

# Give University Education A Chance

Mawdudur Rahman, Ph. D.

MUCH can be said about the deteriorating qualities of higher education in our country. It is not difficult for an inquisitive observer to find out some major causes of this phenomenon. This paper reviews some of the major factors to generate subjects for debate and discussion. I intend to explore some of these areas in greater details in my future papers.

As I will talk about quality in education, I want to briefly outline the concept of quality as we understand in business and economics. First of all, quality has costs, and the higher the quality goals are, the higher will be the costs to achieve such goals. Cost is the sacrifice of resources in monetary and non-monetary terms. One who cares for quality bears costs of quality. Next thing is to ensure that the quality goals are achieved, and for that some controls are necessary. Control means guidance through systems and procedures to achieve the goals. Control should not be used in punitive sense. Thus, this paper is about cost, control, and quality in higher education.

## Factors

The factors that are important for an academic programme include (1) Mission, (2) Faculty, (3) Students, (4) Programmes and Curriculum, (5) Physical facilities, and (6) Administration. Each of these areas can be examined to explore costs and quality, and concerns have to be shown for all of them.

Have we defined the mission of the university? Do faculty, administration, and students know what they are here for? If the mission is defined, then different strategies should be considered to achieve the goals considering the socio-political realities of the country. The mission should help the administration, faculty, and students to set their departmental and individual goals which in turn should be used to evaluate the performance of each segment.

An example: provide quality education at an affordable cost.

## Faculty

Do we have quality faculty in different departments? How will we know the faculty quality and control it?

We do not know the faculty quality. There had been no written and systematic procedure to guide, monitor, and measure faculty quality.

First of all, faculty quality can be monitored at the entry level—judge objectively what is coming on board. Areas to evaluate faculty include:

Academic qualifications.—Only when the first appointment is made, after that no value to it should be given.

Teaching—Teaching effectiveness should be evaluated to provide feed-back to the faculty member, and help to find the weakness and overcome those weaknesses.

Teaching evaluation includes:

1) Evidence of classroom performance

2) Course outlines or syllabi used by an instructor in each course—changes in it from year to year.

3) Tests given to students

4) Innovations in teaching

5) Faculty office hours for students

Now there is no control on teaching performance of a professor, who can do almost anything he/she wants. Students fairly and unfairly make serious negative comments about some of their professors. Many of the weaker professors could be developed to better professors with appropriate feed-back on their teaching performance, and planning and control.

## Research

Do we know what kind of research we want? In what journal they should or should not be published? Do we want everybody to do research? These questions must be answered to ensure faculty quality. Research will not happen over night or automatically. Do we have faculty development programme? Can money be spent to attend research seminars, present papers to acquire new tools and techniques?

Finally, faculty members are responsible to provide service to the university, department and the community at large. Regular annual faculty evaluation should be made a part of the process. What are we doing to motivate a hardworking faculty member?

—More money?

—Higher rank?

—Research grant?

—Any other?

Do something.

Curriculum: When have we looked at the curriculum last? Does it have enough of everything it should have? or is it a balanced curriculum? Can our graduates communicate well verbally and in writing? What about ethical values? What about their conceptual ability? Did our curriculum pass the market test? i.e. will people recruit our graduate? How do we know what is best?

## Students

What do we recruit as students? do we know what kind student we want? we should get more involved in student recruitments and recruit only those who have chances to succeed. Universities should not be parking lots for the aimless individuals or people who come to the university—to achieve other external goals than the missions of higher education. Politicians, professors, and others should refrain from using the students as pawns on their chess boards of power politics. Then only universities will be able to produce better politicians, better professors, and better citizens.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that Taka cost of education to the student should be based on full costs. Students coming from rich families should pay the full price and

the poor students should study free.

Do the faculty members advise students? How many students we are taking in, how many of them are graduating and after how many years? Are they getting jobs? At what salary? What positions? To answer all these questions we need a placement office to help students. Students should have help from placement office and cooperative education office. Students should be allowed to enroll as part-time or full-time students in the day or evening programmes.

Do the administrators (Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Chairpersons) know well enough what their jobs are? Are they appointed, selected or elected? Which is best for us? Are we getting the best person for the job? Is he/she an effective academic leader? How did he/she change/improve the segments he/she is responsible for? Did we train any department Chair/Dean?

For example a chairman must be a good teacher-teaching experience able researcher-research record command respect has ability to establish contact with the environment (employers of the graduate, government agencies, donors for fund, alumni and guardians, can achieve cooperation from the colleagues, finally a fair person and independent from unfair influences of (a) colleagues (b) deans and V.Cs. (c) Political groups and (d) students.

Once we have a chairman having the above qualities, he/she should enjoy support from everybody. Same type of list can be prepared for the Deans and Vice-Chancellors. The academic leadership positions are crucial to the future of the University education. Universities need strong leaders with vision, courage, and very high ethical standard. May I say we are not short of people with such qualities who are willing to give the university education a chance. Furthermore, if the university leaders refuse to allow others to misuse them, the people who approach for such misuse generally respect it. I speak from my own experience, when I was the acting director of the IBA and the student-leader of the most powerful political party asked me to violate a simple procedure regarding student admission. I refused and explained why I could not. The leader was convinced and assured me to support fully the quality mission of the IBA. There was never any more interference from him or others. At that time very few people would risk it. But I wanted to try and then fail if I would. I did not want to concede defeat before I even tried. Even today I admire that student leader for that small understanding. My advise will be: give the politicians a chance to respect the institution by upholding its causes before your own and do not appear weak (morally) before a strong adversary.

## Physical Facilities

Do we have the required physical

facilities? Are we using the existing facilities to its full capacity? I guess the answer to the first question should be yes. The investment in physical facilities needs resources which could be used for other purposes. For example the university buildings are available 365 days and 24 hours every day. Ideally each classroom should be used at least 14 hours a day and 300 days a year before a new classroom is added.

Are we maintaining our facilities well? Who is to stop writings on the walls?

Control and Evaluation of programmes: How do we know we are doing the right things?

This is the biggest question. In order to answer this question, we should accept the merits of external evaluation. Let somebody external to us evaluate us and tell us how we are doing. Where can we improve? who is this somebody else?

I am proposing a committee to do this job, may be under the auspices of the University Grants Commission but completely independent for each academic field like: Commerce and Business Administration, Liberal Arts, Applied and Theoretical Sciences—members of these committees may include, professionals and, 2) Academic faculty people.

The committee may be called National Accreditation Committee and should be supported by appropriate administrative staff. The committee should frame guidelines on goals and missions, provide broad outline of standards in different areas, and specify different types of accreditation of programmes by the committee. The actual control and planning of programme design, curriculum development and faculty development should remain as the concerns of the individual departments, faculty divisions, and the universities. The committee should recruit experts as consultants to help itself and the universities in meeting their respective goals. Gradually, colleges offering graduate and part-graduate degrees should be included within this preview.

The university departments and faculty divisions achieving accreditation from the committee will receive high rating from the employers, students and the government, faculty member will receive more prestige. Please note that at the present moment universities and institutes are valued by their names only and not by their service, though some of them have degenerated from their original standards.

It will enhance the value of the university degrees outside the country also.

I hope many of my readers will think about the issues raised and join together in this mission to raise the quality of the university education in our country.

Dr. Rahman is Professor of Accounting, School of Management, Suffolk University, Beacon Hill, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.