

**ISSUES, TRENDS AND CHALLENGES FACING
HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE BAHAMAS**

A PRESENTATION BY

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To

ASSOCIATION OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN THE BAHAMAS
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INTRODUCTION

Higher education represents the foundation on which modern industrial success has become a reality. Education is the fundamental human right of every person on the face of the earth. It is the tool that assures success in multi-complex environments, allowing both the poor and rich the same level of access to prosperity: working as an agent of change to negative and often repressive national, political, cultural, environmental and economic stagnation.

In the late twentieth century, higher education across the world has come to face a series of fundamental changes arising from the forces of globalization, the growth of the 'knowledge society' and a competitive higher education market. The changes are seen variously as crises, challenges and opportunities for transformation of the traditional roles of higher education.¹

Globally, educational, political and other social systems are in transition under the combined impact of demographic, cultural and technological changes. Arguably, there is a special role for higher education institutions, not only to accommodate themselves to these changes, but also to lead the way in understanding them and to help avoid or ameliorate the painful consequences of change and contribute to the practical achievement of sustainable national development.

Higher education has been an effective national tool for the advancement and development of national goals and aspirations. In the face of crushing poverty around the globe "today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for learning can look forward to lifetimes of unprecedented economic fulfillment. But in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary prospects of lives of quiet desperation"². Kojo confirms this position in his address to the Ghanaian parliament that "...of all national investments, education (higher education) is one of the most crucial and the pace of our educational progress is the pace of our national development"³.

Higher education has the ability to act as an instrument for the consolidation of national unity that encourages objectivity towards becoming the chief custodian of our national heritage.

Accepting this fundamental embodiment of education, with specific reference to higher education, education can become the impetus to guard our co-operative efforts towards the continued development of The

Bahamas. In doing so, the government must, without any viable alternative recourse, work in partnership with the private sector to fashion out sustainable and qualitative education needed in the current dynamic and complex global environment.

In order to fully address the broad spectrum of challenges facing higher education in the Bahamas, this paper will look at the various issues ranging from the policy makers' information gathering mechanism; the funding systems; leadership structure and patterns; gender issues; issues bordering on recognition and accreditation within the regional and global context; the synchronization and harmonization of the transition process from high school into higher education systems; and the future prospect of higher education in the country.

The weakening influence of the state on education as well as other economic activities, together with the emergence of new global competitive forces, driven by changing societal needs, economic realities, and technology, are likely to drive a massive restructuring of higher education towards becoming more responsive to the needs in our society.

POLICY MAKING

One area of primary importance in the realm of education in general and with special difficulty as it pertains to higher education, is the formulation of policies that are geared towards meeting not only our national educational needs via the macro-economic needs of the nation, but in the evolution of systems that would remain competitive within the global context.

Hence, policies in The Bahamas are faced with increasing demand for both national and international compliance to standardising higher education. Our educational system must inculcate the orientation of the Bahamian culture vis-a-viz our economic system. It must be built upon the foundation laid at the primary and secondary levels that would sustain students to effectively get acquainted with and assimilate the increased complexity of learning at the higher level of education.

Bahamian policy makers must understand that higher education is not an isolated sector. They must not attempt to replicate other countries' educational systems for the sake of recognition and accreditation. This is why most developed nations operate at their own pace in the formulation of accreditation systems that best suit their national objectives and the planned strategic development of their country. The United States and the

United Kingdom have, with much dexterity, perfected their educational systems to provide the support needed for the development of their nation.

Consequently, our policy makers must not be learning partners in the formulation of policies from these developed nations, rather an equal partner towards prioritising our national educational needs based on the state of our own country. The parameters for the development of sound higher educational policies rest not on symbiosis recognition alone, but on the social, cultural, political and economic demands of our country.

In doing so, our policy makers must first come to terms with an understanding of the role of higher education in our country, before any meaningful policy thrust could be envisioned. It is McHari Institute's view that our higher educational system should aim at:

- a) Human resource development. The mobilization of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society.
- b) High-level skills training. The training and provision of personal power to strengthen our country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation.
- c) Production, acquisition and application of new knowledge. National growth and competitiveness is dependent on continuous technological improvement and innovation, driven by a well-organized, vibrant, research and development system, which integrates the research and training capacity of higher education with the needs of industry, the economy, as well as the social fabric of our culture.

