

George A. O. Alleyne
Chancellor
University of the West Indies
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Sustaining the enterprise

Mona, Kingston, Jamaica*

Graduation days are special days for us all. This one is special for you the graduands, because having run the academic course and kept the faith, today the celebration revolves around you and your receiving a diploma as a grand seal of your success. This one is special for your loved ones-your significant others who have travelled with you. I am sure there were times when they cried with you or for you, but now today is the day for laughter, joy and celebration. Believe me when I say that it is also a special occasion for our Faculty and our Administration, as your success is some compensation for the hours and days spent worrying with and about you. Yes, the faculty does worry about you.

Today I wish to give a special welcome to your new Principal-Professor Archibald McDonald whom I have known for many years and in many different capacities. I hold him in high esteem and I am very comfortable that the Campus is in good and capable hands. I know that the Vice-Chancellor and his colleagues share that view. At the same time, I wish to thank our former Principal, Professor Gordon Shirley for his brilliant stewardship of this Campus. He has done an outstanding job of steering this Campus through financial storms as severe as any public or private institution has had to weather. It is as well that many of you were not aware of the measures it took to keep this Campus open during the last few years and to maintain the standards which we have come to expect as being synonymous with a good university. I must also welcome Professor Ishenkumba Kahwa as the new Deputy Principal.

This change-this transition in leadership in institutions is often a time for reflection and a time to revisit several aspects of their operation and I know the Vice-Chancellor, the Principal and the senior administrative staff have been doing just that. We all know that the financial situation of Jamaica and indeed of most of the Caribbean has placed severe financial strain on this Campus. I do believe that the budgetary cuts to the Campus were not due to lack of will or lack of any commitment on the part of the Government of Jamaica, which at the highest levels has manifested its support for the regionality of our University and for this Campus in particular. Indeed, the evidence is that they wish us to do more to help to raise the quality and quantity of higher education in this country. But frankly, the budget cuts hurt us very badly.

The tendency to reduction in government financial support to public higher education institutions is now virtually a global phenomenon. Reduction in government funding together with increasing demand both from society as well as from qualified applicants have presented public universities with major challenges. There is a limit to which the university can reduce

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relative unit costs. This Campus, indeed the University as a whole has been adept at reducing costs by increasing operational efficiency. For example this Campus has sought to reduce its electricity costs by more efficient production and distribution. There was a time when we in higher education imagined that the increased use of information technology would be the answer to our financial problems, as we would be able to increase the supply without increasing costs. But there is a limit to which this can occur. The fact is that universities like ours reach a critical point at which they cannot continue to have reduction in funding without affecting the numbers of students and the quality of teaching and research. As the world moves inexorably to a stage in which knowledge work is valued more highly and compensated more than other forms of work, the demand for higher education will continue to increase and we must try to meet it.

This situation in some countries has led to an increase in privately funded for-profit institutions which can carry out at lower cost the training, information generation and credentialing functions of the university, but they cannot fulfill the other functions that form part of a public university's remit. Independent for-profit institutions do not have that commitment to be sensitive to national or regional needs and aspirations, they have no responsibility for local human development and certainly have no remit for helping to shape and maintain the mores of the society in which they operate. They have no remit for articulating the nature of the academic balance required. They have no remit for pointing out the dangers of the academic drift which is the bane of developing countries. They are driven solely by market considerations. This does not mean that our university is not sensitive to market demand, but that cannot be its primary concern.

Given the decrease in public funding, universities have to obtain revenue from other sources which are usually student tuition fees, provision of services and philanthropic giving. Here and throughout our University, there is a more determined and structured effort to increase revenue from philanthropic giving. The Vice Chancellor is reorganizing the Institutional Advancement Office with this in view and I am sure would welcome any support you can give him in this.

In most public institutions like ours philanthropic giving comes from businesses and foundations and from alumni. There is a paucity of wealthy indigenous foundations in the Caribbean and certainly in the current economic climate, garnering support from the private sector here or abroad is rather difficult, though not impossible. On occasion when I have bemoaned the rather weak alumni philanthropy in general, I have been corrected and shown successful alumni support for the secondary schools from which they graduated. Thus it must mean that in these cases, the commitment to the secondary school as an alma mater is stronger than the link to the University. Several of us older alumni are conscious of the need to give back to the University, but I regret that this feeling does not yet extend to all one hundred fifty odd thousands of our alumni. However, I must admit that there has been considerable progress over the last few years, but we can do much better and especially our structure for acknowledging gifts can improve. I therefore wish to challenge this graduating class of 2013 to turn this around. Most universities rate alumni giving not only by the quantum of the gifts, but by the numbers of alumni who give. I know of class competitions that involve not the quantum of giving, but by the percentage of the class that gives. I wish to challenge you to be the class in which there is a 100% giving rate which means that every alumnus gives something, no matter how small. If this became the tradition, our University would soon have the kind of endowment fund of which we could all be proud.

But giving by alumni is not the only way public universities are seeking to increase revenue. I know that many American universities are entering new market areas in Asia and the Middle East-establishing satellite campuses and giving their degrees. They are seeking new markets from which they can draw students. The University Council has been conscious of the need to expand our potential recruitment base and has agreed on a pilot basis to seek students from neighboring countries which are outside the CARICOM region and who of course will pay the full economic costs of education here. Naturally we will be competing with other universities, as it is clear that the field of higher education has become a highly competitive one.

