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The Fourth Child **Antigua***

Greetings,

Giving birth at an advanced age is not common today. An Internet source records only 31 documented births by women between the ages of 60 and 70 in the past 17 years. But perhaps 60 is not that old to bear children as according to Biblical lore, Sarah was blessed by God and miraculously gave birth to Isaac when she was 90 years old. There was considerable doubt that the child was hers, so she proved it by suckling at her breast several of the children of her friends. It is also said that the fourth child in modern times is a status symbol; an indication that the couple is financially comfortable and happy with the prospects of the education of that child which will run to large sums of money.

So there must have been some concern when the University of the West Indies at the age of 60 established its fourth campus-its fourth child. It was not because we were financially comfortable-far from it; certainly we did not think ourselves elderly, because 60 years in the life of a University is but the twinkling of an eye. It was because of the clear perception that if we wished to be the University of the West Indies and maintain currency and credibility in this region there had to be a decided effort to have a palpable presence of the University in every nook and cranny of our space. There had to be a decided effort to ensure that there was no geographical restriction to the “west” as set out in our motto and emblazoned on our crest.

And so it was that three years ago after a year of debate and planning the Open Campus came into being as the amalgamation of several of the University’s outreach programs. This morning I wish to recount briefly some of the tremendous advances that have been made in this short space of time. I trust that this does not appear to be hubris; it is simply bringing to the attention of the public how its University is responding to its needs and the extent to which it sees itself as an essential partner in the struggle for development of all, and I repeat all the Caribbean.

I have read somewhere the quip that if you wish your children to improve, let them hear the nice things you say to others about them. It is not the role of a Chancellor to flatter any part of the institution or to say nice things that are unwarranted, but I do

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hope that all of you who are partners in this venture will appreciate if you have not already done so, what has been accomplished by this fourth child.

This has been a critical period for this Campus. It had the misfortune to be born at a time when the whole region was suffering from the effects of the world's financial crisis and it took considerable courage to go ahead in that climate. So first, I wish to congratulate our Vice-Chancellor for proceeding and especially Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald for supplying much of the energy that it has taken to get us to this stage. I must also thank her dedicated staff for their valuable contributions.

Some small indication of what has transpired can be gleaned for the last newsletter of the Open Campus which conveys some of the excitement that appears to grip the senior management. PVC Simmons-McDonald writes:

During these first three years of existence we have also experimented with various online learning objects, tools, devices and programmes to facilitate access to programming and services and to provide support for our students. We have piloted selected systems and in the new academic year we will be implementing widely a system which provides online the context for full classroom participation and interaction synchronously with instructors and peers in a given course.

And she goes on:

Although in these first three years our planned developments have been stymied by a significant shortfall in funding, we remain focused on the commitments we articulated at our inception. A few examples of these are the provision of open access, developing and maintaining a culture of responsiveness, helpfulness and constant improvement of the quality of our service, ensuring a seamless transition between programmes and building partnerships with other institutions to create a more cohesive and improved tertiary education system in the region.

We are also committed to becoming a viable operation financially.

I laud the spirit of optimism and wish you to note the spirit of entrepreneurship, commitment and fixation on partnership for service. The mantra of the campus is "On line, on time, on demand", and it has lived up to that beyond the expectations of many and the fears of not a few. There are now 42 sites across the region in 16 countries. It now services 4,000 students online and nearly 20,000 in face to face or blended continuing education programs across the region. This fourth child is bringing the University to the region in a remarkable way.

The use of information technology and the emphasis on facility of communication for academic as well as administrative purposes has been impressive. Truly it is an echo of the phrase used by Martin Luther King on so many occasions as he marveled at the advance of science. Truly they have “dwarfed distance and placed time in chains”. But as I have been reliably informed, and indeed seen, the fixation is less on the technology and more on the substance. The informational content in the modern instruments is not fundamentally different from that contained in the clay tablets of Babylon. It is the nature of the data, the interconnectedness through technology and the use of the data which make the difference. This claim of the Open Campus to be on line and on site has the connotation of making presential the information needed for learning and conversion to knowledge.

This morning we see the fruits of the efforts of that learning in the 595 persons who have satisfied the examiners and are graduating. I am pleased to note that they come from every country of the Caribbean that supports the University. The majority of them are Bachelors of Science and Education and I am particularly pleased with the latter, as this is one of our major contributions to the development of future generations. Just over 10% of them received First Class Honors and we should salute and congratulate them. I note that the graduates are mature persons with the average age of 36 years and it is pleasing to have one graduate over the age of 60.

The growth in the number of programs and courses being offered is another impressive feature and we now have postgraduate programs in public sector management and public policy. I cannot describe all of the courses offered, but I was struck particularly by the new certificate in Community Policing, which must be important, given the concern expressed universally about the crime and violence in our societies. It is good to see the cooperation with the banking sector and the undergraduate certificate courses in banking and finance services. I noted also the course on Spanish for business as a clear indication of the appreciation of the need for us to develop links with our neighbors in Latin America.

The Campus is very aware of the need for sites that can do the University proud, so there is constant concern for upgrading them and equipping them with the infrastructure to allow the students optimal chance of learning. So I am very pleased that the final arrangements for conveyance of the land made available by the Government of Grenada are being undertaken, and I trust we will break ground there shortly. It is also gratifying to note the discussions with the Government of St. Lucia about its commitment to make 60 acres of land available for a new Open Campus facility. I wish to thank those and all the governments which have made great efforts to establish and maintain the facilities that will permit the campus to be optimally functional.

The campus contributed to the relief efforts in St. Lucia in the wake of the storm Tomas. Given the participation of Haiti in CARICOM it is good to note that it made available four scholarships in the pre-university Department to Haiti through the OAS. Students will access the programs online.

It is not only the graduates who must be congratulated. I must also thank and congratulate the parents and loved ones who are here and those who are viewing this electronically. Given the age of our graduates, it is likely that there are whole families which have had to shoulder much of the emotional and financial burden. I trust you think that it is worth it. My experience tells me that it definitely is, but I do hope you share in the rejoicing that should attend this passage.

No institution gets this far without committed staff and it is a pleasure to acknowledge all the staff throughout the Caribbean who are a part of this enterprise. The fourth child will continue to need support as it grows, and I am confident of that support that must come from many quarters. I count on the support of the governments and people of the Caribbean who should feel a sense of accomplishment at progress to date and a belief that this progress is but an earnest of things to come. I know I can count on the support of the Campus Council and especially that of its Chair, my good friend Sir Dwight Venner to guide the affairs of this campus aright.

I thank you and wish you all well.