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Geography, Destiny and the University of the West Indies
St. George's, Grenada*

Let me welcome you to this graduation ceremony of the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies. It is a pleasure to see so many representatives of our member Governments present. I take it as a sign of your continued interest in and support for the University of the West Indies and in one sense a continued validation of the Open Campus itself, its orientation and its products.

The Open Campus is new, but no one should think of it as an experiment. It was born out of the history of a presence of the University throughout the Caribbean, recognition of the geographical nature of our constituency and the decision that the University had to make itself more relevant to those countries that did not have a major campus. This was the direction pointed out emphatically in consultations with you. The time had come when the concept of extra-mural which had served us well at our inception, no longer had salience and the walls if any had to be drawn from Barbados through Bermuda through Belize, through Trinidad and Tobago and perhaps one day the southern wall will encompass Guyana as well. I believe that destiny will point us in that direction.

I also look forward to the day when we will expand to include the diaspora in the north. I have heard enough of my Caribbean friends in the diaspora speak with anticipation of having a presence of their University among them and but apart from the sentimental ones, there may be good financial reasons for expansion beyond the current walls. I know that we have cooperative agreements with institutions in the north, but this is not a substitute for having the Pelican wave over some physical space there. We see old universities establishing full campuses in other countries, and I doubt that sentiment enters into the calculus but in our case, I would think that there would be some responsibility to the Caribbean society, including the diaspora as part of the Caribbean society.

I am sure many of you have studied the roots and development of our Caribbean societies but let me speak briefly about one aspect of their destiny. It is still not unusual to read discussion and debate as to whether geography is indeed destiny-that to a large extent our essential potential is determined by our geographic origins. The fact that the countries that have lagged behind in recent times are landlocked and tropical is adduced to give weight to this argument. The thesis

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has always troubled me and when I stand before the thousands of you bright, starry-eyed, expectant young West Indians, I cannot accept that your geography is any more a determinant of what you can achieve than is your genetics.

A distinguished economist once put to me the theory that countries with access to large waterways did better economically than those which were landlocked. Tropical countries were enormously disadvantaged because in general they were indeed landlocked and this translated into a disadvantage because of the dominance of two main engines of economic development—market access and technological progress. He would point out to me that that was why islands like those in the Caribbean were better off than could be accounted for by the resources they possessed. They were small and by definition had access to a major waterway. This theory has been seriously questioned as the basis for development as measured by economic growth and the issue is far more complex. However, there is no doubt about some of the difficulties our Caribbean nations face because of our geography and it is pertinent to examine the role our university plays in helping to overcome them. I share these thoughts with you as they may help to strengthen your arguments for your alma mater and its centrality to Caribbean development and perhaps burnish your pride in it a little more. During the course of this graduation cycle, I will speak of the difficulty of distance and dispersion, the difficulty of difference, the difficulty of democratic decision making and the difficulty of dualism.

Let us examine the difficulty of distance and dispersion. It is a bold people that attempts to forge a common destiny from their several small homelands and create institutions to support them when the parts of the enterprise are so dispersed across such distances. I have had cause to reflect on the institutions which support the enterprise and query whether they have been the result of the need to come together for mutual support, or whether it is the institutions that have created or have been the driver of the need for coming together. I prefer to believe that once there has been a desire to come together and there is a first movement in that direction, then it is critical to have strong institutions to keep the disparate parts together. I would posit that the University of the West Indies is one of the institutions that has contributed to keeping the parts together and has fostered and maintained Caribbean regionalism. It has been suggested that it has been the urge for economic closeness that spurred or initiated the movement towards a West Indian University, but I believe that our history shows that the need for our university preceded the moves towards economic regionalism.

A second difficulty of our environment is that of difference. The scriptures tell us of the difficulty inherent in yoking unequals together. We have to acknowledge that the differences in size and resources among other characteristics bring problems that create tensions. Jamaica with a population of almost 3 million can comfortably think of satisfying its needs for trained human resources by supporting several tertiary university caliber institutions in addition to the University of the West Indies always with the idea of seeking complementarity. But the question must be asked whether the smaller members of the family can provide the human, financial and organizational resources to support multiple tertiary institutions at the level of universities in addition to the University of the West Indies. The question always is whether the regional institution can supply the national needs in addition to its pristine function of providing regional public goods. This is a major challenge, but is one we can and must overcome. With the kind of collaboration that is being built up and the convincing arguments I know are being put by the

Vice-chancellor and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, I believe that a modus operandi or co-operandi will be found.

The differences of course also extend to the national wealth of the various countries and therefore the capacity to fund tertiary education. It is a tribute to the magnanimity of our governments and the administrative agility within the University itself that these differences have not lead to fracture. But the point must always be made that there is no permanence in terms of economic position. One only has to look at Europe to see how economic fortunes rise and fall.

