The Registry as the Heart of the University System: Making it Beat Efficiently

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It is a delight to give the second in the series of lectures organised by the Registry of Elizade University. Let me begin by thanking, indeed, congratulating the Proprietor, Chief Michael Ade Ojo, *OON* for the investment in this world-class university. Visitors to Elizade University will be positively awe-struck at the quality of infrastructure relative to what you see in many Nigerian universities. Chief Ade Ojo could easily have invested his hard-earned money on mansions on some exotic islands and spent holidays on end basking in the glamour of beaches and enjoying the good life with his family. However, he opted for building a university that will live millennia after him and ensure that his name remains evergreen as a contributor to quality university education in Africa. I say "thank you Sir to a worthy father and a great Nigerian. May God bless you with long life and excellent health and at the end of your sojourn on earth, find you worthy of His Kingdom."

I thank the Registrar, Mr. Omololu Adegbenro, a very dynamic university administrator that I had interacted with over the years since his FUTA days. He was easily one of the best top administrators at FUTA. When I heard of his appointment as Registrar of Elizade University, I knew that God loves Elizade for letting Mr. Adegbenro be appointed as the foundation Registrar. He is a very pragmatic, no nonsense, visionary, ever smiling and highly responsive and responsible person.

I believe all those who are here today are part of history. You are part of the early beginning of this great university. You should be on the good side of this history by ensuring that you excel in all that you do. Elizade University has been attracting great names in Nigeria for its activities. Not too long ago, the Acting President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo was here.

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Thanks to the esteem to which the Founder is held around the world. I have no doubt that if Chief Ade Ojo were to invite both President Donald Trump and President Barack Obama to the next graduation ceremony as special guests, they will gladly oblige. They will oblige because of the fame of Chief Ade Ojo and of his University. This is why you must all do your best, from Vice-Chancellor to the least staff, to strive to maintain the high standards for which the university is known.

Today, we will be looking at a very important arm of the university- the Registry. We will begin with the expected roles of the Registry, move on to do a gap analysis where we should be and current practice and anchor with how we can bridge the gap so that the Registry of a university like that of Elizade can be the best of its kind in the Nigerian university system in the coming years. It is worth noting that I was given the topic *"The Administrator and Academics: An Organisational Culture Perspective"*. I however found the topic I chose more relevant to a Registry Annual Lecture. The topic is **The Registry as the Heart of the University System: Making it Beat Efficiently.**

The Registry and its Role in a University System

I chose the analogy of the heart because of the critical role which the Registry plays in the health of a university. The heart pumps blood to all the cells in the body. Similarly, the Registry services all the units in the university. If the Registry breaks down, the university will literally ground to a halt. If there are blockages in the Registry in terms of efficiency of operation, like blockages to the coronary vessels, the university will have an equivalent of a heart attack. This means that steps must be taken in all universities to keep the Registry working at optimal capacity.

Over 90% of university laws in Nigeria accord the Registry the vantage position as the epicentre of administration. After the Vice-Chancellor and his/her deputy(ies), the next most exalted office in management is the Registrar who heads the Registry.

The Registry is responsible for providing a wide range of services to students, staff and the wider external university community. The Registry works collectively and collaboratively with academic

departments, other university professional services and external bodies to deliver on its mandate.

Let me make a case study of Osun State University to exemplify common practice in the Nigerian university system. I tried to access the Elizade University website to get information on the Registry and use it as my example. Unfortunately, up till 2.00 a.m. today, June 15 when I was finalising this paper in Paris, the site still showed error 404- meaning that the site is down. This is not a hallmark of a world-class university! By the way, I am at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris representing Nigeria hence could not personally come to Ilara to deliver this lecture. Professor Sam Denola Ayanlaja, former Vice-Chancellor of Crawford University and a world-class agricultural scientist is making this presentation on my behalf. I thank him, most sincerely.

Case Study of Osun State University

The Registry is the Secretariat of the University and it is the rallying point of all administrative activities in the University. The Registry is headed by the Registrar who is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day-to-day administration of the University. For the smooth and efficient running of the Registry as a department, it is divided into the Registrar's main office, the Council Affairs Unit, the Personnel and the Academic Affairs Unit. The Registrar's main office coordinates the activities of these other units apart from its involvement in the policy formulation and implementation of the University.