I quote from an Australian author who writes of the dynamics of national and global competition in higher education.

“Higher education is now situated in an open information environment in which national borders are routinely crossed and identities are continually made and self-made in encounters with diverse others. We can begin to imagine higher education as a single world-wide arrangement: not as a global unitary global systems but as a more complex combination of (1) global flows and networks of words and ideas, knowledge, finance and inter-institution dealings; with (2) national higher education systems shaped by history, law, policy and funding; and separation; and stable and unstable hierarchies.”

The competition is mainly for the private or positional goods produced by the university which benefit primarily the student and is one of the main justifications for student tuition fees as a part of the funding of the institution. But this globalization of higher education brings special concerns for us small countries in relation to the application of the strictures of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs. We have alerted our governments about this before. The solution to the possible trade in educational services is beyond us and in the meantime we continue to be the best we can be in teaching, service and research and take pride in producing the human capital needed in the Caribbean.

The total Campus registration is 16, 277 students, of whom 8% are non-Jamaican CARICOM nationals. This year there are 3234 graduates and I am pleased to tell you that the percentage of males at 25.6% is the highest it has been in several years and the trend is an upward one. Of these there were 2505 undergraduate and 729 postgraduate degrees. 227 of the degrees were First Class Honors and 72 were with Distinction. We should congratulate them. The majority of our graduates are in the Social Sciences-754, but I noted that the medical graduates were second with 411. We speak feelingly about our contribution to the nation's and the region's human capital, as over the past 10 years, this Campus has graduated 21,000 persons with first degrees and although the majority are in their twenties there has been a consistent 1-2% of graduates over the age of 50.

There are 873 Post graduate diplomas and degrees this year, compared with 407 for the same period in 2011/12. So far, 59 research degrees have been awarded this year compared with 36 last year. 25 PhD and 34 MPhil degrees were awarded this year. This is welcome, as it is from graduates in the postgraduate research stream that we will draw many of our future staff.

Five (5) candidates from the MSc Politics and International Cooperation program have been awarded the degree which comes as a result of a tripartite cooperation agreement with two

French universities - the University of Bordeaux IV and the University Antilles-Guyane— under which we offer this degree in Politics and International Cooperation. The final year of the program is delivered here at Mona. 82 awards were made to graduate students to a value of J\$17.4 million while academic staff pursuing graduate studies were supported by grants totalling J\$3.4 million. The Office of Sponsored Research has been active in securing at least one patent and is in the process of getting at least two patents licensed and commercialized. A good example of the latter is the Cardiac Simulator invented here and which has attracted international commercial interest.

Student centeredness is a real for us and is shown outside as well as inside the classroom. The financial situation bears heavily on students and over the year the Campus has helped by providing support in various ways within the limits of its own funding. This year the Campus has given 689 scholarships, 404 bursaries and 107 grants through the Office of Student Financing, and in total has provided J\$ 540 million to needy students, even helping with meals. In an effort to reduce costs, the Campus has become the first educational institution in the English Caribbean to offer e-book services through partnership with the overseas based company VitalSource, allowing students initially in Medicine, to access required books and program-related material more affordably and more cost-effectively. The Mona School of Business and management has also launched its e-book packages on the Jamaican designed tablet, SmartTab 9 IPS. The Campus commenced operation of its e-services park in collaboration with Sutherland Global service which will provide employment opportunities for students. The newly established Academic Support Unit reached over 5000 students, providing help in many areas including garnering some J\$350,000 worth of food for the Fresh Start Initiative for students during examination periods.

Our students continue to do us proud outside of the classroom. There have been several examples of UWI Mona students excelling in regional and international competitions in law, IT, management and sport. The men's sprint medley relay team created history by becoming the first UWI team to win a Championship of America at the 2013 Penn Relays. Students from the Mona School of Business and management won the First Place Award at the Opportunity Funding Corporation Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition in Atlanta Georgia.

I wish you graduates well and trust that you will be good ambassadors for the Campus and the University. The best advertisement for the University is its graduates and I hope you do not think that I am laying too heavy a burden on your young shoulders when I say that the sustainability of the University as the premier tertiary educational institution in the Caribbean depends in large measure on how you comport yourselves in the world. Many of the metrics for grading universities depend on the research output, the grants obtained and the accolades received by their staff. But in the places from which we draw our students and our public support, it is how our graduates are received and perceived that is also a critical metric for us. It is not only the number of Ministers, Prime Ministers and Governors General whom we count among our alumni, proud as we are of them, but it is also the competence in the myriad jobs you will occupy and the many new businesses you entrepreneurs will form that will carry weight on how your alma mater is regarded.

I wish to impress on you the need to be good alumni of the University in the context of the philanthropy I mentioned before. I wish to re-emphasize a responsibility to give back to the

University in some way. I urge you to take an active part in the Alumni Associations and let your voices be heard in the various councils of the University.

Let me thank your parents and significant others not only for their support of you, but also for having entrusted you to the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies. I hope they are pleased with the result and will say so in the circles in which they move.