Hence, the critical elements in the formulation of these policies remain the availability of data and information infrastructure. The data and information infrastructure must be capable of generating information relating to the needs of the society in respect of:

- a) Ensuring political stability. It is interesting to note that our current stable political society has been our single major platform that have sustained and ensured the tremendous transformation of our country into a vibrant growth oriented economy with the correlated high standard of living.

This enduring legacy cannot be taken for granted, but must be sustained through the evolution of deep-rooted educational policies that would engender future leaders with the zealot-like approach to defending the ideals of broad and objective minded approaches to our higher educational system, that embraces all points of view for the single purpose of national opinion harmonisation that would forestall any aberration to existing political culture.

- b) Alleviating the ugly and lopsided trend in gender imbalance in terms of male/female enrolment. Policy makers must be able to mine prerequisite data that would unravel the best approach to re-orientate the mindset of the young towards taking up studies at higher education levels. This is the only way the nation can be assured of smooth transition of the legacy our fathers have bequeathed to this generation.

- c) Understanding the social and economic divide existing in our society today. Education is the last resort for families who cannot raise substantial capital for entrepreneurial investment. Hence, policy makers must ensure that our higher educational system is flexible in terms of affordability. The government Educational Loan Guarantee Scheme is an example of a viable vehicle to bridge the affordability problem.

In spite of the loan scheme, our systems must provide for the thousands of teenagers without any family and financial support. In fact the Organisation of American States (OAS) believes that nations should "take care, on a priority basis, of the most vulnerable groups to ensure their equal access to educational opportunities and establish conditions to allow the optimal use of them so that the vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance is broken."

- d) Ensure that the primary and secondary systems and curricula are geared and structured towards the grooming of children that are singularly focused on seeking placement in higher learning as a matter of necessity.

Subsequently, policy makers must be focused towards developing policies that would further enhance higher education's capability to:

- a) Promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realize their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- b) Meet, through well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- c) Support democratic ethos and the culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humanity; and
- d) Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, while upholding rigorous standards of academic quality.

FUNDING

The greatest challenge facing most higher education institutions in The Bahamas is in the area of finance. The demographic proportion of Bahamians that prefer to study abroad compared to studying locally is astounding and though unintentional, very unpatriotic. The government and the Ministry of Education are not helping either in assisting local institutions to offer comparable standards, not in terms of quality programmes, but in terms of the environment and infrastructural facilities, which are more appealing to youths, in addition to the connotation of wanting to be associated with the big leagues of renowned institutions.

Considering that higher education “is a strategic element to improve quality of life, facilitate the exercise of civil rights, guarantee the preservation of the environment, ensure conditions of competitiveness and productivity for the economy and foster a culture of living together in harmony, ...recognizing the pluri-cultural, multiethnic character of our cultural heritage”⁴; the government must re-prioritize its educational objectives to include both public and private higher education institutions for subvention or grants.

The advancement of educational technology is another dimension that poses serious problems to the schools in The Bahamas in their inability to generate enough funds to acquire the latest instructional support technology.

The financial constraints over the years have forced many institutions around the globe to change their policies as it relates to meeting its financial requirements. Hence, Adrianna J. Kezar⁵ has identified the following new emerging trends in the area of higher education finance. Among them are:

- a) An increase in public funding through corporate sponsorship.
- b) The use of funding priorities by developing scales of priorities in the use of existing funds.
- c) Focus on faculty salary issues. This is related to the significant change among the faculty: more part-time and contract faculty relative to full-time faculty salaried staff.
- d) Use of profit sharing
- e) Use of multiple financial strategies: Some key strategies for institutions to consider, include:
 - i. Attracting additional revenues to help close the gap between resources and expenses;
 - ii. Reassessing tuition rate and financial aid policies to alter the size or mix of the student body;
 - iii. Cutting costs, improving quality, and restructuring how the institution educates students and administers its programs;

- iv. Introducing or expanding the use of technology to educate students and improve administrative functions; and
 - v. Increasing resource sharing by forming alliances and co-operating with other institutions such as the "Distance Learning Partners" in education.
- f) New revenue generation: Three major issues were noted in the emergence of new markets that would improve institutions' finances:
- i. Growth of continuing education with reference to adult education;
 - ii. Certificate programs that focus on emerging economic, political and social problems; and
 - iii. Degree upgrade programs.
- g) The proliferation of for-profit higher education
- h) Increased marketing: The interest in marketing is illustrated by the growth and development of various journals in the marketing of higher education. These journals now offer step-by-step approaches to marketing for educational institutions and the strategy range from developing a new image to strategic time management according to Norris, M⁶.

