

My vision for UP Diliman

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I envision a University of the Philippines that is recognized and respected internationally as a great university in the Asia-Pacific Rim. Our nation deserves a national university that is able to harness, embody, and project the considerable artistic, creative and scientific talent of our people.

Scientific research is the key that enables UP to perform its distinct role as the national university of the country that sets the standard of academic excellence and scholarship for the rest of the Philippine higher education system to emulate or aspire for.

Sustained excellence in scientific research is the defining element of a great institution of higher learning and UP must constantly strengthen its research capability in order to fulfill its other critical functions as a graduate as well as a public service university.

Our country is confronted with complex challenges that are multidimensional in nature. These challenges require inclusive interdisciplinary solutions that are best found through scientific thinking as well as fruitful collaboration and constructive engagement among and between scientists, researchers, scholars, humanists, and artists.

UPD is the flagship campus of UP. It is home to more than 52 percent of the student population and 50 percent of all PhD faculty members in the entire UP System during SY 2009-2010 [1]. It sustains the highest concentration of the most promising talents, most creative minds and the most accomplished individuals of the country in the arts and culture, natural and social sciences, engineering and architecture, business and economics, humanities, law, international affairs, sports and the performing arts as well as in education and home economics.

Clearly, the international stature and transformational relevance of UP are hinged critically on the enduring capability of UPD to produce new scientific knowledge and original creative works that enable us to understand the natural world more accurately as well as celebrate and enrich our own cultural history and national heritage. The true worth of UP to the Filipino nation is also gauged in its ability to train the next generation of artists, researchers, scientists and scholars of the country.

Graduate degrees are research degrees and the awarding of a PhD degree requires the contribution of new scientific knowledge by its recipient. Scientific research also helps artists and scholars discover new techniques, perspectives, and genres that would make their creative works more precious and profoundly original.

Tangible gains in research productivity have been realized in the last decade or so especially in the basic and applied sciences as a result of sensible investments and programs that were earnestly initiated and put into place by succeeding UP administrations.

But there is still considerable work that is left for us to do.

UPD continues to perform below its true potential. Its graduate programs are still unable to produce the reasonable number of PhD graduates in proportion to the number of PhD faculty members that are being employed. This is due to the lack of qualified and committed mentors to direct and guide graduate students.

UPD remains unable to generate consistently new scientific knowledge and creative works that could find their way into the most influential peer-reviewed technical journals, conferences, fairs and art exhibitions in the world.

UPD could not yet train the critical number of graduates with the pertinent skill sets and core values that would allow them not just to land in better paying jobs in a knowledge-based economy but more importantly, to solve the difficult problems that continue to weigh down Philippine society. Because their education is heavily subsidized by Filipino taxpayers, UP students are duty-bound to excel in academics, graduate in due time, and lead our people in its difficult struggle to free itself from grinding poverty and debilitating collective self-doubt.

Any future improvement in academic performance is invariably anchored on our collective ability to turn the 493-hectare UPD campus into an enabling and nurturing environment for its faculty members, students and staff. The campus must be maintained and operated properly to protect and preserve its physical beauty and territorial integrity as well as to ensure the safety and security of the academic community in a rapidly expanding metropolis. We pay greater homage to our iconic edifices and art works on campus by maintaining them correctly instead of merely knowing their histories.

Lasting success in this difficult but necessary task requires strategic vision and executional diligence on the part of duly appointed officials within the UPD organization.

We need to explain with greater clarity, the duly approved UPD Land Use Plan to the UPD Executive Committee, the University Council and other relevant stakeholders. All of us must understand about the necessity of a land-use blueprint that must also be implemented scrupulously.

The territorial integrity of the campus has been long endangered not only by the incursion of informal settlers but also by the conversion of campus streets into national roads. National roads (*e.g.* CP García Avenue, part of Commonwealth Avenue, part of C-5 adjacent to UP Integrated School) that permit the transit of huge trucks and trailers, directly threaten the well-being of our academic community. The Land Use Plan needs to factor in the socio-economic impact of allowing such roads to cut through the belly of the UPD campus.

UP needs to formulate a coherent and comprehensive strategic plan for dealing with informal settlers and urban sprawl in UPD. Such a plan requires an accurate scientific understanding of the dynamics of urbanization in an emergent economy and a conscious acceptance by all stakeholders that campus land could not be parceled out for private ownership and unregulated personal gain.

The University Council and the UPD Administration need to continue refining and strengthening objective measures of scientific productivity, creativity and scholarship. There are valuable lessons to learn from our neighbors such as Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and China; that decided earlier to invest seriously in their university systems despite unfavorable socio-economic conditions.

Peer-review and self-regulation are the principles that would guide our constant effort to improve the performance of our faculty members and academic units. We need reliable measures to benchmark any noteworthy progress in the future and to build a dependable and lasting institutional memory for UPD.

Transforming UPD into a great academic institution in Asia Pacific requires serious financial commitment. We need to determine precisely and accurately the cost of operating and maintaining such an institution and to elicit the corresponding assurance from all stakeholders especially those who prepare, approve and release the UP Budget.

