ADDRESS BY

VIDYAJYOTHI PROFESSOR LALITHA MENDIS

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THE PROFILE OF A UNIVERSITY

Vidyajyothi Professor Lalitha Mendis
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Criteria used in University Ranking Systems demonstrate what aspects of a university's profile are valued globally.

Times Higher Education (THE), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), are considered to be the most influential of international University Ranking Systems.

QS has also developed an Asian University Ranking , Latin American University Ranking, and a University Ranking by Subject.

THE found Harvard University, MIT USA, University of Cambridge, Oxford University, University College Berkley and Stanford to be heads and shoulders above the rest.

In the QS ranking too, using different indicators, The University of Cambridge, Harvard and MIT ranked among the first.

The University of Hong Kong which was 22nd in the World Ranking by QS, was regarded as the best in the Asian University Ranking. The National University of Singapore was in third place. The first fifty in the QS Asian universities ranking in 2011 has twelve universities from Japan, eight from South Korea, nine from China, six from Hong Kong, five from India, four from Taiwan, two from Thailand two from Singapore, one from Malaysia and one from Indonesia.

All five Indian universities among the first fifty are technology universities.

The University of Colombo ranked among the first 300.

Factors in the university profile that are considered by THE

1 **The International outlook of the University**
The degree to which academics collaborate with international colleagues on research projects, the proportion of the faculty who are from around the globe, and the number of research journal publications that have at least one international author.

2 Research volume, income and reputation
Several indicators are used to assess this and all values are normalized to give an even playing field. e.g.university research income which is subject to competition and peer review. Also the number of papers in indexed journals.

3 Citations and research influence
Citations are the single most influential of the indicators that THE uses.

It is considered as a measure of how much a university is contributing to the sum of human knowledge, and whose research has been picked up and built on by other scholars.

4 Industry income and innovation
This indicator examines the ability of a university to help industry with innovations, inventions and consultancies. This has become a core mission of contemporary global academia. It tests for the incidence of knowledge transfer, or how much research income a university can earn from industry.

5 Teaching and learning environment
The factors taken into consideration are :

Staff :student ratios, physical factors, the subject mix of the university, the ratio of doctoral degrees to Bachelor's degrees, and the number of research students – This receives a high rating because a high density of research students and the presence of a postgraduate community is a marker of a research led teaching environment which is valued by undergraduates and postgraduates alike.

6 Some Other criteria used include:
The academic profile of students entering the university, the academic profile of teachers, library facilities, residential facilities and opportunities for undergraduate research and the undergraduate research output.

THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES (AAU)

A brief examination of the AAU provides a further glimpse of the current value systems that operate. AAA is a unique association of about 60 research universities in the USA and two in Canada. AAU membership is only by invitation. The breadth and quality of certain criteria are examined, such as University programmes of research, research spending, postgraduate education undergraduate education, and membership of staff in national academic organizations Faculty awards, and citations.

As of 1999, 43% of Nobel prize winners have been associated with these Universities. As of 2004, AAU members accounted for 58% of US universities research grants and contract income, and 52% of doctorates awarded in the USA. This speaks volumes for the quality of these universities.

So research is indeed the global common currency of university profile and standards.

Universities are supposed to educate future leaders and to develop high levels of technical capacities and co- generic skills that will contribute to economic growth.

Given this overall objective, it is recognized that there is a higher education crisis globally, especially in the developing countries. Some universities and higher education systems have introduced reforms.

In Sri Lanka, Higher Education is almost totally dependant on government funding. The admission of above optimal numbers of students to certain faculties has led to reduced spending per student, overcrowding, deterioration in physical facilities, library facilities, laboratory and clinical facilities. It is an unenviable situation and one of great concern.

A few years ago, some universities and faculties of universities, bid for and obtained substantial quality improvement grants through the IRQUE project of the World Bank. I believe that a similar but not so generous project is being planned by the Ministry of Higher Education and the World Bank.

Sri Lanka is blessed by its free education policy. The benefits and spin offs of a high literacy rate of about 95% especially among women are immeasurable. Considering the health sector, alone they extend to good health indices, acceptance of immunization, an understanding of the concepts of nutrition and to motivation towards the prevention of non communicable diseases.

The non fee levying University system that Sri Lanka has is unique for this region. I quote from a former Vice Chairman of the UGC who was critical of its outcome. "the relevance and the standard of degrees are now mis-aligned to economic needs". This is probably a fair criticism.

I know of a trishaw driver who has two children in medical schools of this country. There are many such examples we in the universities are all aware of , which provide **evidence of the upward social mobility that is permitted by our non fee levying system.** A system that is appropriate for our country in the backdrop of free education in schools.