Notwithstanding these new sources of funding options which higher education institutions in The Bahamas may explore towards improving their finances, the government needs to develop strategies for the provision of partial funding or grants to various institutions in the country, as a form of support towards the development of substantial manpower base for the future prosperity of the nation, in addition to making significant contribution to research and development needed for national development.

LEADERSHIP

One area of great need in the Bahamian higher educational sector is in the area of leadership. The Association of Tertiary Institutions in the Bahamas (ATIB) must strive to evolve leadership models that are conceptually focused at broadening the framework of higher education

institutions operating in The Bahamas, by adequately and actively representing the sector within the government parlance.

The leadership expected from a body such as ATIB is one that should provide, strengthen and facilitate it's members to have adequate representation on any government proposed plans for the sector, especially in regards to the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council.

Obviously, the manner and style adopted in the draft accreditation bill runs against the fundamental concepts of our national constitution. The leadership of ATIB must be bold, courageous, and without mincing words, challenge the unconstitutionality of the draft bill. This would be explained in detail later in this paper.

The exhibition of derelict attitudes by leaders in our higher educational sector today, will in the near future haunt the sector for many years to come. We must become responsive to the challenges we face today.

We must note that in this "twenty-first century, countries in the Caribbean region and in other parts of the world will be confronted with economic, social, and political challenges that are interrelated and increasingly global. Economic production across countries will take place in a global economy characterised by rapid changes in various industries, increased application of new technology in different domains of the production process, more free movement of capital across markets in different parts of the world, greater mobility of labor across countries within regional trading blocs, and more changes in the working career of the individual"⁷.

Consequently, members of ATIB and leaders in the higher educational sector must be dynamic and envision the demand of the nation and the entire globe and push for the remodelling of our higher education curriculum to meet the needs and expectations of the nation. It has been argued according to Etkowitz⁸ that an academic revolution is in process, whereby the traditional mission of higher education would be fundamentally changed to include economic development alongside its traditional roles of teaching, research and service". New approaches that best serve the challenges in the 21st century should be the preparation of a high skilled, flexible, adaptable labour force to meet changing economic and social needs"⁹.

Members and leaders of ATIB must dedicate substantial attention aimed at influencing and mediating in government policy direction in a manner that extends their ideal role far beyond labour market responsiveness, to

the long-term general and broad recognition of all institutions in The Bahamas without any group/institution(s) swaying favours in respect of government support and funding.

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS AND DEMANDS

The higher education sector is equally responsible, just like other corporate organisations, as part of their “social responsibility,” to adopt policies and approaches that facilitates the provision of education to all members of the society, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Hence, courses and curricula must be very relevant, to attract all gender and contribute to overall societal harmony as an effective agent of socialisation and intellectual development.

The key social responsibility of higher education institutions in The Bahamas is in reference to the link between higher education and the workplace. Increasingly, higher education institutions are expected to prepare graduates, who will be directly employable and ready to enter the labour market as high skill employees, in view of the emerging or expected hemispheric competition via the introduction of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Higher education programmes are expected to include new elements to ensure that graduates are equipped with the tacit high level knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the labour market, alongside general and specialists academic knowledge. Higher education institutions will increasingly have to offer a greater mix of programmes, including those based on the development of vocationally based competencies and skills that are needed in the workplace.

We must collectively attempt to persuade the government to overhaul both primary and secondary school curricula, to become more effective and functional, to cater to the growing backsliding in the level of youth education and in preparing the youth towards smooth transition from secondary to post-secondary education. To meet this challenge, three major tasks face the Bahamian higher education sector: increased participation through the expansion of enrolments from a broader distribution of social groups; becoming more responsive to societal interests and needs; building co-operation and partnerships in the governing structures and operations of higher education institutions.

