

The emergent mission of varsities

CHALLENGE: Wealth creation has become a necessity owing to rising pressure of higher education costs

PUBLIC and private institutions of higher learning work hard to be relevant by linking with community and industry. To this end a network of concepts is formulated and a language and conceptual register common to higher education institutions is developed.

Within the register, higher education institutions map out their strategic plans, typically connected to the plans and blueprints of education at school and higher education levels as well as to the broader national development plans.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) also initiate and engage in leading or participating in regional

or global networks of scholars, universities or research projects.

The government and industry engagement typically include staff attachments in industry, (beyond the sabbatical taken by academicians), and student internships and international experiences, industry-based research and industry based projects.

Collaborations involve government agencies, government linked companies, local private companies, non-governmental organisations, multinational companies and small and medium enterprises. The knowledge transfer involves consultancy, education, training, research, and sharing of facilities.

With varying degrees of emphasis, universities focus on students seen as customers, learners, scholars or future leaders who would be agents of change.

Whatever the emphasis, all universities would not neglect the agenda of quality and excellence. Also, in order to function effectively with no conflict with authorities, universities would adopt a policy of compliance to all regulatory instruc-

tions.

There are interesting advances regarding teaching methods in use which include project-based teaching, problem-based teaching, problem solving, inquiry-discovery problem solving approaches, learner-centred teaching and values-based teaching. Research universities, more than other universities, are expected to use research-based teaching.

Values that are identified in institutional and programme development include integrity, ethics, transparency, accountability, autonomy, empowerment, scholarly engagement, democratic participation, volunteerism, mutual respect, inclusiveness, caring, meaningful collaboration and partnerships, efficiency, impact, capacity building, creativity, innovativeness, knowledge generation, knowledge management distributed leadership.

Worldwide and in Malaysia the cost of education is rising. The question, therefore, is whether and when public universities can be self-sufficient and self-funding.

The funds needed to run a large

public university can be as high as over RM1.5 billion a year. A large percentage of the costs would go to salaries of academic and administrative staff and facilities for students.

Maintenance costs of grounds, buildings, facilities, amenities and equipment constitute an important component of the expenditure.

Whether leaders of public universities have thought about or are prepared for such eventualities is not about practical mindsets but is about imagining the possibilities of transformations.

The possibilities can only be realised when the income generating and wealth creation agenda of a university functions successfully.

The income generating agenda would depend on the effective engagement of university with industry, businesses, the government and communities collaborating on research development, innovation and commercialisation.

The income generation agenda would be evidenced by the various funds in the foundations of the

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Alumni's role in wealth creation efforts at varsities

→ *From Page 16*

universities or colleges. The alumni are expected to assist the universities in their wealth creation efforts. All higher education institutions engage in teaching, research, publications, consultancy, and community service.

Within each of these areas there would be niche areas of engagement such as education, tourism, energy, green technology and environment, waste management, pharmaceuticals and health.

Also the niche areas develop Centres of Excellence which generate and disseminate knowledge and drive transformations towards the betterment of communities and societies and even contribute towards humanity and contemporary civilisation.

In their role as the guardian of high culture and the generation of knowledge for civilisational survival, universities would take initiatives to formulate various programmes and establish centres to build knowledge corpus.

One of the popular initiatives is to create interest in building local knowledge and wisdom and local knowledge repository.

The awareness of corporate social responsibility lead universities to address the local and global challenges of poverty, diseases, drug and human trafficking.

Various opportunities would be provided to disadvantaged individuals and marginalised groups through the establishment of policies and initiatives which celebrate diversity and provide access to higher education, promoting the policy of the democratisation of higher education.

The expansion of higher education in Malaysia has created unprecedented opportunities to Malaysians and non-Malaysians across the human lifespan, to develop human potentialities and talents, acquire skills in a wide range of knowledge disciplines in multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways.

Leading the silent and significant transformation of higher education are Universiti Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

As the enlightened graduate learners participate in the activities of society, there are higher aspirations and expectations and higher standards are being established increasingly in all domains of life.

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