In this quest to maximize and provide opportunities for upward social mobility, one may add to the benefits by **aligning** the system to economic advancement. This brings us to the need for the development of **co-generic skills.**

In a sense, the teaching and training of undergraduates for particular professions such as medicine, law, egineering, architecture, business management and agriculture is easier because the skills we teach students are ones they will use in their future professions. However in the case of courses in arts, social sciences and science, graduates have to learn to fit into a variety of occupations. What has to be realised is, that whether or not the student and the teacher knows the jobs they are preparing for, the modern competitive world striving for economic progress demands certain co-generic skills. Some of these co-generic skills were identified and compiled by CART

(Chamber of Commerce Round Table) in which many highly placed academics have participated. They are:

1) Ability to communicate effectively – including in the English language.
2) Good interpersonal skills- the ability to work with different people and in different teams, and the ability to adapt to changing working environments
3) Ability to lead a team and achieve results in a short space of time
4) Ability to prioritize time and organise time productively
5) One who cultivates a willingness to take risks
6) An open, positive and practical mindset
7) Willingness to learn from a wide cross section of persons.
8) Computer literacy and basic numerical skills
9) A General knowledge of world and local affairs
10) Dress sense, personal grooming and business etiquette
11) Awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence.
12) Innovativeness
13) Ethical Conduct.

There are many obstacles to our universities concentrating on these key inputs and co-generic skills training. e.g. large numbers, lack of resources, and lack of conviction among academics, that these outcomes should be achieved, to name a few.

However, several faculties and universities have despite problems, introduced various innovations to achieve these objectives, as was seen at a workshop conducted by CART on pockets of good practice.

Presentations were made of some wonderful innovations that had worked in the universities of Colombo, Peradeniya and Moratuwa. Bringing about change is difficult, but some have brought about significant reforms in their faculties **by using their teaching styles to expand the range of skills in students and in doing so by improving the teaching skills and enthusiasm of their staff.**

Conceptualising the purpose of university learning

It also depends on how the teachers and student's conceptualise the purpose of teaching and the purpose of learning. For instance:.

You can learn history to pass the 1st, 2nd or final examination in history

You can learn history to fit into a job that requires a knowledge of history

You can learn history to contribute to the economic development of the country

So, context matters

Whatever the course of study both the teacher and the student has to be clear about the **context** in which teaching and learning takes place. It is good to ask ourselves as teachers whether this concept of context is embedded in our academic culture. **Do we try to relate the student to the environment out there? The environment of real life that he will be released to?**

Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne ,Head of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Peradeniya and Chairman of the Central Cultural Trust at the CART workshop on Pockets of Good practice said how a large component of the teaching learning experience in his faculty is conducted on site at Anuradhapura, where teachers and students camp on site, interact with the people of that area, have lectures and discussions and do excavations and reports on site. The students are provided thus with a sense of **context** in their learning. Students are also exposed to a host of multidisciplinary studies including geography, management , botany, zoology, chemistry anatomy, trade and commerce and life skills etc. The final product is not only a professional archeologist, but a skilled professional who is employable in the tourist industry, travel trade, NGO sector involved in social work, advertising, teaching and many other professional fields.

Assessments

The assessments one designs could similarly reflect context.

Can you through your teaching of history or social sciences train and assess students on critical thinking?

Can science students be taught to engage in team work?

Can any student doing any subject be taught to write a good report as an assignment?

Can co-generic skills be assessed side by side with subject matter?

So- we are in a unique system of non fee levying university education with all its benefits.

Can we show case it to the world?

Within the system, can we identify and introduce the quality changes to produce graduates who will contribute to economic development?

There are many requirements to achieve these goals.

Vision; Leadership; Greater Autonomy- a redefining of the role of the government;
Strategic planning towards diversifying university education; Redesigning courses to confer competencies that make graduates employable; Introducing undergraduates to the possibilities and avenues of self employment; Staff training and retraining and performance based staff rewards. M**ost importantly generation of additional income to support new ventures.**

Development without funds is very difficult. I am sure that if there is a will universties and faculties can find innovative means of generating funds for faculty development. One way is to generate funds through obtaining research grants.

Lastly, let us examine how the National University of Singapore, (NUS) classed as a developing country 50 years ago , is now the third on the list of QS ranking of Asian Universities?

They poured money into the development of their Universities; Intake to different faculties is according to country requirements; Each teacher has a mentor who writes an account of the teachers performance over that year; Teachers are expected to be in the university during working hours; and research development in the university happens in a very coordinated way. It is promoted through organizational structures with clear organizational aims supported by action plans with yearly deliverables and outcomes. At NUS there is the office of Deputy President Research and all faculties have a

Vice Dean Research with one or two Assistant Deans Research to ensure that each faculty achieves its research goals and secures competitive funding.

Each department gets a few research academic posts depending on the size of the department.

Potential young staff are recruited and groomed well to engage effectively in research. They are supported with systematic training.

Research staff assist in the writing of grant proposals or subsequent publications. There are incentives provided, such as sending staff on attachments to centers of excellence. In this way they also encourage collaborative studies.

So developing a research culture is not only the responsibility of individual members of staff. There should be planned institutional backing, as well as national level support for such research enhancing programmes. The ranking and other accolades follows.

Within the context of a non fee levying system of university education the university of Peradeniya and other Sri Lankan universities face the challenge to use the currency of research to be competitive in global ratings and to design their courses to produce graduates who will contribute to the economic development of the country.

Such Universities would be worth show casing to the world.

In Sri Lanka, the University of Peradeniya can take a lead in this effort, and for this I wish you well.