

LEARNING BEYOND THE LECTURE HALL:

A Journey into Knowledge to National Archive
of Malaysia Sarawak Branch



After briefing session, in the Dewan Puspawangsa.

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In adherence to the collaborative teaching of the Foundation of Archives course (IMD313) this semester, Miss Nor Hayati Kassim and I have crafted an exciting academic visit for students from groups IM1105B and IM1105C. The destination of this educational excursion is the esteemed National Archive of Malaysia, Sarawak Branch. The mission is clear: move beyond theoretical learning and dive into the world of hands-on experience at the National Archive of Malaysia, Sarawak Branch. The archive's working environment becomes its own classroom, offering a firsthand look at how history is preserved and cherished. Amidst the shelves of documents, students will gain insight into the daily lives of those safeguarding our collective past. In this journey from theory to practice, Miss Nor Hayati Kassim and I extend an opportunity for students to break free from the lecture hall routine.

The decision to visit the National Archive of Malaysia, Sarawak Branch, was spurred by their recent move to a new location at Jalan Diplomatik Off Jalan Bako. Previously situated at Bangunan Sultan Iskandar, Simpang Tiga, Kuching, the relocation presented an opportune moment for our visit. Preparations for the visit commenced as early as week four of the semester. Initially, I delegated the task of contacting the National Archive of Malaysia to a student, requesting permission for our academic visit. The archive, in response, required an official letter and email. Motivating the students, I guided them through the paperwork, emphasizing the importance of completing it diligently. After assisting in refining the paperwork and TAPA form, the final step involved submitting the documents to the Academic Affairs Department (HEA) for approval. Moving one step closer to unlocking the doors of the National Archive of Malaysia, Sarawak Branch, for an enriching academic experience.



At Reference Area, briefing from Encik Fiqri

On the crisp Friday morning of December 1, 2023, our journey into excursion began as 33 students and two lecturers gathered at Parking A, UiTM Sarawak, in the early hour of 6:45 a.m. Meanwhile, the other six students steered their way to the archives on their vehicles. With the air filled with excitement, the bus wheels started to roll promptly around 7 a.m., marking the beginning of our excursion. Students were treated to breakfast, fostering a communal spirit as we embarked on the journey, which took approximately 1 hour and a half to reach our destination. Fortunately, luck was on our side, and the journey was free from the grip of traffic jams. As a result, we arrived at the National Archives of Malaysia right on schedule. Miss Nor Hayati and I were excited because it was our first time visiting the new and beautiful National Archives of Malaysia, which is more spacious than before.

The National Archives of Malaysia staff greeted us with cheerful smiles as we stepped through the entrance at 8:30 a.m. Their warm welcome set the tone for a delightful visit. Lecturers were requested to fill out the guest book indicating the arrival of the academic visit from the School of Information Science, UiTM Sarawak. Before diving into the excursion, we were served breakfast by the host. This visit was attended not only by Miss Nor Hayati and myself but lecturer Ts. Abdul Ismail Mohd Jawi also joined us, generously dedicating time to be part of this educational excursion.

As we savored our morning meal, we engaged in friendly conversations with staff members who joined us. The exchange of stories and laughter over breakfast created a sense of friendship, turning the visit into more than just an educational excursion; it became a shared experience, blending learning with the joy of connecting with the people behind the archives. Regrettably, our timing was not in sync with the schedules of the Director and Deputy Director, who were away attending an event in Kuala Lumpur during our visit. However, stepping into the spotlight were the gracious hosts for the day, Encik Fiqri Mohamed and Puan Suria Ismail, who seamlessly took on the responsibility of guiding and entertaining the students. Despite the absence of the higher-ups, their passion and knowledge infused the visit with an unexpected charm, turning what could have been a setback into an opportunity for a unique and enriching experience.