The Council Affairs Unit

The Council Affairs Unit is in charge of all Council matters. As the property and finances of the University are vested in Council, the Unit is in charge of the implementation of all policies formulated by Council. The Unit operates through the Committee system. Apart from Council itself, there are important Committees such as the Procurement Committee which is in charge of all contract awards in the University; the Finance and General Purposes Committee which considers all financial matters on behalf of Council and makes appropriate recommendations thereon to Council; the Appointment and Promotions Committee (Academic,

Administrative and Technical and Junior Staff) respectively and the Honorary Degrees Committee among others.

The Personnel Affairs Unit

The Personnel Affairs Unit deals with all staff matters. The unit is divided into the Academic Staff sub-unit, Administrative and Technical Staff sub-unit and Junior Staff sub-unit. The unit is coordinated by a Principal Assistant Registrar who is responsible to the Registrar for the activities of the Unit. In turn, the Unit is responsible to Council through the Appointment and Promotions Committee (Academic, Administrative and Technical and Junior Staff). It is responsible for the appointment, promotion and discipline of staff. The unit is the point of entry and exit into and from the University for all categories of staff.

The Academic Affairs Unit

The Academic Affairs Unit is also a very important arm of the Registry because it is in charge of academic matters which is the very essence of the University. The Unit also operates through three major subdivisions such as Senate, Admissions as well as Examinations and Records all of which also operate through the Committee System. Because of the enormity of its business, Senate operates through an array of Committees such as the Committee of Provosts, Deans and Directors, Business Committee of Senate, Development Committee, Academic Matters Sub-Committee and Learned Conferences Support Committee. Senate is responsible for policies guiding the admission and graduation of students in the University.

The Admissions Sub-unit of the Academic Affairs Unit is responsible for the admission of students into the University and it performs this function through the Admissions Committee. This Committee does not just admit but it also carries out verification of results (from all examining bodies) of all students admitted into the University each year.

Other important functions of the unit are the arrangement for examinations as well as the keeping of student records. This is done by the Examinations and Records Sub-unit of the Academic Affairs unit. This

function is performed by the sub-unit in relation with the Heads of departments, the Deans and the Provosts of the Colleges. This sub-unit is very important to the Academic Affairs Unit as its functions have implications for the credibility of the certificates issued by the University. After this case study of the structure and functions of a typical Registry in a university, let us identify key qualities of good Registry staff.

Qualities of good Registry staff

There are several attributes of good Registry staff. I trust that all staff in the Registry Elizade University are endowed with most of these attributes. Let me list some of these attributes or qualities.

- Diligence: persistent and hardworking and ensuring that files that should be treated today are not left until tomorrow.
- Discipline –having mental self-control and work ethic to achieve the goals set out by the institution. Behaving in a controlled and calm way even in a difficult or stressful situation
- Humility – avoiding arrogance. Humility makes the Registry staff willing to learn even from subordinates, and makes him/her earn respect.
- Accountability – taking responsibility for his/her actions. Taking ownership of decisions made within one's sphere of responsibility is one of the hallmarks of a good Registry staff.
- Perseverance – working hard and demonstrating grit, especially when confronting resistance to change. People frequently prefer the status quo to change. They fear the unknown; they may believe their skill sets are no longer needed. The successful staff is adept at ushering in change without being confrontational and perseveres despite initial resistance and occasional failures along the way.
- Dresses well: Shabby dressers are often shabby in thinking. It is good for Registry staff to be well dressed to work always.
- Responsive to staff and student needs relating to the Registry
- Good in record keeping especially staff and student records
- Creative in solving problems in the Registry

- Providing sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on administrative matters
- Applying modern methods in Registry operations
- Keeping of confidential records of staff and students; not allowing such records to be leaked to the public
- Ability to retrieve important records/documents on demand
- Promptness in correspondence
- The Registrar as head of the Registry should be bold to tell the VC the rules and regulations guiding the administration of the University without fear.
- Communication lines should be opened for staff to criticise or commend administration without fear

Making the Registry (as the heart of the university) beat efficiently

With Elizade University Registry leading the way, the Registry in the Nigerian university system should strive to attain the following goals:

Efficient service as Secretariat of Board of Trustees/Council, Senate, Faculty and other key university committees: The Registry typically provides the secretariat of key university committees. These committees expect, among other services, that notices of meetings are issued in good time (via a combination of text messages, emails and printed invitations); minutes are sent well in advance of the next meeting; all documents relevant for decision making are included in the files for meetings; information is rapidly provided on the floor of meetings if required; meeting venues are well set at least an hour before the meeting; and decision extracts of a meeting are sent latest two days after the close of the meeting.

