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Educational Entrepreneurship

Grenada*

Welcome!

This is the first time the graduation ceremony of our Open Campus is being held in Grenada and let me say how pleased I am to see the response-an indication of the interest in what our University of the West Indies does, its purpose and its products. It is a natural tendency for human beings to overemphasize the importance of the moments and messages of their time and brand them as seminal when in fact they are simply part of the regular currents of history. So I crave forgiveness of those who will be here, say fifty years from now, when I define July 2008 as a seminal moment in tertiary education history of this part of the Caribbean. I note this landmark because July 2008 was the date on which the Open Campus was formally launched-very appropriately at the time of the Conference of the CARICOM Heads of Government in Antigua and Barbuda. This year we mark that auspicious occasion and celebrate 5 years of the Open campus as a formal entity. Five years is a short but critical time in the life of an educational institution and I like to think of these early times like the first 5 years of a marriage-5 years of togetherness achieved after going through a lot of compromises, adjustment, misunderstandings and then understanding each other again. And so we celebrate this fifth anniversary as a grand occasion.

I wish to congratulate Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald and her staff for their stewardship of the enterprise and we can see in it the fruits of their passion, dedication and commitment. Our Vice-Chancellor is to be congratulated also for having the courage to set the University on that new course. You have been supported by many institutions and persons -the sister campuses and of course the indefatigable Chair of your Campus Council, Sir Dwight Venner whose commitment to the Caribbean and its human development is peerless. At the launch in 2008, Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald was futuristic in her approach and is quoted as envisioning the Campus as *“positioned to enable the University and its traditional campuses to meet the demands for education and provide for the delivery of programs in more effective and efficient ways.”* She saw it as *“continuing to contribute to the development of the human capital of the region and to the positive transformation and enhancement of Caribbean societies”*. The presentation of the graduates here today is proof positive of the former and while

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I believe the latter are being fulfilled, the indicators of their achievement are much more subtle and results are seen over a much longer time period. But that is the nature of universities.

There is one of the many aspects of the Open Campus that has made it especially dear to me, as I dub it an example of educational entrepreneurship-the work of educational entrepreneurs. Education entrepreneurs can be defined as visionary thinkers who create new educational institutions that redefine our sense of what is possible. While most leaders plan around the resources that are currently available, entrepreneurs are driven by their perception of opportunity, irrespective of resources. This does not mean that our entrepreneurs were not cognizant of resource availability, or were reckless adventurers, but they were genuinely driven by the pressing need for the institution at this time and had the unshakeable conviction that the time was right to do the right thing.

As I have noted before on other occasions, when we examined the governance of the University in 2002, one thing was made very clear by senior Caribbean politicians and other policy makers. Unless the University established a much more palpable intellectual and physical presence outside of the three main Campus territories, it would soon become irrelevant to the aspirations of the Caribbean as a whole. It was possible to argue and it has been argued, that the provision of distance education could be provided by the other campuses, given the advances in technology and that it was a bifurcation of effort to establish an entity whose major rationale was distance education or some version thereof. This Open Campus represents an ingenious mechanism for avoiding or reducing this bifurcation and at the same time satisfying the very legitimate needs of the other countries to have an enhanced physical presence of the University of the West Indies-to have the University in Grenada, in St. Lucia, as well as in Jamaica and not only in Kingston and Montego Bay. And at this juncture, let me recall with gratitude the work of Lawrence Carrington in conceptualizing and providing a name for the institution-a name that is much better than that of a Fourth campus which was suggested in 2002.

The expansion of the University to increase the region's stock of trained human capital is predicated on the thesis that there is a handsome return for the investment. But we must be always conscious of the inputs being made for that return and therefore the issues of cost and funding are ever present in our thinking. We are not alone in this. In many countries of the world there is active discussion on the appropriate methods of funding the tertiary education enterprise-not if, but how it should be funded. Some have suggested that the current business model is broken and there should be other ways of securing stable funding for an enterprise whose costs continue to increase for several good reasons. But there is universal acceptance of the basic thesis that tertiary education is both a public as well as a private good and in that context there is a rationale for support by a public entity as well as by private individuals.

