. As a result, a conscious effort needs to be made to monitor the process right from the onset. A record has three stages in its life cycle before it can be passed for an archive that will be housed in an archive repository viz: record creation, record maintenance and use, records disposal and retention (Adegboye, 1986). Hence, two offices need to be created under the management of the university archival programme. These are the record management office and the University archives (Record Management Office, Harvard University Archives, 2003; Harvard University Archives, 2002).
3. **Administrative Location of Archives:** The University also needs to determine the location of the repository or the University archives. Some universities have a separate establishment under the headship of the University Archivist while some institutions maintain their archives as a special collection within the library system (University of Oregon Libraries, 2003).
4. **Archival Holdings:** Having enumerated the values and informational characteristics, this work still seeks to present a guide for the building up of institutional archival repositories. McLaren (1975) and Dolores (n.d.) opined that university archives include among others, records of foundation and endowment, deliberations of Council and Senate, university committees, records of such bodies as libraries, health centre and career advisory offices and records pertaining to teaching and research. Others include histories, biographies, reminiscences, university publications (namely bulletins & newsletters etc.) photographs, tapes and recordings on subjects related to

the University. Rare materials such as souvenirs, relics and memorabilia are also included.

However, the work of Maher (1992) is more analytical showing ten major groupings as fundamental holdings of all academic archives. The breakdown is highlighted to serve as a guide below:

- i. The founding charter, statutes or legislative document of institution;
- ii. Agendas, minutes and all documents relating to the governing board;
- iii. Agendas, minutes of meeting of the faculty, faculty students and students-governing bodies e.g. Senate and Council;
- iv. Correspondence and records of deans, and makers; published and unpublished reports as well as academic records;
- v. Students' academic records;
- vi. Budgets and financial reports;
- vii. Publications relating to basic institutional mission such as timetables, class allocation, course/curricula/degree requirements handbooks;
- viii. Directories of faculty, staff, students, and alumni (including departmental affiliations);
- ix. Newspapers, newsletters, and other publications of students, departments and other organizations in the institution; and
- x. All publications issued by the administrative, teaching, research and students' bodies (Despite the availability of some of these in the library) (pp.25-26).

5. Methods of Acquisition, Classification & Maintenance: This will be decided by record managers/archivists/professionals in charge of the institution's records and archival programme using records management/ archival theory and principles.

6. Records Inventory and Appraisal: Records inventory and appraisal are major components of records management and archival management. Records inventory involves the listing and description of records (Maher, 1992). In doing this, according to Maher (1992), the archival "principles of respect des fonds, provenance and the sanctity of the original order" (pp.75-76) have to be taken into cognizance. These principles state that records should be arranged in the very order in which they had been created and used in their respective units. Also, regular records appraisal practices are

indispensable in order to determine when to retain or dispose records (Maher, 1992); and

7. **Personnel:** The most profitable way to maintain a university or any academic archives is by recruiting the services of trained archivists who should also earn the same academic status like other non-teaching academics (Maher, 1992). This may be very much desirable especially if the unit is going to stand independent of the University Library. It could however be suggested that if the archives is made a unit under the library administration, a librarian with a bias for archives may head the unit. Such a librarian should however be exposed to training and re-training in archival services especially by understudying such programmes ran by practicing university libraries. The unit will also need the services of other non- professionals such as clerical staff, archives assistants, computer technicians and so on.

Conclusion

Having discussed the values of university archives, it suffices to say that actions need to be taken to harness these resources for proper management. Resourceful archives are not made in a day. Apart from managing existing dormant records, new records also require proper management to facilitate the making of valuable archives of the future.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to facilitate the setting up of archives units in universities and other higher institutions of learning in Nigeria:

1. There is a need for the constitution of a records and archives management committee comprising representatives of the various faculties, departments and administrative units of the Obafemi Awolowo University/ other higher institutions;
2. The committee should be charged with the responsibility of developing the records and archival policy of the institutions;
3. Obafemi Awolowo University needs a records management office and an archives repository managed as a homogeneous collection in the University Library or kept as a separate unit of the University as may be designated by the Records Management and Archives Committee. The same principle applies to other universities and higher institutions in Nigeria; and
4. There is a need to create awareness about the importance of management and effective control of records amongst the members of staff of the University and other higher institutions.

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APPENDIX I

Table I: Sketch of Different Types of Records Generated by Various Divisions/Departments/Units of the O.A.U., Ile-Ife and their Research Values

	Creating office(s)	Types of Archives Emanating from the Office(s)	Values/Contributions of Archives Created to Research/Learning
1.	Faculties/ Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Administration records e.g. from Deans and Heads of Department Offices. - Courses/Curriculum/Examination records - Faculty Boards/Departmental Boards - Budgets - Equipment and supplies policy and procedures etc. - Personnel - Forms of different types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational administration - Curriculum development - Educational policies - History of education
2.	Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Records relating to acquisition of books and journals. - Library Equipment/Supplies - Library services and operations - Users patronage statistics - Library votes - Relationship with other cognate faculties/departments - Library Committee records - The library also presently houses copies of some of the university publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studies in Library and Information Science - Practical Library/ Information Management - Educational Finance - Vital records on information resources
3.	The Registry (a) Academic Affairs	Records relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senate matters/deliberations/Committees - Admissions - Examinations - Student statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tests and measurements/ Educational standard - Comparative educational analysis
	(b)	Records relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council matters and deliberations/ committees - University legal matters - Tenders/contracts awarded by the university 	Educational Administration Educational Finance
	(c) Student Affairs	Records relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students welfare matters - Scholarship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational psychology - Psychology general - Sociology

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance and Counseling - Halls of residence 	
	(d) General Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University publications e.g. University Calendar, Inaugural lectures News bulletin - Papers dealing with security - Immigration/Passages - Congregation papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University history - Educational development
	(e) Personnel Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic staff establishment papers - Administrative and Technical staff papers - Junior Staff establishment - Staff training and industrial relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labour related researches - Human resources Management researches.
	(f) Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring	<p>Records relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic planning - Budgeting - Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational planning - Educational finance - Education facilities/ Infrastructures
4	Bursary	<p>Records relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capital and recurrent expenditures - Salaries and remunerations - Disbursement etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational Finance
5.	Common Services (a) Medical and Health Services	<p>Papers relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health services general - Purchase an equipment/facilities - Pharmacy - Budget - Relationship with other Health organization/Hospitals etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical and Health research (including comparative studies) - Health Finance
	(b) Physical Planning	<p>Papers relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical Planning of the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studies in environmental design and management - Architecture - Infrastructures
	(c) Maintenance Services	<p>Papers relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase of equipment and facilities - Installation and maintenance services - Budget etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational infrastructure and facilities - Education finance

	(d) Computer Center	- Storage of vital information of the university processed by the center	- The services of the computer center enhances easy management of information especially in the areas of data processing. Records administration are not however controlled centrally in the university.
6.	(a) Alumni Centre	- Vital records to OAU Alumni Association	- Educational development
	(b) Public Relations Unit	It is primarily charged with the responsibility of disseminating information both within and outside the university hence they keep: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - News and correspondences within the university - News and correspondences from outside. 	- Educational development and monitoring

* The explanation is inexhaustible; it is simply a representation and may vary from institution to institution.