

The Role of Academic Archives: Prospects and Possibilities (The Case of Nazarbayev University)

Abstract

This article will take a look on the current status of adapting an academic archives for the Nazarbayev University as the main repository of historical intellectual content, an imprint of institutional legacy, and safeguards a wealth of information that preserves the academe's social memory.

Introduction

The Nazarbayev University opened its doors to the pioneer batch of Foundation students in September 2010 (Nazarbayev University, 2017). Since that time, a lot of important administrative, student, financial, and various kinds of university records have been produced by the schools, departments, faculty, students, and staff. Most records produced by the university are sources of evidence and thereby needs to be appraised for possible archiving. To prevent the loss of important records from the university, it is important to establish an academic archives within the premises of the university for easy access and retrieval of active documents and historical records.

Any intellectual product which is considered a record in itself produced by a university becomes an institutional legacy and part and parcel of a social memory. In the context of archives and libraries, these repositories of information have a wealth of knowledge that captures its institutional cultural heritage (Baker, 2013). As part of a greater community, the people of Astana and Kazakhstan will benefit from the cultural products produced by the university specially if they are well-preserved and will be available for research and analysis. This report will shed light on how the academic community of Nazarbayev University as an autonomous university that practices academic freedom and self-government (Nazarbayev University, 2013) will take action to ensure that everybody will have access to information as provided by the supposed to be academic archives.

What are Academic Archives?

In general, universities produce a wide range of records and information. Each school and department conducts regular meetings, academic events including conferences and seminars, social activities,

and other miscellaneous undertakings for students, faculty, and staff. The academic environment creates voluminous files of records that may contain very specific information that may be needed in the future when someone needs it for research.

Academic archives are cultural memory institutions of a university that stores and preserves all records of the past events and is considered to be a trusted source of information (International Council on Archives, 2016). These records are deemed permanent and has an enduring value.

Academic archives are seen as resource centers for both internal and external users specially scholars who do not have an access to such records online (Mahurter, 2014).

The International Council on Archives (2016) enumerated four qualities of an archives namely: authenticity (being true and original); reliability (accurate representation of events); integrity (the completeness and honesty of the record); and usability (having an accessible location and the record itself is readable and useful).

In most cases, the academic archives also serves as the repository of special collections in the university library since there needs a special care and attention given to the special collections of a library. Records kept in the archives including special collections contribute to the creation of new knowledge as records of the past are building blocks of new information (Schwartz, 2006). Archives are also valuable both for teaching and learning, and in building-up the image of an institution.

Archives in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan proves itself to have a number of state archives. The National Digital History of Kazakhstan provides a list of 23 State Archives within the country. In the words of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, "We need to look into the past in order to understand the present and foresee the future" (Ministry of Information and Communications of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017).

However, there needs to be a list of existing academic archives in the country.

Establishment of the Joint Archives of Nazarbayev University

The Joint Archives was established on December 2016. It maintains the administrative records of the university from 2009 to the present (Z. Sakenova, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

There is no specific type of record mentioned in the Regulations of Organization and Work of Joint Archive of the Autonomous

Organization of Education “Nazarbayev University” and its Private Entities which was approved by the Managing Council in 2017. According to the English translation of the document, the contents of the Joint Archive are primarily those created by the university and its organizations but not on a specific type of record (eg. inclusion of a yearbook, student publication, or department newsletter). Moreover, the regulation will maintain a finding aid which is very important on how to search and locate the records.

As a young department of the university, it became one of the newest member of the International Council of Archives in 2018 (Nazarbayev University, 2018). This will allow them to learn and understand archival principles, techniques and standards from colleagues from all over the world.

The NU Repository of the Library

The regulations of the open access archives (repository) of the Autonomous Organization of Education Nazarbayev University was approved by the Managing Council last 2014 and the repository started to implement in January 2015 (T. Jangulova, personal communication, August 20, 2018).

