

National Archives—Preserving the Past, Reflecting the Present, and Planning for the Future

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Abstract: *A nation that does not know its past will not be able to fully understand its present nor visualize its future.*

National archives have long been regarded as the memory of the nation. Under the direction of Dr. Patricia C. Franks and Dr. Anthony Bernier, a team of students and alumni of the School of Information at San José State University embarked upon a year-long journey to answer the overarching research question: “What is the status of national archives today?”

A decision was made to limit the scope of the study to the national archives of the 195 countries recognized by the United Nations. During the research process, three countries were added. For each of the 198 countries, three sub-questions were answered: 1) “What is the history of the national archives of each country?” 2) “How does the institution responsible for the national archives operate in terms of organizational structure, responsibilities, and physical and digital infrastructures?” and 3) “What is its current focus, including means by which the public can access archival holdings?”

The results of the study revealed that not all countries have an institution designated as a “National Archives” or the equivalent. Of those that do, there emerged both differences and commonalities in their mission and vision, size and scope of operations, external environment, governing laws, and resources allocated. The one constant, however, was the archivist’s attitude toward their work: the desire to acquire and preserve documents that reflect the past while visualizing a future—one that will increasingly incorporate digital technology--to provide access to historical artifacts and, in many instances, current government records.

The methods used to gather the information will be described briefly, and the findings for four very different types of national archives will be shared.

About the Author:

Patricia C. Franks is a professor in the School of Information at San Jose State University where she coordinates the Master’s Degree in Archives and Records Management. She holds a doctorate/Ph.D. in Organization and Management from Capella University and is a Certified Archivist (CA), Certified Records Manager (CRM), and an Information Governance Professional (IGP). Pat was inducted into ARMA International’s Company of Fellows in 2014 based on her outstanding achievements and contributions in records and information management. She is author of the book *Records and Information Management* (2013, 2018), co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*, and co-editor of the *International Directory of National Archives*. As a member of the 2013-2018 *InterPARES Trust* research team she leads two projects: *Social Media & Trust in Government* and *Retention and Disposition in a Cloud Environment*. She is currently collaborating on the *Encyclopedia of Archival Writers, 1500-2015*, scheduled for publication in early 2019.