In doing this, we should focus on combating the increase in dropouts of the male population from the educational systems, by significantly providing appealing extra-curricula programmes to keep them in school for onward progression to higher institutions of learning. It is our responsibility to fulfil the long-term educational expectation of the society.

There is always tension and challenges between and within the higher educational sector, to continue, to promote and to preserve the model of historical body of knowledge of the past, and to develop a new model in relation to changing societal needs. Our curricula and programmes must while preserving our heritage, endeavour to adapt to the changing societal needs and the needs of the highly competitive and integrated international economies. We must begin to change our curricula, teaching and learning in line with these new expectations.

These challenges have to be understood in the context of the impact on higher education systems worldwide, attributed to the changes associated with the phenomenon of globalisation. The onset of the 21st century has brought in its wake changes in social, cultural and economic relations spawned by the revolution in information and communications technology. The impact of these changes on the way in which societies are organised is likely to be far-reaching and fundamental, comparable only to the changes brought by the industrial revolution in the 18th century. At the centre of these changes is the notion that in the 21st century, knowledge and the processing of information will be the key driving forces for wealth creation and thus social and economic development. Hence, our higher education sector must be responsive and focused to meet these challenges.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION

The general accreditation of higher education institutes in The Bahamas has become very crucial and an important element in the development of the nation and in ensuring fairness by all education service providers in The Bahamas. Hence, it is profoundly important that a level playing field be established to prevent bias and public miss-information.

It is fundamental however, that ATIB is unanimous in the understanding that The Bahamas' educational system is qualitatively evolving through the efforts and pursuit of both public and private sector providers of educational services, hence, any regulatory framework is expected to

evolve along the lines of advanced nations' established educational systems in conformity with the unique Bahamian socio-cultural foundation.

The term accreditation is broad and signifies the unification through pre-structured agreed organizational relationships, between institutions for the reciprocity in programs, courses, outputs or certificates and degrees recognition. Globally and with specific reference to the United Kingdom, accreditation is meant to promote academic excellence; in-depth and continuous improvement; upgrading and advancement of both undergraduate and graduate programmes with the sole objective of ensuring the training of students at levels consistent with humanity's dream of educational advancement towards higher intellectual development.

In the UK, an independent non-governmental body, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education was created and designated to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced through¹⁰:

- i. Working with higher education institutions to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of provision.
- ii. Providing clear and accurate information to students, employers and others about the quality and standards of higher education provision.
- iii. Working with higher education institutions to develop and manage the qualification framework.
- iv. Advising on the grant of degree awarding powers and university title.
- v. Facilitating the development of benchmark information to guide subject standards.
- vi. Promulgating codes of practice and examples of good practice.
- vii. Operating programmes for the review of performance at institutional and programmes levels.

In the USA, the Department of Education sets the standards on which accreditation boards operate but has no direct or indirect control or relationship with the bodies. The United States have the most divergent accreditation systems or bodies in the world. It is safe and intellectually factual to conclude that, "an accreditation body is an independent organization which lays down standards"¹¹

Hence, an independent accreditation body always focuses on assessing institutions against predetermined standards agreed by all concerned parties, which include private educational institutions, public sector professionals as well as experts in the business sector as it relates to any specific field.

The practice of accreditation, according to the United States Office of Post-Secondary Education, arose as a means of conducting non-governmental and peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope such as ATIB are expected to adopt criteria reflecting the qualities of sound educational programmes and develop procedures for evaluating institutions or programmes to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality.

The membership of any accreditation body, as we can see from both the UK and the USA, always represent very wide range of interests and it includes representatives from: heads of higher education institutions; government representatives; funding bodies in higher education; and independent directors who have wide practical experience in industry, commerce, finance or the practice of a profession.

In recognition of the need to promote the highest educational standards in The Bahamas and lay the foundation for the development of skilled professionals and experts in various fields, and in the interest of national economic development, the government and higher education service providers, both public and private sector, must come together as partners.

