Means of Monitoring the Life-Cycle of a Document by Example of Tasks of the CTU Archives

Kamila Mádrová, Czech Technical University Archives

The system and function of archives are regulated by the Act No. 499/2004 Coll., about archival science and record management („Archival Act“) which has been amended by 17 amendments to take into account the published legal regulations until mid-2017. The most significant changes included eg: inclusion of the Security Services Archive to the network of public archives (2007), introduction of the definition of the registry room (2009), implementation of electronic records management systems (2009), inclusion of the Basic Registers Act (2009), concept of digital archiving (2012), regulation of commercial registries (2014), consideration of the Civil Service Act (2014), changes connected with the eIDAS regulation (2016). An amendment to the Archives Act is currently underway with a view to the entry into force of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

University archives are included under the so-called specialized archives, that means, they look after the archive sources originating from the activities of their founders or by the activities of their legal predecessors. They obtain also archival materials by gift or purchase. A university archive must be accredited by the Archiving Administration and Filing Service Department of the Ministry of the Interior in order to gain a function as a public archive. The granting of this accreditation requires the fulfillment of construction, technical, spatial, security, material, financial and personnel conditions for the care of archival records and their protection. The Czech Technical University Archives, the Institute of History and Archive of Charles University, the Archive of the Masaryk University in Brno and the Archive of the University of Technology in Brno were considered to be accredited university archives on January 1st, when the „Archival Act“ came into force. Since then, the number of accredited university archives has increased to eleven, except mentioned: Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, Archive of Mendel University in Brno, Archive of the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Brno, Archive of Palacky University Olomouc, Archive of the Silesian University in Opava, Archive of the Technical University of Ostrava, Archive of the University of Hradec Králové. On the other hand, other universities, which have not yet secured their archives for archival accreditation, are acquiring by the relevant state regional archive. However, the selected documents remain after the expiry of their operational (retention) periods
in the administrative archives of the universities due to the insufficient spatial conditions in the state archives. Therefore, the Ministry of the Interior also supports the establishment of self-governing university archives. This way should be chosen, for example, by the University of Economics and the University of Chemistry and Technology. University archives are directly governed in their professional archival activities by the Archiving Administration and Filing Service Department of the Ministry of the Interior according to paragraph 44 of the „Archival Act“. 

The tasks of the university archives and namely the CTU Archives can be divided into four areas:

a) supervision of the removal of documents from its founder and carrying out the selection of archival materials from its founder and the acquisition of archival materials of other origins,

b) record keeping and processing of archive files, care for archival materials,

c) preparation of scientific searches of archival sources and literature and conduction of their own research,

d) looking up of the documents for the needs of the authorities and natural persons (certificate of study, duplicate of the diploma, transcript of records etc.)

According to the „Archival Act“, university archives set up a specialized library to fulfill the above mentioned tasks.

Moreover, the systematic digitization of archival files and their access to the general public is currently added to this workload.

There is no methodology, or prescription, how the university archives should deal with the given tasks, so the leadership of each of them has created their own model of functioning.

Their inclusion in the university is different as well, which is related to the self-governing role of universities. The archives are either specialized departments of universities (UDAUK - AUSTR, AMU, AAVU, AUPOL), or department of the Rector's Office (ACVUT, AVUT, AUHK, AMENDELU, ASU, AVFU) or other organizational unit (A VŠB - TULO).

The removal of documents also involves the proper functioning of the records management. The important role of archives in this field lies in the creation and guaranteeing of a „records and retention schedule“ for the entire university. Individual types of documents and their
records and retention signs are determined on the basis of a legal obligation, or are inspired by state authorities, or we are based on the tradition of previous records and retention schedules and wishes and comments of the documents originators.

It is necessary, with the onset of the obligation for universities, to lead a records management in the electronic system (so called Document Management System DMS or Electronic Records Management System ERMS), to create a post of the records management specialist and her/his cooperation with both the archivists and the staff of the IT office. However, this cooperation requires interest, support, and own initiative from the leadership of a university, because its consistent support for the functioning of the records management and the archive is increasingly reflected in the budget of universities. It is also important to involve control mechanisms in this field. The universities are committing offenses in accordance with „the Archival Act“ in case of non-observance of the proper functioning of the record management and the correct execution of the retention process and are put in financial sanctions. In particular, the offense under paragraph 74, section. 6: "A public law agent or a legal or entrepreneurial natural person as a private lawmaker shall commit a misdemeanor by failing to preserve a document in contravention of paragraph 3 or to allow the collection of archival records." Further, the data protection requirements related to the effectiveness of GDPR can be argued. I point out from my own experience that it is necessary to create personal contacts with the management of the organizational departments of the university and directly with the administrative staff and to convince them about the advantages of a properly set system and its adherence.