In a lecture on the subject I gave some time ago, I advanced several reasons for government support in situations such as ours. There is the ethical, moral reason which says that for reasons of social equity there should be public support for higher educational facilities that are available to all. Government should support the provision of public goods such as knowledge creation and the maintenance of the country's culture and mores that are intrinsic parts of the university's remit. In addition, institutions in societies such as ours, that are not-for-

profit and do not benefit from great philanthropy, need to have stable public support and not be constantly consumed by balancing the need for education with the need for generating resources to survive.

I was also clear, that given the private good aspect of tertiary education, in that the individual derives particular and personal benefit from it, the beneficiary should contribute to its provision. No one has yet defined a formula for determining the fractional division and unfortunately the global tendency is for governments to decrease their contribution, compelling the institution to reduce its costs, seek additional sources of funding and increase the contribution by the students. At the last meeting of the University Council, it was decided to establish a committee or Task Force to examine the issue of fees and appropriate methods of assessing them. Our University like others in the world continues to wrestle with these issues and has to develop various approaches to tapping these other sources of funding as part of its strategic planning.

It is not enough to create the product, it has to be marketed. In this day and age we do not only get what we deserve, we also get what we market, and I am pleased to note the many and varied approaches to this. Who would have imagined years ago that we would see University personnel in the streets of Roseau aggressively marketing the open Campus?

I have never doubted the conviction or resolve of Caribbean governments as regards their University or to tertiary education in general. I was pleased to note that in his budget speech the Prime Minister was explicit in saying that “*the education and human resource development of our people for the new economy is paramount and cannot be over emphasized*”. He apportioned 11% of the government budget to education and human resource development and I was also pleased to see his commitment to address the debt owed to the University of the West Indies.

One of the more visible fruits of the enterprise is the number and quality of the graduates. This year there is a total of 635 graduates with 556 of them obtaining first degrees and 79 post graduates. I am pleased to note that 78 of the graduates obtained First Class honors and we should congratulate them. The average age of our graduates is 37 years, indicating that we cater for the more mature student and I should note that the most mature was 69 years of age. Our total enrolment for online/blended programs during 2012/2013 was 6,856. In addition to the online programs, the Campus continues to offer an impressive array of continuing education programs and courses face-to-face at its 43 country sites. It also reaches out to organizations by offering custom-made courses, workshops and seminars. In 2011/2012, there were 17,848 students enrolled in local programs and the Campus provided service to 23,479 students across the Region. I must also thank and congratulate our faculty for these achievements.

During the course of this year the Barbados Accreditation Council awarded institutional accreditation to the Campus for six years. This is a signal achievement and it was impressive to read the self-evaluation documentation produced by the Campus which is serving to plan many future improvements.

It is always a pleasure to acknowledge contributions to our work. The Campus received a substantial grant (CDN\$20 million) from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada (DFATD, formerly CIDA) for a project to strengthen Distance Education in the Caribbean. This phase of the project will support institutional strengthening, online program development and the planning and design for technological and infrastructural upgrades of Open Campus sites over the next five years. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Diane Oblonczy, travelled to Antigua to announce the award formally.

The Open Campus benefited from a grant of J\$106,053,150 from the United Access Fund (UAF) (now the United Service Fund - USF) in Jamaica to support the improvement of the technological infrastructure of the Open Campus sites across Jamaica. To date, five sites have been either relocated or redeveloped with the provision of state of the art technologies and work continues on the upgrade of the other five.

At the graduation ceremony in 2010, the Government of Grenada announced its intention to allocate land to the University for the relocation of the Open Campus Site and the expansion and improvement of educational services to the people of Grenada. The Open Campus has consulted with the current government to present the preliminary concept for the development and it has received the blessing of the government to proceed. The Campus will continue to work closely with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Education to further this initiative. The University is grateful to the government and people of Grenada for their continued confidence in our University to provide opportunities for development of the country.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has allocated 10 acres of land at the former Caroni Estate in Chaguanas for development of a facility that will expand services to communities in Central Trinidad and in addition has provided financial support (TT\$15m) for preliminary work on the site.

Let me congratulate you graduands and emphasize how much we depend on you to be good ambassadors for your University. I hope that 100% of you will be good alumni, taking part in your local alumni chapters and seeking ways to contribute to the university-to give back a little! Your loved ones are also to be thanked and appreciated for their support and I trust that today they feel a sense of accomplishment for having enabled you to fulfill what may have been a dream of many years.

I say to you all, well done!