This partnership should be focused towards the introduction - on the basis of absolute trust - of a regulatory body to co-ordinate, accredit and regularize the operation of higher education institutions in The Bahamas. This partnership with the government entails government functioning as mentor only or as referee - guiding but not dictating or controlling the dispensation of the accreditation process.

We must recognize the burden faced by the government in respect of the provision of quality social and economic services to the citizens, and the usual bureaucracy inherent in the public sector. Hence, we must be unanimous to persuade the government to gradually divest its interests in the provision of higher education in The Bahamas with specific reference to the College of The Bahamas (COB). This would allow for the development of high level professionalism in higher learning institutions towards the provision of quality assurance programmes and its implementation; and

assures a level playing field in the accreditation process - for the benefit of the nation.

THE PROPOSED NATIONAL ACCREDITATION AND EQUIVALENCY COUNCIL

With reference to the draft accreditation bill presented to McHari Institute by the Ministry of Education, it is appalling to note that in modern civilized society, the government is attempting to usurp constitutional powers to itself by stating that the decision of the proposed national accreditation board is final without recourse to our judicial system. Section 12(1) that "a person or institution aggrieved by any decision of the Council in refusing an application for accreditation may within fourteen days after the date on which the notice of such decision was received by him, appeal against such decision to the Appeal Tribunal appointed by the Minister in accordance with the provision of the second schedule"¹². How could the Honourable Minister make such a proposal?

The Minister has no right to circumvent our judicial system by devolving to himself the sole authority (albeit illegally) to appoint the three members of the tribunal whose decision is purported to be final. This is unethical and improper within our democratic institutions.

Furthermore, section 14 (1) states that "the Minister may give to the Council directions of a general nature to the policy to be followed by the Council in the carrying out or in pursuit of its functions as appear to the Minister requisite in the public interest and the Council shall give effect to any such directions, is a dangerous precedent that would lead to disastrous public administration in our country. Please be mindful that the direction(s) the Minister may give is not in respect of "appointment, termination of appointment, promotion or disciplining of any employee of the Council as stated in Section 14 subsection (2).

Members of ATIB must unite to ensure that this draconian bill is not passed into law. This would trample the progress we have so far achieved in the provision of higher education in The Bahamas. ATIB must be the driving force in the process shaping the policy direction of accreditation of tertiary institutions and their programmes in The Bahamas.

In respect to the attempt to formally harmonize the Caribbean region higher education structure and programmes, it is a note worthy policy focus. However, reference to Section 4 Subsection (2)(g), which states inter alia

...to determine equivalency of programmes and qualifications in accordance with the framework established for the Caribbean Community”.

We must be mindful of the economic, social, and political challenges inherent within the Caribbean countries, with apparent concern regarding their different domestic and historical conditions. According to the World Bank, “given the small size and lack of diversified structure, the economies in the region are prone to economic fluctuations induced by external disturbances.” A number of these countries went through rather painful structural adjustment reforms in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and the record of economic recovery has been mixed. The emergence of regional trading blocs and the competitive environment will exert increased pressure on these economies, coupled with weak democratic institutions and problematic social divisions, the possibility of developing conformity and equivalency under these conditions remain uncertain and bleak. Hence, The Bahamas must look inward in the formulation of accreditation policy(s) guidelines, with more inclination towards either the renowned education centers of the United Kingdom and or United States.

THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE BAHAMAS

1. NEW FOCUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education learning is an integral part of the lifelong continuum of intellectual development that should be consistent with the ideology of the Bahamian nation. The purposes of higher education in McHari’s point of view, as adapted from the Australian Higher Education System¹³ are to:

- i. Inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential;
- ii. Enable individuals to learn throughout their lives (for personal and professional growth and fulfillment, for effective participation in the workforce and for constructive contributions to society);
- iii. Advance knowledge and understanding;
- iv. Aid the application of knowledge and understanding to the benefit of the economy and society;

- v. Enable individuals to adapt and learn, consistent with the needs of an adaptable knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels; and
- vi. Contribute to a democratic, civilized society and promote the tolerance and debate that underpins it.