The CTU Archives as a specialized university archive is the organization which is caring about the record management at the university. The conception of registries in its particular faculties, institutes and other departments was established. A qualified worker supervises the proper production of documents - the records management methodology for the part, takes care of document retention during the retention periods, preserves electronic documents in Document Management System (DMS) and performs the so-called shredding procedure – discarding of documents. For documents of type A - archive, he or she passes them to the archive. If they are S - shredding, he or she will ensure their safe shredding with respect to the personal data they contain. In case of type V documents – selection („výběr“ in Czech), they will assess their value in cooperation with the archivist and the original workplace where the documents were created. Fixed methodologies are often created for this selection which files or documents should be deposited in the archive. A record manager makes out a so-called proposal for the discarding of documents which is subsequently approved by the archival inspection in the registry. The
archivist will prepare a protocol for the procedure. In case of type A documents, they will also make an official paper of the documents being handed over to the archive.

Let me introduce some obstacles that can keep the archive from records management service. 1st Faculties, institutes, etc. are self-governing units and issue their own internal regulations. The governing role of the Rector's Office, under which is the CTU Archive organized, is not understood as binding but recommending.

2nd The record management and archiving in Czech Republic is generally underestimated in terms of personnel and finances (compared to other agendas of the Ministry of the Interior - police, firefighters, etc.).

3rd Inspections of archives over originators often have only a suggestive, non-dissuasive character. The fines are negligible compared to financial offenses.

4th University archives, as well as administrative archives, are struggling with the lack of space for storage of archival records. In order to build up modern depositories, the management of universities must be convinced of the importance of the archive.

The archive has to be able to keep register of the National Archival Heritage (Národní archivní dědictví – NAD) in the PEvA software (Computer Archiving Evidence). The ordering of archival records is determined by the so-called “Basic Rules for the Ordering of Archival Documents” (Základní pravidla pro pořádání archiválií), which were prepared by the staff of the Archiving Administration and Filing Service Department of the Ministry of the Interior. The ELZA software (“Electronic Ordering of Archival Material”) was developed for their fulfillment and its development was supported by a grant from the Technical Agency of the Czech Republic (TAČR). Archivists re-assesses the value of documents during the ordering. There is so-called internal shredding. Primarily the duplicate documents are eliminated. The importance of e.g. concepts, accounting documents, envelopes etc. is assessed as well.

Especially the sources of personal nature, photos or collections are acquired by the archive in so-called out-of-shredding proceeding, that means out of the record management system proceeding. The way to obtain these documents is an active effort of the archive to address the families of deceased university personalities with a request to take over their written estate. Furthermore, the archive seeks to retrieve documents through an open call on the website. We manage to obtain material documenting the life and work of students in this way. Sometimes
these documents are offered to the archive as a gift, sometimes a purchase. In both cases, the protocol, respectively contract is written between the originator and the archive. The oral history method is highly valued in terms of obtaining and completing information. In doing so, it is very important to carefully prepare questions for the witness, especially when are confronted with sensitive topics (in the Czech environment it is mainly the confrontation with their life and activities in the communist regime).

The unspecified documents can also be identified by the open call. Such an example is a sheet with caricatures of the teachers of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the Czech Technical University in the late 1960s. The sheet is made up of 52 caricatures. It was probably created on the occasion of the 60th birthday of the dean of the faculty prof. Alfred Bolek. Some personalities portrayed by caricature were identified by a comparative method using historical photographs. However, also due to the lack of comparative material, we decided to call for the identification of personalities in the university magazine "Pražská technika" and social networks (facebook). We have also targeted key witnesses (CTU Senior Club). The result was very successful. We succeeded in identifying more than 20 portraits and even identifying the author of the sheet. We approached the successful solvers for further cooperation as witnesses.