One ultimate goal of the repository is to “create a reliable and accessible system of centralized and long term storage of electronic versions of works of NU employees.” What it forgot to include was the work created by the students as part of their student life. The low turn-over of theses to the repository can be addressed and resolved if the top management will request all schools to submit student theses in the repository. A confidential record may still be tagged confidential and will respect all the rights embedded in it including any company secrecy. The obligation of the student and faculty adviser is to inform the library or the archive that theses were confidential; yet it is appropriate to submit the thesis to the archive as a final requirement and will serve as Nazarbayev University’s scholarly contribution to the society.

The Proposed Academic Archives

Any growing institution will continue to accumulate large amounts of academic records and documents. As a young university with the mission of becoming a model for higher education reform in Kazakhstan, it is the right time to create an academic archives that will “collect, preserve, and provide access to materials that document the history of an institution” (Smith, 2014).

The library strategy plan concentrates on building the library

collection such as scientific researches, reference sources, and periodicals both in print and non-print, but does not include collection and preservation of scientific and informative assets produced by the university which has a permanent historical and research value. In time, materials such as photographs, magazines, journals, theses, student publications, yearbooks, architectural prints, university-sponsored conferences, memorabilia and collaterals including but not limited to posters, brochures, and awards, videos, and audio recordings and even research data both in print and electronic versions produced by the university will be significant for research and publication. Furthermore, it adds-up to the historical identity not only of the university but of the creators of the records themselves -- the faculty, staff, and students. The power to decide on which records to retain or exclude shall be in the hands of this document as the archives role is to preserve and let people know that something valuable happened in the past and will be part of the future.

This proposal is conceptualized to establish and create an academic archives that may work hand-in-hand with the university library.

Sample identified collections that could be part of the academic archives.

Table 1. Sample collection in the academic archives

Architectural prints (blue prints)	Photographs of events
Audio recordings	Research data
Journals (ex. NUGSE Journal) and other publications like coffee table books	Student publications (ex. Basta)
Faculty Profiles or CVs	Theses and Dissertations (All print)
Magazines (NU Magazine)	University-sponsored conferences (ex. EHELF proceedings and program)

Memorabilia and collaterals including but not limited to posters, brochures, and awards	Videos (Commencement exercises, Interviews https://youtu.be/UjmbZtSTv4o)
News clippings about NU and its affiliates	Yearbooks (by school or university)

Current Status of NU Theses as a Primary Collection of the Academic Archives

In a study by Yap, Groen, Kamilova, Terzi, & Zvonareva (2018), the need to preserve students' work becomes part of the institutional memory. The university should provide value to their work as part of the intellectual content. Theses and dissertations records the scientific history of the university. It is a trail that informs the public about the research productivity of an academic institution. The student's work becomes his legacy to the university and to the society before he graduates. It becomes a reference material and a primary source document for future studies, thus avoiding duplication of a scientific work.

Since 2017, a total number of 421 Master's students graduated from the university and only 118 are transferred to the NU repository. These are all e-versions and no print copy was submitted to the library (Yap, Groen, Kamilova, Terzi, & Zvonareva, 2018).

Importance of Thesis as an Example of an Archival Record

Having a print archives is as important as the electronic archives as the thesis themselves become a historical record of a student. It proves that a student graduated from a university if thesis is part of the academic requirement. Thesis are used by historians to trace the past and is also being used by researchers to analyze the previous methodologies used in past studies. Historians use unpublished materials because they see a great interest for this resource (Wangmar&Lennartsson, 2018). Unpublished works such as thesis are fruits of the scholar's labor (United States Senate, 1961). Therefore, they need to be collected and preserved.

Challenges

I see the following as challenges in the future:

Loss of records with archival value if the academic archives will not be established.

The transfer of permanent records to the state archive will somehow

be a challenge for future researchers on campus due to proximity of location. As an autonomous university, it can create its own archival policy; however due to the existing law on National Archival Fund no. 326-1, it also states that departmental archives owned by the state should transfer their records accordingly specifically if it is for long term preservation.

The creation of an academic archives will require professional staff, policies, and space.

Who will establish the academic archives? Is it going to be under the Joint Archive or under the Library?

Recommendations

As archives preserve institutional collective memory, we do not want to lose the heritage that we have in the university. We call upon the stakeholders to focus on appraising and collecting the records of every entities and departments. This should be marked to be an institutional priority.

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