2. THE DEMANDS OF INCREASING CHANGE IN SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY

The Bahamian society, as well as the global community, is experiencing changes on a scale and pace that seems, at times, both hard to comprehend and difficult to integrate. Trends in technological advances in every field have made the world closer and more accessible - within reach of every laptop or lab, however remote the location. "Gene mapping, designer drugs, and advanced surgical techniques promise a future in which the mysteries of our physical being will be unraveled and our understanding of the sources of pain, disease, and disability greatly improved." The borders and boundaries of our changing world are dissolving too, as the "global economy" only written of in decades past becomes one fluid, fast-moving market place", ...and institutions of higher learning are, to some extent, also buffeted by the winds of such change"¹⁴.

The wind will eventually become unstoppable in raising new challenges that would force change in government, industry, and professionals in every field, thus generating momentum for higher education in the country to inculcate such changes in their system. The Bahamian society is renewing aging; and our population is becoming more diverse; and the hemispheric integration is becoming a reality. Hence, as Bahamians strive to live and work in a rapidly changing environment, increasingly they turn - individually and collectively - to institutions of higher education for knowledge, for guidance, and for help. Higher education, as the repertoire where knowledge is systematically created, preserved, and translated, would face more daunting challenges in the coming years.

These challenges will come critically and literally from the government. As the chapter of liberal educational deregulation comes to a close, with the embrace of a more highly regulated higher education system in The Bahamas, via the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council, operators in the sector will be made more accountable in terms of quality and administration. In addition, more regulation will extend the horizon of tertiary institutions beyond the boundary of existing classroom and student

interaction; towards modern advances and technological embrace of virtual classrooms while conforming to standard.

Fellow members, we must be prepared to adapt curriculum development and teaching techniques to equip students with the tools they need to adapt to the dynamic social and economic climate that awaits them in the years ahead. In doing so, we must share existing technology and resources where necessary and available, in partnership to accomplish long-term goals to expand and become more responsive to society's need to make Bahamians better prepared to meet the challenges of the future. We must be prepared to realign our various Institutions with the knowledge needs the future will demand and the burden and responsibility the government will place on us.

3. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF TODAY'S STUDENTS

We must influence our working environment, the government, students and business community, towards a more intellectual and skillful development. We must bear in mind the salient characteristics of today's students: the diversity in age, socioeconomic status, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, learning and physical ability. We must carefully scrutinize beliefs regarding our students: how they learn, their level of preparation, other demands being made on their time and attention (e.g., family and work), and their educational and occupational goals. This examination must also extend to their current beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners, the learning/teaching process and how it can best be facilitated, and how we can create and sustain a local intelligentsia that supports higher education's effort to educate the society.

Higher education must be "tailored to students needs with the recognition of the fact that learning is holistic, connected to learners' lives, and characterized by multiple intelligence's. That recognition, in turn, requires new pedagogical assumptions. Constructivist pedagogy necessitates respecting students' ways of knowing and learning and incorporating them into the educational process"¹⁵.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

In order to meet the increasing and complex socio-economic and technological challenges ahead, the Bahamian higher education sector must devote substantial attention towards building and putting in place necessary infrastructure that would support the sophisticated research needed to

keep abreast and ahead of the changing global and national conditions. A sustained research facility, resources and facilitators is needed to promote the kinds of research and other knowledge outputs required to meet national development needs, which will enable the country to become competitive in a new global context.

This is an onerous task, which will need the full support of the government in establishing state-of-the-art library facilities distributed through a modern and integrated communication system.

SIGNIFICANT GENERAL SHIFT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Globally and with specific reference to The Bahamas, there has been an increasing general shift in modern society, with great implications for the approach to higher education which education providers must be concerned with. Among these shifts are:

- i. An increasing shift away from campus/classroom-based higher education towards distant learning education.
- ii. An increase in student's access to communication systems that facilitates learning beyond campus/classroom-based learning through on-line services.
- iii. Increased availability and use of floppy disc textbooks.
- iv. An increasing cross border or international pool of human resources available to employers with priority need for language skills.
- v. Tuition fees increases at a faster rate than household incomes.
- vi. Increasing needs for multiple degrees.
- vii. Increased globalisation and the elimination of labour mobility barriers to trade and investment and resources allocation.
- viii. Increased demands for corporate accountability and professionalism.
- ix. Increasing demands for increased and efficient productivity
- x. An increasing resource allocation to information technology and the need for multi-media information technology training for faculty.
- xi. An awareness of the need for the academic community in the face of increased online availability of resource materials to have information security and integrity.

