

A Study on the Importance of Archival Management in the Standardized Setting Provincial Qualification Assessment of Independent Colleges

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How to cite this paper: Xie, L., & Ma, Q. G. (2025). A Study on the Importance of Archival Management in the Standardized Setting Provincial Qualification Assessment of Independent Colleges. *Creative Education*, 16, 957-963.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2025.167060>

Received: May 7, 2025

Accepted: July 14, 2025

Published: July 17, 2025

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Abstract

Starting in 2018, Jiangsu Province launched the provincial qualification assessment work for the standardized establishment of independent colleges. The aim was to improve the policy environment for the development of independent colleges, strengthen management in accordance with the law, and promote the adaptation of independent colleges to the current requirements of classified, connotative, transitional, and distinctive development in higher education. Independent colleges, using the provincial standardization qualification assessment as a key driver, actively prepared and improved their work in various aspects based on the assessment criteria, thereby promoting their standardized operational development. In the important stages of the independent colleges' application for provincial qualification assessment and acceptance of on-site inspections, the supporting materials required were collected, organized, and made available for review by the records departments. The standardization and orderliness of the archives department's daily operations, as well as the comprehensiveness and systematic nature of the archives it manages, played a crucial role in the assessment process. This paper takes Changzhou University Huaide College as a case study to highlight the critical role of archives management in provincial accreditation for independent colleges. It first analyzes current challenges in archival practices within such institutions and then proposes targeted optimization strategies to enhance compliance and operational effectiveness.

Keywords

Independent Colleges, Standardized Settings, Qualification Assessment, Archival Management

1. Introduction

Independent colleges, as a distinctive model of higher education in China, have encountered systemic challenges during rapid expansion, including unclear property rights, ambiguous educational positioning, and insufficient faculty resources (Fang, 2022). These issues have become significant barriers to sustainable development. To address these concerns, the Ministry of Education issued the *Administrative Measures for the Establishment and Management of Independent Colleges* (Order No. 26, 2008), establishing clear operational standards and regulatory frameworks. In response, Jiangsu Province initiated compliance accreditation in 2018, focusing on clarifying governance structures, improving infrastructure, and enhancing teaching quality to meet national and provincial requirements.

However, independent colleges face considerable pressure during accreditation, requiring comprehensive preparation across multiple dimensions—basic operational conditions, financial assets, sponsor qualifications, corporate governance, and internal management (Yuan et al., 2020). As the primary provider of supporting documentation, archives departments bear critical responsibilities in this process.

This study employs policy analysis combined with empirical evidence from the archives management practices of Changzhou University Huaide College. It examines the significance of archives work, identifies existing challenges, and proposes optimization strategies. The findings underscore the pivotal role of robust archives management in facilitating successful provincial accreditation and offer actionable recommendations for peer institutions.

2. The Importance of Archival Management in the Standardized Operation Assessment of Independent Colleges

2.1. Meeting Qualified Acceptance Needs

The standardized operation assessment of independent colleges focuses on the standardization of their operations and consists of self-declaration and on-site inspection. In the on-site inspection, the acceptance expert group requires independent colleges to provide comprehensive materials for review. Therefore, comprehensive archival materials are indispensable for the assessment.

When independent colleges have well-managed and reliable archival management, they can directly provide accessible documents during the assessment. This avoids last-minute additions and reduces the workload, time, and difficulty. Conversely, suboptimal archival management engenders systemic risks and operational bottlenecks in day-to-day administration. A lack of solid evidence makes it hard for independent colleges to actively participate in the acceptance process, causing unnecessary trouble for the assessment.

Archival records of independent colleges serve as critical primary sources and deserve heightened attention. Good archival management helps meet the qualified

acceptance requirements.

2.2. Enhancing the Development of Independent Colleges

The importance of archival management in the standardized operation assessment also lies in promoting the development of independent colleges. According to China's "Management Measures for Archives of Institutions of Higher Learning", archival management is vital for the development of higher education institutions (Qiu, 2024). Colleges need to strengthen management, incorporate it into their overall development plans, and prevent defects that could disrupt operations (Liu, 2022).

