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Give University Education A Chance

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THE institutions of higher education like many other institutions in our society are fast decaying. We are moving away from the substance and truth to the mechanics and substance. From the systems point of view, all social institutions are intricately related to form the social fabric. Political, economic and academic institutions are closely interrelated, and they interact with each other to shape the character and content of society. If the economic institutions (business and industries) are not self-sustaining, the political institutions are failing, and the academic institutions are degenerative, it will not be difficult for a social scientist to outline a grim picture for the future of our society. For example, due to the lack of leadership vision and public participation and inability to resolve political differences on a broader level, we have a large number of political parties without any platform.

Most industries and businesses are heavily leveraged (more borrowed money than owners' contribution). They don't run or are not being managed on an economic basis. Most heavy duty necessities and 'luxuries' are still imported. University graduates do not get jobs, cannot compete for admission with fund in any foreign university. People of means send their children to foreign countries to pursue even secondary education indicating a loss of their confidence in the country's education system. I think this is the time for social leaders to take a very serious look at specific areas of their interest and expertise. In pursuance of my interest in quality in higher education in Bangladesh I have made several attempts from various directions.

I approached the relevant administrative agency of the government, academic leaders and social elite. Everybody listens to me with in-

terest, agrees with me and concludes that it will not be a success. For example I discussed my ideas with a very senior academic person holding a high position. If he represents the typical thinking of the intelligentsia then our higher education has no future. Even before he carefully heard me, he gave me the verdict, your quality-in-education mission has no future you are wasting your time.

Now, after all these complaints and disappointing remarks, what is it I am after?

A very simple idea, but it needs courage and initiatives, I am recommending to set goals for our actions, and measure the performance against the goals set. I am proposing a process of self-control. Goals are to be set by each university faculty, by departments, professors for their own evaluation. This can be formalised through a planning process.

All our actions, private, or public, are guided by our long term and short term goals. We act to achieve what we decide in advance to attain which are goals for us. Why should there be no goal for our institutions and individuals who work in those institutions? Setting realistic goals is one way of getting the work done effectively.

More Than Moral Support

However, successful implementation of goals needs more than moral support. It needs intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for the people who work with the goals. A system of periodic evaluation by comparing the goals and achievement, a system of positive reinforcement, and helping people to achieve the goals are very important tasks before such a system

is instituted. Which means it should involve all levels of people. A national initiative is necessary. It can be done. People at other places are doing it.

The only thing we need is will. As the old saying goes, where there is a will, there is a way. People do not try to believe that they have capacity to do things systematically and differently than what it is now. By people here I am referring to top ranking administrators and the intelligentsia. These are the people whom I happen to interact with frequently. This defeatist attitude is dangerously counter to the national aspiration.

University professors, department heads, and deans do not seem to believe that they can change things or the university can be run in a better way. Instead of a common purpose most of them are focusing on individual purposes, in most cases, dysfunctional to the common purpose of the university and the departments. The efforts and interest of these highly trained, intelligent and capable people could easily be directed towards a common purpose with a simple and small effort i.e. setting goals and evaluating performance against these goals.

Initially these goals could be simple and self-motivated, without any formal imposition. For example, a professor should write his/her annual plan in three areas as teaching, research and service, such as:— a) teaching the number of courses in a year, b) Doing specific research and publishing in quality journals. c) Doing specific service for the university, department, and the society.

Any service to the community outside is as good as services to the university, department. University professors should be adequate in all

the three areas and excellent at least in one area.

There is no short cut solution to these problems, and this cannot be achieved overnight it is a long way to go, but what is needed is a modest start.

I am sure many university professors are doing outstanding jobs in one or all three areas of evaluation mentioned earlier i.e. teaching, research and service. These outstanding jobs remain unrecognized and unremunerated causing frustration and disappointment among those who perform such work.

Freedom

Education environment in the university is not only student's politics, or the election of the vice chancellor or a dean it is also teaching and research climate. I will not think the quest for high quality research is secondary to the political institutions of the university. With objective leadership and positive plans both can survive and succeed. One can support the other towards achieving long term goals of high quality academic output (teaching and research) and the desired freedom of academic institutions.

If the systems for ensuring the quality for curriculum, academic requirements for students, teaching and research requirements for the professor are in place, much of the uncertainties will be reduced and a more objective basis of doing things will be introduced. We have the intellectual powerhouse and what is needed is a BIG BANG to explode, into creativity.

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