These shifts will bring more pressure on higher education in The Bahamas and around the world to re-prioritise its objectives towards the beneficial fulfilment of the needs of today and future challenges. Hence, Bahamian higher education must become ready to:

- a) Invest in faculty development for information technology and training.
- b) Restructure existing educational budgets to support technology growth and the development of systems and procedures that assure academic information integrity and security.
- c) Develop systems for advising and supporting students based on the shift to technological distance learning.
- d) Develop innovative ways of rewarding faculty, with the additional goal of managing operational cost.
- e) Re-focus marketing strategies for distance learning to gain student admission globally, thus boosting the financial resources of our institutions through tuition fees.
- f) Break down of inter-institution barriers and formulate strategic plans for such development and collaboration
- g) Increase accessibility for traditionally over-the-hill populations through increased dissemination of information in respect of the benefits of higher educational.

CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind the great challenges and the dynamic world in which we live today, higher education in The Bahamas is no longer isolated from the rest of the world. Bahamians are more greatly opportune now than in the past to seek qualitative education around the global from the comfort of their homes. Hence, higher education in The Bahamas must be market-driven.

Notwithstanding that the concept of "market-driven" is both alien and distasteful to the academic world, nevertheless it is the most viable option in the near future in order for higher education in The Bahamas to remain competitive. We must learn to cope with the competitive pressures of the marketplace while preserving programme quality, instructional delivery

modes, traditional values and character, and quality of research and intellectual development.

In the present reality, there would be no single model for higher education in The Bahamas to meet the demand of diversity prevalent in this 21st century both in form and types of institution. Hopefully, institutions structured with these focuses will go a long way in sustainably facing and bracing the challenges ahead:

- a) **INTELLIGENCE AND ADAPTABILITY.** Knowledge and distributed-intelligence technology would increasingly foster the construction of learning environments that are not only highly customized but also adapted to the needs of the learner.
- b) **LEARNER-CENTERED INSTITUTIONS.** Just like other social institutions, higher education institutions must become more focused on those they serve. They must transform themselves from faculty-centered to learner-centered institutions, becoming more responsive to what student's and "society's" need to learn, rather than simply what faculties wish to teach.
- c) **AFFORDABILITY.** Higher education in the Bahamas must become far more affordable, providing educational opportunities within the resources of all citizens. Whether this occurs through greater public subsidy or dramatic restructuring of higher education institutions' operational cost, it seems increasingly clear that society no longer will tolerate the high-cost of higher education today.
- d) **LIFELONG LEARNING.** The need for advanced education and skills will require a willingness to continue to learn throughout life and a commitment on the part of institutions to provide such opportunities. The concept of student and alumni will merge. Today's highly partitioned system of education will blend increasingly into a seamless web, in which primary and secondary education; undergraduate, graduate, and professional education; on-the-job training and continuing education; and lifelong enrichment become a continuum.

- e) INTERACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE STUDY PATTERN. New forms of pedagogy tailored to changing societal needs already are emerging. Some examples: asynchronous (any time, any place) learning uses information technology to break the constraints of time and space, making learning opportunities more compatible with lifestyles and career needs; and interactive and collaborative learning techniques effectively reach the plug-and-play generation of the digital age.

It is certain that higher education in The Bahamas will continue to evolve and be transformed, as the need of the society becomes apparent and inevitable in the years ahead. Pressure will certainly be exerted on the different authorities within the sector for change, compliance and accommodation. Academic boundaries will be broken and accommodation given to needs of the business community and wider society.

Members of the Association of Tertiary Institution of the Bahamas (ATIB) must clearly discern their responsibility and live up to the changes expected in the future. We cannot be adamant and passive in the face of the tumultuous and challenging educational needs of modern society. We must be capable and ready to transform our institutions; and ourselves in order to effectively and efficiently respond to the needs of the new culture of learning in order to use the changing opportunity as a renaissance in higher education in The Bahamas in years to come.

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