As a key source of information on the development history and current status of independent colleges, archival management deserves more attention. Effective management leads to systematic and comprehensive archives, helping colleges identify problems and potential risks. Based on these findings, colleges can form objective and accurate improvement suggestions. This allows them to purposefully adjust and reform for a more efficient and orderly future.

Therefore, archival management should be highly valued in the future. It not only helps with the standardized operation assessment but also creates better conditions for the development of independent colleges. This prevents the assessment from becoming a mere formality and avoids serious non-compliance issues.

3. Analysis of Problems in Archival Management in the Standardized Operation Assessment of Independent Colleges

3.1. Weak Archives Awareness

Although the importance of archival management is prominent in the standardized operation assessment of independent colleges, there are still many problems and shortcomings in the current archival management of independent colleges. The most pressing challenge is the pervasive lack of archival awareness among staff, which undermines the effectiveness of archival management. Heads of various departments in independent colleges, and even some heads of archives departments, fail to fully recognize the importance of archives, leading to insufficient investment in budget, personnel allocation, and training. As a result, archives staff often have limited professional skills, low motivation, and poor work efficiency. Archives work remains at a basic level of collection and organization, and there are even omissions in the collection process, which may pose potential risks for the subsequent assessment work.

Currently, many management personnel in independent colleges are aware of the need for a large amount of archives materials to support the standardized operation assessment. However, they often only pay attention to this at the last minute before the assessment, which not only increases the difficulty of archival management but also easily leads to confusion, errors in material organization, and a subsequent impact on the application value of the archives.

3.2. Confusion in Archival Management Systems

Problems in archival management during the standardized operation assessment of independent colleges also manifest in the institutional level. The lack of a comprehensive and feasible system of archival management means that specific work lacks sufficient guidance and is prone to confusion. From the perspective of responsibility division among archival management personnel, many independent colleges fail to clearly define job responsibilities for each staff member, which can easily lead to omissions or mutual shirking of responsibilities in subsequent work. Moreover, some colleges, considering archival management as relatively simple, allocate few staff members to the archives department and allow a lot of personnel to work part-time in this role. The selection and appointment of part-time archives staff are often arbitrary, resulting in staff with low professional quality and high turnover, making the implementation of archival management difficult. Additionally, the archival management system lacks an effective incentive mechanism. Without a performance evaluation system for archives staff and a reasonable set of rewards and penalties, it is impossible to effectively boost staff motivation and fully utilize the strengths of outstanding individuals or teams.

3.3. Issues with Archives Staff

Archives management currently struggles to meet evaluation and inspection standards, largely due to staffing constraints and professional limitations.

On one hand, most archivists serve in dual administrative roles, overwhelmed by routine tasks that leave insufficient time for systematic archival work (Xu, 2019). At Changzhou University Huaide College, for example, the proportion of part-time archivists decreased from 100% to 93.75% after 2020—still a dominant majority. With limited full-time staff, archivists are preoccupied with daily operations, leaving little capacity to adopt new technologies or methodologies. This results in outdated practices that fail to maximize the potential of archival resources.

On the other hand, the majority of part-time archivists lack formal training in archival science, often transitioning from unrelated fields. Their fragmented knowledge creates operational risks, particularly in critical areas such as classification, arrangement, and digitization. Without systematic professional training, these staff frequently exhibit non-standard procedures and low efficiency, undermining the overall quality of archival work.

3.4. Low Utilization of Archives Materials

The low development and utilization rate of archives materials also means that the potential of archives cannot be fully realized in independent colleges (Wang, 2023). Although archives materials are a core basis for the standardized operation assessment and a key focus in the preparation process of independent colleges, the poor systematic nature of the archives materials often fails to meet the requirements of the assessment. This creates obvious problems in practical applications

and increases the difficulty for assessment staff, which is not conducive to the successful passage of the standardized operation assessment. From the perspective of independent colleges themselves, the application value of archives has not been fully recognized. Archives materials are simply seen as files that need to be organized and stored, without fully exploring their reference value for the development of independent colleges. As a result, archives materials cannot provide effective strategies and suggestions for the development of independent colleges, and their utilization rate remains low.

