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**The University of the West Indies and the Knowledge Business**  
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Last year I began what I hope will become a tradition—inviting graduates of our earlier years to participate in our ceremonies. I do this not only to reengage with them, but also to have the new graduates recognize them and their contribution to getting the University to where it is today. I ask them to stand so the new graduates may salute them.

Over the past two years I have marveled at the increase in enrolment at this Campus. It now stands at 13,070 which represents a 15.6 percent increase over last year and exceeds by far the target for enrolment that was set in the University's Strategic Plan for 2002-2007. I have wondered how the staff and the physical facilities have coped with the situation. Thus, I must congratulate the Principal and the Faculty as well as the students on this achievement, and obviously the quality of teaching has not suffered, as we see from the graduation results. I also wish to congratulate you on the physical facilities, especially the grounds, as it seems to me that this beautiful oasis is as well kept as always and shows no sign of having exceeded its carrying capacity.

But I have to wonder how long this increase can go on and if it does, whether the graduates of tomorrow will have as rich a learning experience as those we have with us today. I am sure that you new graduates must share the same concern, as you would wish your children to enjoy the same kind of university experience you have had. You will wish those who come after you to be as prepared for the world of work as you have been or perhaps even better. These are the kinds of questions that need to be answered in any institution that tries to satisfy the absolute and imperative need to increase the percentage of the eligible cohort of Caribbean nationals who have access to higher education. Let me hazard a response and say that I believe that your children will receive an education as good as or even better than the one given here today. I will also predict that the Campus will expand, although perhaps not as rapidly as it has recently.

However, it is clear that the mode and loci of higher education will change and of course the truism of the inevitability of change is as apt here as in other places. The primary reason for the change will be the advances in technology. I will give one example of the original rejection of a technology which is now used universally. We sometimes idealize the concept of the academy of Socrates as being the progenitor of the university and every good teacher has from time to time used the Socratic method of

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transferring information to students with the hope that they internalize it and create their own knowledge which is the precursor to the wisdom on which all human action is based. But the reality of the Socratic academy makes us appreciate the nature of the change over the centuries and more comfortable with the prospects for the future.

Socrates did not believe in books as a method of transferring information. According to Plato in the Phaedros, he tells the story of the god who invented letters, (incidentally he also invented drafts and dice) who went to see the powerful god-King of Egypt to convince him of the usefulness of that technology to make Egyptians wiser and improve their memories. The King replied as follows:

*“One man has the ability to beget the arts, but the ability to judge of usefulness or harmfulness belongs to another. This invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.”*

Further along we even had critics of the printing press that put the monks out of work and made information available to many. Of course you will not tell the manager of the Campus Book Store that the Chancellor even mentioned that there was ever any questioning of a need for books!

And now we have come to the stage where as Martin Luther King said we have dwarfed space and put distance in chains and information can be disseminated world-wide in the twinkling of an eye and to a myriad of devices. The digital divide is shrinking. Thus we have come from the dislike for the codification of information to its “massification”. In the midst of this techno-euphoria, some pundits have predicted that the university as a physical entity will die; there will be no more bricks and mortar and certainly no saman trees, and that all if not most higher education will take place over the internet. There is no doubt about the growth of distance transmitted information, and I differentiate instruction from information transmission, and indeed the growth of the education business has spawned large enterprises that specialize in providing information on line.

However, I will be bold enough to predict that the university will not die and our own University of the West Indies will be one of those to give the lie to the idea that the institution of the future will be a university without walls. I am confident and assure you new graduates and those who come after you of this for several reasons. First, a virtual institution cannot discharge all the essential functions of a university. It can perform the credentialing function, but it cannot perform the functions of social integration and networking which are so critical in the Caribbean. After all, this is not the first time that we have come into contact with distance instruction. There are many illustrious

Caribbean citizens who did their degrees externally through correspondence courses. But the critical issue is found in Plato's assertion that to read without instruction is not the ideal way to educate the young.

Your university of the future will of course use the best technology to transmit information and this is essential, given the nature of our Caribbean. I must say that my recent experience with communicating among the University centers shows that we have a very long way to go, but we will get there. But the direction of our efforts has to be in promoting and employing blended learning-learning which combines on line and face to face approaches and thus combines reading to acquire information with instruction. Any approach that separates these two is second best and should only be an interim position. Not to accept this is to negate the very definition of our University and all such as companies of masters and scholars.

Of course your children will see other changes as the technology moves on. More universities are putting their courses on line and in the public domain so one does not have to be a registered student to access them. I have been exposed to this practice of e-learning which replaces the concept of distance education, in that the learning materials are available for persons anywhere and not necessarily physically distant from the source. The fact that this does not eliminate the contact between student and instructor is in keeping with the Plato's belief in the need for instruction in addition to transmission of information in order for there to be education.

Our University will not only continue to traffic in the knowledge business, but has to play a role in ensuring that our countries have the capacity to ensure quality through linkage to some regional accreditation mechanism. There has to be a way to avoid each country having to establish its own standard of competence; and with the imminence of the CSME, there must be a way of ensuring a regionally established level of competency in the essential disciplines, especially those whose practitioners are likely to move throughout the Caribbean.