Objective custodian of the traditions and practice of the university: The Registry should be where every member of the university community turns for valuable information on traditions and established policies of the university. BoT/Council/Senate records of approved policies should be readily at the fingertips of the Registry and retrievable at short notice. I used the adjective "objective" because in some cases, the Registry, for

partisan reasons, may suppress information on policies approved by previous BoT/Council or even by Senate. If a person favoured by the Registry has a case not in line with a precedent, instances have been found when the Registry as secretariat suppressed information so that their candidate was unduly advantaged. This is not good practice as it will then lead to the setting of a counter precedent making future decision making rather awkward. It is my hope that the Registry of Elizade University will not fall into this trap.

A way to ensure that university policies and traditions endure is to encode them in instruments that can be stored electronically in searchable databases. No university in Nigeria that I am aware of has such searchable Registry database of policies and decisions of BoT/Council, Senate and other major university committees. I believe Elizade University can show leadership in this regard. This can be done by simply digitising all approved university manuals and summaries of decisions of meetings, creating a database for these entries and setting up a secure front end that will allow approved users to search for relevant information especially approved policies on a particular issue. This database should be protected from hacking so that unauthorised persons do not manipulate the data. There should also be periodic backup on secure servers.

Increasing use of technology in service delivery: The emerging trend is for the Registry to increasingly move away from analogue service delivery such as postage and manual deliveries to technology-mediated services such as use of electronic files for meetings rather than hard copies of files ensuring the practice of what is commonly referred to as "paperless meetings"; use of emails, text messages and WhatsApp for communication; use of voice-to-text device for recording and transcribing the transactions of meetings; rapid electronic issuance of students' results and transcripts; and monthly release of electronic newsletters.

It is not in doubt that many Registry staff in the Nigerian university system are a little bit behind in catching up with new technologies relevant to their schedule of duties. This is more so for the "old brigades". Hence it is important to expose all Registry staff to period capacity-

building programmes, in this case to enhance their capacity in the use of technologies for efficient service delivery.

Exemplar in the implementation of SERVICOM: Whereas teaching staff without administrative duties in most universities in Nigeria do run an 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. schedule, Registry staff are expected to run such schedule and even close much later than 4.00p.m. Apart from reporting punctually at work, they are expected to be prompt in response to mails (24-hour turnaround), respond to enquiries from the public and provide examples of good SERVICOM practices.

Catalyst for defusing tension that can lead to strikes and lockouts: The Registry occupies a strategic role in feeling the pulse of staff and students and availing such information that could disrupt peace on campus to the Vice-Chancellor to complement reports from internal and external security units. Armed with such information, the Registrar and his/her men and women can take steps to defuse tension.

Checklist for Elizade University Registry

Before I close, let us attempt some self-assessment. I have provided a 14-item checklist for assessing the Elizade Registry. We shall score by way of voice vote. The scoring scheme is 5=excellent; 4= good; 3=fair; 2= poor; 1= very poor. I need you to shout your score. The score that most people shout will be what I will enter in the score card. So, let us proceed.

S/No.	Activity	Score
1.	Efficient service as Secretariat of Board of Trustees/Council, Senate, Faculty and other key university committees	
2.	Objective custodian of the traditions and practice of the university	
3.	Catalyst for defusing tension that can lead to strikes and lockouts	
4.	Use of ICT for service delivery	
5.	Level of discipline among Registry staff	
6.	Level of diligence among Registry staff	
7.	Level of humility among Registry staff	

8.	Quality of dressing of Registry staff	
9.	Responsiveness to staff and student needs relating to the Registry	
10.	Provision of sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on administrative matters	
11.	Application of modern methods in Registry operations	
12.	Keeping of confidential records of staff and students; not allowing such records to be leaked to the public	
13.	Promptness in correspondence, that is in replying to mails	
14.	Punctuality to work	
	TOTAL	

Now, let us see how we have performed. We shall use the NUC scheme of accreditation as basis for decision making.

60-70= Full accreditation
42-59= Interim Accreditation
Less than 42= Denied Accreditation

Based on our score on this exercise, I enjoin the Registrar to do a gap analysis and develop an action plan for bridging the gap over the next six months. By December, he should then conduct another assessment to see how far we have closed the gap and moved towards full accreditation in Registry operations. If we achieve full accreditation, from January 2018, God willing, we should then take steps to sustain this impressive performance.

Thank you once again for inviting me to give the second in the series of the Registry lectures and thank you for listening.

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