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A Centralized On-line System to Maintain Records of the Events Organized at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna

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Abstract

The events organized by the Faculty of Agriculture are diverse in scope. These events reflect the liveliness of the faculty and contribute to uplift the quality of the academic environment and the wellbeing of the communities in and outside the faculty. Hence, the information related to these events is important for managerial decisions and future developments. Such events are given a substantial weightage in the program and institutional review process. Therefore, the Management Information System (MIS) of the faculty should include a tool or a component to record and archive the information related to completed events. The simple centralized system proposed in this paper can be used as an interim solution in the absence of an MIS capable of recording and archiving the information related to the events completed. The proposed system uses Google forms and Google drive to retrieve and store the information about the events at the IQAC of the Faculty. The organizers of the events are requested to upload the information to the system at their earliest. Frequent manual reminders will be sent by the IQAC via emails and the progress of the submissions will be announced at the faculty board with a summary as strategies to encourage the voluntary upload of information. The system is currently being tested and validated at the Faculty of Agriculture. The system will be improved using feedback from the users and introduced to other faculties and universities.

Keywords: Event Recording, Archiving, Management Information System, Google Forms, Electronic Record Management

Introduction

The Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna organizes many events or programs on diverse themes targeting a wide range of participants or beneficiaries within a year. The academic staff, non-academic staff, student community, established associations or such entities, projects, or a combination of these entities organize most of the events. On the other hand, the benefits of these events or programs could be specific to a community or span over multiple target communities including the public. Having records of the events is vital for managerial decisions, accountability considerations,

program accreditation and program and institutional reviews. In addition, updating the university web, preparation of newsletters, leaflets, promotional videos also may use this information. A good example to show the need for such information is the preparation of the evidence for the recent program reviews and the institutional reviews.

Currently, there is no proper system in place to record management or to record and archive the information related to the events held at the Faculty of Agriculture. Further, this could be the case of most of the faculties of the university. An Electronic Record Management (ERM) system can easily be incorporated into the existing MIS with many advanced functions to accomplish this task. ERM is capable of providing required information to the management as and when it is needed (AIIM, 2021). This paper proposes an interim solution to record and archive the information using free online tools offered by Google. In addition, a strategy to encourage voluntary data entry is also proposed. This system is currently being tested and validated at the Faculty of Agriculture.

Methodology

Main Requirements

The software system should be secure, reliable, and easily accessible for the users. There should be a mechanism in place to encourage the users (event organizers) to voluntarily fill the information to the system. A designated system manager is necessary to monitor the progress, handle issues and encourage users to fill the information. Hence, the proposed system is best suited at the faculty level where its management is relatively simple.

Software Platform

Any software platform that provides a substantial amount of cloud storage and integrated facility to create online forms with file upload capabilities can be used for this activity e.g. Google, n.d., Microsoft, n.d. The present system uses the Google workspace subscription available for the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna. This system provides ample cloud storage and online forms with exceptional reliability and security. The users can access the system via popular web browsers. Microsoft subscriptions including one drive and forms can also be used for this purpose. Individual Google accounts can also be used if there is no subscription required for the services at the institutional level. In addition, if there is a functional intranet or MIS and expertise available, the tailor-made interfaces and databases could be developed with advanced features for data collection and management.

Data Entry, Handling, and Analysis

The system is currently managed by the IQAC of the Faculty of Agriculture. The form is shared among the office bearers of the associations, coordinators of the establishments within the university project coordinators for data entry. However, the students shall not get the authority to fill the form directly. As all student associations of the university have a patron, the system authorizes the patrons to fill in the information on the events organized by the students. The proposed system collects the information indicated in Table 1. As it is a centralized system, additional entries could be added to the form at any time. The system stores the images or any other supported attachments such as PowerPoint presentations in the Google drive of the system administrator. The system automatically generates a summary of all events along with graphical illustrations. In addition, all the data can be downloaded as a comma-separated values (CSV) file that can be opened with MS Excel.

Table 1: The information collected by the system

Google form entries
Timestamp (Automatically generated by the form)
Organizer of the activity (Dropdown list)
Name of the reporting person
Designation
Contact number of the reporting person
E-mail address of the reporting person
Department (for department-level activities)
Association (for student associations)
Title/ Name of the Activity
Date and Time (Date and time of Commencement)
Duration
Target Groups
Objective/s
Location/ Delivery Media
Invitees/ Resource persons
Source of Funds
Outcomes/Achievements
File upload
Total cost
Any other comments

IQAC's Role in Maintaining the System

The IQAC maintains and manages the system and IQAC's official email account is used for this purpose. The Chairperson of the IQAC presents the automatically generated summary of the events at the last Faculty Board of the year. In addition, the chairpersons/coordinators/patrons may present detailed activity reports at the Faculty Board meetings. The data in the system will be provided to the respective presenters upon request. The submission of the information to the faculty board by the IQAC not only reports the activities officially but also encourages the office bearers to actively engage in feeding the information to the system. Until the system becomes familiar with the staff members, IQAC will send frequent reminders to encourage uploading new information. Since the system is still under testing and validation, new strategies will be added to the system to enhance its functionality.

Discussion and Conclusions

An analysis of the nature of the events will provide information such as frequently addressed topics, inadequately addressed topics, inactive associations/societies/committees, level of participation and sources of funding. This information will provide an assessment of the performance of different associations, committees, and societies. The committees can be advised and guided based on their performance in order to improve on their proposed activities. Further, the performance of the office bearers of the student-based bodies can be assessed through this system to determine the eligibility for reappointments and issuing references.

Despite the benefits of having this system, getting the users to upload information voluntarily appears to be a challenge. Even within a few weeks after the completion of an event, retrieval and archiving of the details is a tedious task due to several reasons. Main reasons are the reluctance of the relevant staff members to compile information, absence of designated officers to carry out the process and absence of a system or a format to compile the information. The first reason mentioned above is linked to the attitudes while the others are linked to the facilities. Carefully selected strategies should be adopted to encourage the users to feed the information. Such strategies need to be reviewed and approved at appropriate administrative bodies before incorporating into the system.

In conclusion, this system provides a structured platform to enter the information about the events organized at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna. The proposed structure could be used as a prototype for future developments of the MIS. The strategies to encourage the users to upload information to the system should be reviewed and applied with necessary approvals. This system can be introduced to other faculties and universities with necessary changes.

References

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