4. Measures to Optimize Archival Management in the Standardized Operation Assessment of Independent Colleges

4.1. Enhancing Archives Awareness

In the future optimization of archival management in independent colleges, to better cope with the qualified acceptance work, independent colleges must first recognize the vital role of archives. It is imperative to ensure that university leaders, department heads, and archival staff all develop a strong awareness of archival significance. They should fully understand the significance of archival management in various types of assessment and acceptance work, as well as in the overall development of the college, and provide adequate support in terms of funding, human resources, and technology.

Against the backdrop of significantly enhanced archival awareness across the college, it is also necessary to ensure that all departments develop the habit of filing documents promptly and routinely in their daily work, guaranteeing that archival management is consistently implemented rather than addressed hastily only during inspections or evaluations.

In the course of daily educational and teaching activities, independent colleges must clarify and refine the tasks and responsibilities of each department in archival work, standardize the collection and organization of records, and promptly address any oversights or omissions to prevent the loss of substantial archival materials.

4.2. Improving Archival Management Systems

To maximize the effectiveness of records management during provincial accreditation inspections, institutional optimization through a scientifically grounded framework is critical.

First, implement a university records accountability system to clarify roles (Lu & Zhang, 2024). A leadership team, including the college principal and department heads, should oversee archival operations with defined responsibilities. Department leaders act as primary custodians, signing accountability agreements, while the records office provides professional guidance. Part-time archivists manage collection, pre-archiving, and transfers.

Second, establish a closed-loop management mechanism (assessment incen-

tives → problem feedback → continuous improvement). Develop Detailed Rules for Records Management to define submission scopes, standards, and deadlines. This should be supported by a performance evaluation system with reward-penalty measures (Li, 2025). Quarterly audits via Issue Correction Checklists ensure iterative improvements.

4.3. Strengthening the Archival Management Team

The optimization of archival management in independent colleges also relies on a team of highly responsible and competent archives managers and staff. To achieve this, colleges should first ensure an adequate number of archives personnel based on the specific demands of archival management. Efforts should be made to recruit more professionals with expertise in archival management, ensuring that key positions are filled by individuals who have graduated in relevant fields or possess relevant work experience.

On the other hand, colleges should provide necessary training and guidance for existing archives staff. This includes enhancing theoretical education and incorporating both internal and external learning and exchange activities into departmental plans. Regular learning and experience-sharing sessions should be scheduled to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and insights. In addition to this, archives personnel should also undergo technical skill training, actively learn and adapt to new technologies in archival management, and keep pace with the times. They should prioritize continuous learning and research, aiming to become competent and research-driven archival professionals.

4.4. Increasing Archives Utilization

The optimization of archival management in independent colleges also requires improving archives utilization, which is crucial for serving the qualified acceptance work effectively. Independent colleges need to thoroughly study and familiarize themselves with the specific requirements of each part of the standardized operation assessment. Archives materials should be collected and organized purposefully, forming a set of interrelated supporting documents for verification by assessors, thereby fully leveraging the value of archives.

Moreover, improving archives utilization involves focusing on the college's own development. By analyzing archives, colleges can identify issues in their development, make accurate development forecasts, and gradually address these issues. This ensures that the independent college develops in a scientific and correct direction.

5. Discussion and Limitations

This study focuses on optimizing archives management strategies for independent colleges in Jiangsu Province, aiming to provide practical references for peer institutions. However, its scope is limited to Jiangsu, where variations in resource endowments, management foundations, and policy enforcement across colleges may

constrain the universality and implementation outcomes of the proposed strategies. Therefore, when applying these strategies, institutions should adapt them flexibly to their specific contexts and capabilities.

Additionally, the effectiveness of archives management in independent colleges is heavily influenced by leadership support and resource allocation. The commitment and decision-making of senior administrators significantly determine the pace and quality of archival initiatives. Future research could further investigate how different leadership styles and policy orientations impact archives management, thereby refining optimization strategies.

Funding

This work was supported by the General Projects of Philosophy and Social Science Research in Universities of Jiangsu Province “Research on Archival Work During the Transition of Independent Colleges” (2021SJA2483) and the Teaching Research Project of Changzhou University Huaide College “Study on Archival Work in the Standardization Accreditation Phase of Independent Colleges” (2019HDJY05).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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