I am sure all our new graduates have had it dinned into them that their education gives them the skills and tools to be functional in the world of knowledge work. This is legitimate. But I do hope that the seed of knowledge for its own sake has also been planted. Perhaps it will take some time to grow, but I would not wish you to believe that there is any intrinsic conflict between the appreciation that the knowledge of the many wonderful things around us can be good for us as human beings and a utilitarian approach to the knowledge you have gained. As Francis Bacon would say five centuries ago:

*“But this is what will indeed dignify and exalt knowledge, if contemplation and action may be more neatly and straightly conjoined and united together than they have been”---- “That knowledge may not be a courtesan, for pleasure and vanity only, or as a bondwoman, to acquire and gain to her master's use; but as a spouse for generation, fruit and comfort”.*

I said that the loci of higher education will change within and without the University. Everyone in the Caribbean would agree that the University of the West Indies cannot and should not satisfy all the needs for higher education in the Region. To attempt to do so would be to destroy it. However, as I said here last year, we see it as our remit to assist wherever possible and within the limits of our resources, in the development of other institutions of higher education in all the Caribbean countries. We do not see the creation of national universities as a threat but as an opportunity to help build capacity for the delivery of quality higher education in the region.

I was privileged to attend, the inauguration of the University of Trinidad and Tobago along with Principal Tewarie and was immensely cheered by its focus and the acknowledgement by Professor Ken Julien of the role this University had played in much of the thinking behind its creation. I speak for the Vice Chancellor and all the staff of the University of the West Indies when I say that we wish these institutions well and extend the hand of cooperation. This can only be to the benefit of the Caribbean as a whole.

If the University of the West Indies is to discharge its function in the knowledge business in the Caribbean it obviously has to have the resources to do so. To date the governments of the Caribbean have been generous to the University, but there is good reason for the University to diversify its source of funding. In the world's best public universities there are three major sources of funds—the state, the private sector and the students' fees. I must congratulate the Principal for his work in mobilizing resources from the private sector. The Vice Chancellor has indicated quite clearly that the University has to be in a position to compete for many of the funds which are now channeled to foreign experts for consultancy services in the Caribbean.

I mentioned at the beginning that the enrolment for the year 2005-2006 stands at 13,070 students. Of these 54 percent are in Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities, and Education while 46 percent are in Medicine, Engineering and Science and Agriculture. Some 41% of our post-graduate students are in the sciences. There is strong female dominance especially in Law and the Social Sciences but two-thirds of the students in Engineering are male. Over the past three years there has been a slight but steady increase in the percentage of female students and also an increase in the students enrolled in Social Sciences.

The steady decrease in the number of students who are not from the host country must be a cause of concern for any Campus of the University of the West Indies. Over the past four years the percentage of Trinidadian and Tobagonian students has risen from 86% to 92%. This cannot be good for the students or for the University and is one problem which the University must address. One solution is for the University to seek funding to permit students to spend part of their program in another Campus. The Vice Chancellor is examining closely why the existing Millennium program which should serve this purpose is not being taken up actively by students. Clearly we wish to see the increase in students from this country but we also wish to see increasing numbers of other CARICOM nationals living and studying here for all or part of their program. It is however good to have students from 23 non-Caribbean countries on Campus.

The graduating class this year will be 1,568 with 208 gaining Certificates or Diplomas, 1096 gaining First Degrees and 264 with Higher Degrees. I was pleased to note that just over 12 percent of the undergraduate degrees were First Class Honors, which is higher than in any of the past three years. While much credit goes to the students, I also wish to congratulate the Faculty on this impressive result. There are 248 graduates who have gained Higher Degrees and 16 of these were awarded with distinction. Well done!

Several new academic programs were introduced in the past year in the Faculties of Engineering, Humanities and Education and Social Sciences. I am especially pleased to note the Diploma in Natural Hazards Management which must be of special relevance to our Region, prone as we are to the disasters that arise from these natural hazards.

The expansion in numbers has naturally led to a need for more space and a temporary classroom building has been erected to accommodate 360 students. However we have seen the completion of several more permanent buildings, notably among them the Phase 2 of the Center for Language Learning Facilities with its beautiful new auditorium. Several other buildings are on the drawing board or in the process of construction.

I referred to the need for contributions from non-governmental sources. We were pleased to receive an additional sum of US \$180, 223.80 from the estate of Ivy Maynier who was Resident Tutor of the Extra-Mural Department here from 1958 to 1962. I hope this kind of gift will be an example to others and we will see planned giving become a standard mechanism for our alumni and friends to contribute to the University. Every good University has developed mechanisms to facilitate planned giving and we are in the process of doing the same.

The Petroleum Geoscience Program has benefited from 2 major grants-- US\$, 2 million by Halliburton, BPT&T and Landmark and TT\$ 315,000 from Kerr-McGee. The Faculty of Engineering has received TT\$ 20,000 from the Society of Tribologists and Lubrication Engineers and there have been grants of TT\$ 2.9 million for other areas. I must congratulate the Business Development Office in its search for additional resources. The consultancies being managed or undertaken total some TT\$ 3.2 million and there are 29 million dollars of projects that are in the pipeline. Well done!

It gives me the greatest of pleasure to thank Mr. Arthur Lok Jack for the magnanimous gift of TT\$ 20 million dollars to the Lok Jack Institute of Business. This is a splendid example which I hope others will follow.

I have spoken to the graduates about what your University will be like and you will have received in your package my message which stresses the responsibility you have to those who supported you and to the place that has trained you so far. I cannot stress enough the need for us to maintain contact with you, so that you can hear of our problems, successes and even failures. There will be failures, as every institution that is

man-made will have failures, but with your help and the help of those who come after you these should be mere hiccups along the way.

I wish also to salute the parents, relatives and friends of the graduates. You should savor this day and be justly proud of what your loved one has accomplished. I would only ask that your interest in the University not die with this graduation. You too have a stake in seeing that the institution that trained him or her continues on an upward path.

So let us all therefore rejoice!