One of the clear answers to assuaging some of these differences is to have in all countries enough of the symbols and realities of the regional institution that there is not only the impression, but also the fact of the permanence and relevance of the regional university. The physical plant is clearly important. Here in Grenada we have been grateful for the use of Marryshow House as our home. To be associated with one of the most indefatigable champions of a regional enterprise and one of the most articulate voices of a West Indian destiny was for us a source of tremendous pride.

But the time has clearly come for a change. I am therefore pleased to be able to thank publicly the Prime Minister and Cabinet for approving the allocation of a parcel of land of approximately 89 acres in Hope, Parish of St. Andrew to the UWI Open Campus to locate a new site. The Government is organising a formal Handing Over Ceremony of the lands to the University on Sunday 17th October at 10:30 a.m. Let me repeat how pleased I am to be able to thank publicly the Government of Grenada for its generosity in finding an appropriate physical location for the University of the West Indies in Grenada. I must also thank most sincerely the Minister of Education for her tireless support in this, and I look forward to the day when we will inaugurate the buildings. I have every confidence that we will have a structure as near perfect in its parts as resources will allow and human hands can form. This development augurs well for the University and augurs well for Grenada.

I am pleased to note that this year's graduating class numbers just over 600 and they come from 15 Caribbean countries. Eight percent are graduating with first class honors. The average age of the class is 36 years which shows the opportunity being given to the mature student by the Open Campus. Pro Vice-chancellor Simmons-McDonald and her staff are to be congratulated on these results.

Let me address some of the recent developments in the Open Campus which I think merit the attention of the public. This year's graduating class includes the first cohort of students to complete the BSc Banking and Finance program which the Open Campus offers in partnership with the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Banking and Financial Services (ECIB) and the Caribbean Association of Banking and Finance Institutes (CABFI) which are professional bodies representing the banking and finance sector. The programme came on stream in 2006 as a special arrangement between the then UWIDEC, ECIB and CABFI and it allowed for individuals employed in the field of banking and finance across the OECS to pursue education at university level while remaining at home on the job. The courses were primarily conducted through video conferencing facilities located at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) offices in each country of the OECS and the Central Bank of Barbados. This allowed lecturers to be located at

any videoconferencing facility in all the islands. The program has since been revised to ensure greater relevance to the workplace and it now allows students to participate from across the entire Caribbean. The total number of graduates from this program is 607.

The Open Campus is collaborating with UNICEF to develop a Centre of Excellence for Research on the Child. This will allow the Open Campus to consolidate the considerable amount of research that is being done in the Consortium for Social Development and Research on issues related to various aspects of child development, including children and violence and nutrition issues. The Open Campus is shaping its existing Early Childhood Education Centres into model facilities that provide training for caregivers and allow for research to be done in a controlled environment.

During the year there has also been a focus on designing and developing programs that are in demand. To this end the Open Campus has collaborated with agencies to create courses and certificate programs in special interest areas and it continues to refine and improve its pedagogical learner-oriented approach. Among some of the new courses being introduced are Certificate courses in Basic Applied Forensic Science and Crime Analysis, Criminology, Entrepreneurship, Information and Communications Technology; Diploma programmes also in Criminology, NGO Administration, Public Sector Administration; Bachelors programs in Literacy Studies, Educational Leadership and management, Secondary Education with area specialisations; Postgraduate Masters programs in Instructional Systems, Open and Distance, Instructional Technology and others.

Last year saw an extensive needs survey of a wide range of agencies, educational providers, private and public sector entities a have recommend job-specific education and training for their staff. The research has also made it evident that there is a niche available in the area of workforce professional development training. Since online/distance education is preferred by mature learners, the Open Campus is strategically placed to provide cutting edge programs which will facilitate the development of a competent and efficient workforce in our region. The Open Campus is working towards the delivery of programs in the areas of Education, Business Agriculture, Technology, Culture, Foreign languages, including selected Creole languages, Policing and Juvenile/Prison Rehabilitation among others. The Open campus is also pursuing partnerships with national institutions to support the development of programs in these areas.

Most Open Campus sites have now established student guilds – only three sites have not been able to do so thus far. The students are now actively participating as organised groups in the various activities of the larger community of UWI students and they are representing the Open Campus on committees as required by UWI.

Let me congratulate you new graduands and wish you well in all your future endeavors. I hope your future actions in whatever sphere you choose to work will bring credit to yourselves, your families and luster to your University. You represent one of, if not our finest advertisement. I also hope that you will maintain your contact with us and be an active member of your local alumni chapter. We need a strong alumnus presence throughout the Caribbean- indeed throughout the world as we see more and more of our graduates in really distant lands. I

hope you will acquire and use the email address you have been given, that you will be a frequent visitor to our webpage and contribute to it.

I also wish to congratulate your parents and relatives-those who are here today and those who will hear of this ceremony from you. Theirs has been no easy task, and I am sure that you who are today's graduates will be even more grateful as the years pass and you find yourselves in their position. I say this because I trust that many of your children and their children will find an academic home in the University of the West Indies.

Good luck to you all!