The curtains of the program lifted, and we were ushered into the main hall, Dewan Puspawangsa. The resonant chords of the national anthem, Negaraku, and Ibu Pertiwiku, filled the air, accompanied by the soulful doa recitation. The collective spirit of unity was echoed in the pledge recitation by Encik Awang Umar Awang Hambali. The student representative, Cik Nurul Farhana Muhammad Mahazir from IM1105C, took the stage, weaving words of inspiration and purpose in a speech that set the tone for the unfolding



The staff explained the cleaning process before transferring archive materials into the repository.

journey. We were treated to insightful briefing sessions and a delightful exchange of souvenirs between the National Archives of Malaysia and the School of Information Science, UiTM Sarawak. The MC, Puan Nurul Safiqahrina bt Bujang, gracefully conducted the program in the hall.

After that, Puan Suria took the stage, immersing us in a captivating briefing on the intricate world of records and archives management within the halls of the National Archives of Malaysia. She elaborates on procedures that unfolded from the transfer of archival materials, their meticulous management, storage, and onward to the crucial aspects of maintenance and preservation. The narrative she painted detailed the journey of these historical treasures, navigating from their origins in creating agencies to their ultimate sanctuary at the National Archives of Malaysia. Stepping into the limelight after Puan Suria, Encik Fiqri took the stage, unraveling the intricacies of OFA and COMPASS. In a masterful display, he briefed us on these tools and embarked on hands-on tutorials, igniting the students' excitement to explore COMPASS firsthand. Encik Fiqri, with his wealth of knowledge, concluded the tutorial sessions with a vibrant Q&A. This interactive session left the students feeling enriched and empowered with a deeper understanding.

The adventure continued as the students were divided into two groups. Encik Fiqri guided the IM1105B students, while Puan Suria led the IM1105C group. Both groups explored the Reference Area and Preservation and Conservation Area. They introduced the students to the Reference Area, deemed the most crucial space for researchers. Here, they access manual finding aids and online resources. However, there is a limitation as only one computer is available for researchers to use OFA and COMPASS. Through my excursion in this area, I found the old pictures of places in Sarawak hanging on the wall fascinating, although some needed captions or descriptions. Encik Fiqri also showcased several frequently requested old documents, like sdnewspapers, posters, letters, and archives, in a special format, offering a glimpse into the historical richness stored in the archives. The reference area provides a spacious and comfortable environment for researchers to conduct their studies.

The most thrilling part was the Preservation and Conservation Area. But before that, we visited the Working Area, where the staff, Encik Moair Saard Saruji and Puan Rosnah Anak Renggan, demonstrated the cleaning process for documents being transferred from creating agencies to the National Archives of Malaysia. Once the cleaning



At entrance National Archives of Malaysia Sarawak Branch

is complete, the documents are sorted into two categories. Records in good condition, without any issues, are transferred to the repository. On the other hand, documents with conditions or infections are moved to the Preservation and Conservation Area. Encik Kennedy Anak Nyadang demonstrated traditional tissue repair techniques to the students in this area. He introduced the tools required for these procedures. The procedures involved in preservation and conservation were highly technical, demanding meticulous care and patience. I observed students keenly interested, posing numerous questions to Encik Kennedy. Their curiosity delved into the finer details of the preservation and conservation techniques applied to archival materials.

As the visit neared its conclusion, the students were not ushered to the repository area this time. The staff explained that the area was

undergoing maintenance and not in proper order. Despite this detour, the immersive exploration of the Reference Area and Preservation and Conservation Areas provided the students with more than enough satisfaction and valuable insights. For many students, this marked their inaugural visit to the National Archives of Malaysia, Sarawak Branch. The hope is that this experience will enrich their understanding of classroom teachings and instill practical knowledge. Beyond merely for enjoyment or exam preparation, the visit aims to impart skills and insights they can readily apply in their future endeavors. It's not just about learning; it's about living the knowledge, touching history, and embracing the essence of the archive.



Staff demonstrate cleaning process for archive materials, followed by Encik Kennedy's tissue repair demonstration