As Chancellor, I will engage pro-actively and work closely with the UP President and the Board of Regents by providing them with timely quantitative reports about the state of UPD. It may be necessary for us to do things (a little bit) differently to achieve better results. The quintessential scientist, Albert Einstein, earlier realized that craziness is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

We need to engage and agree that making UP into one of the great universities in this dynamic part of the world by the end of the second decade of the 21st century is a vision that is worth striving for.

As a community we can scale greater heights by working together for a common purpose — UPD is greater than the sum of its component stakeholders.

Views on certain issues

On building an enabling and nurturing environment. A secure and properly maintained UPD campus is not possible without the services of highly trained, well equipped and disciplined staff in designated offices such as the Campus Maintenance Office, UPD Police Force, Office of the Campus Architect, Supply and Property Management Office, UPD Legal Office and the UP Infirmary. UPD must invest seriously to enhance the capability of these offices so that their personnel can do their job properly and be justifiably held accountable.

An energy efficient campus can still be accomplished without unduly burdening UPD beyond its current financial wherewithal. We begin by utilizing with greater appreciation and attention to detail, available hard and soft resources like the CWTS programs and our concerned alumni and friends.

We will make colleges and institutes take a more direct role in finding ways to achieve higher energy efficiency by allocating specific budgets for the payment of their own electric and water

consumption. In the present scheme, the Office of the Chancellor is left to pay for the utility bills of all UPD units and there is no incentive to save energy at the building level. To encourage our academic units to reduce energy expenditures, we will allow the reprogramming of savings that are made out of their yearly utility budget allocations, to equipment acquisition and other MOOE use in the succeeding quarter or fiscal year.

Success also depends crucially upon the genuine support of the various sectors that comprise the UP community. UPD needs to clarify and define its administrative relationship with the parallel local government units (*e.g.* Barangay UP Campus) that exist within the campus in order to be effective in dealing with social issues involving public health and sanitation as well as the presence of informal settlers particularly those who are neither UP employees nor students.

To advance in our difficult task of establishing a more enabling and nurturing campus, a multi-sectoral environment taskforce will be set up and chaired by the Chancellor himself.

On governance. The Chancellor is the chief executive as well as chief academic officer of UPD. He presides over the UPD Executive Committee, which is the highest executive body of UPD. The Committee is composed of the college deans, other duly appointed representatives of the faculty and the Vice Chancellors as *ex-officio* members.

As Chancellor, I will hold Committee meetings on a monthly basis and report on different issues affecting the administration and operation of UPD.

Academic units particularly our colleges, need to function and operate in the pursuit of their institutional mission. It is therefore essential that the mission of an academic unit is clearly stated and well understood by its leadership, faculty, staff and students. A well-defined mission is crucial in the formulation of a fair and responsive system for faculty merit promotion, hiring and tenure. It is also vital in the inception of new and assessment of existing academic programs as well as in the crafting of a sensible infrastructure development plan.

On academic freedom and faculty discipline. I am deeply committed to uphold and defend academic freedom in UPD. A university is only able to fulfill its unique mission for society if its faculty and students are free to inquire, teach or communicate ideas or facts without being targeted for intimidation, job loss (*e.g.* denial of tenure or non-renewal of temporary appointment) or expulsion.

The climate fostered by freedom of inquiry has allowed me to realize my potential as a scientist, mentor and teacher in UP and to reach goals and milestones in my own professional career that were beyond my childhood dreams and humble beginnings.

However, academic freedom is best enjoyed and protected in an academic community that is able to regulate itself fairly and responsibly wherein colleagues adhere to the peer-review process as the way to test the scientific merit of ideas, hypotheses and proposals.

There is a need for UPD to improve its capability to handle allegations of scientific misconduct by its faculty members. The prompt and proper disposition of misconduct cases is essential in

protecting the integrity of an institution of higher learning. It also allows those who are involved to rebuild their own professional careers and redeem themselves. Unfortunately, this is not yet the state of affairs in UPD.

On transparency and accountability. Lack of transparency and explicit procedure breeds distrust especially in a large organization like UPD. But even if it wants to, an office cannot attain adequate transparency if it does not religiously keep accurate records systematically.

Administrative accountability is also hard to ascertain without a reliable body of information for benchmarking office performance on a regular basis. Decisions and policies that are based on unscientific evidence or incomplete information are highly susceptible to costly pitfalls and confusing outcomes.

We need to build a culture of accurate data collection and systematic record-keeping starting with the offices that are directly under the Office of the Chancellor. Current system of processing appointments, vouchers and other requests will be evaluated in order to simplify tracking and reduce document evaluation time. We also need to remind ourselves constantly that being government employees we are obliged to render 40 hours of work per week.

Filipino citizen with a strong nationalist commitment. I am a Filipino citizen by birth and I have invested time and energy serving as a faculty member of the University of the Philippines since June 1981.

I firmly believe that Filipinos are highly capable of becoming great artists, researchers, scientists and scholars when they are provided with an enabling and nurturing environment. Our talents do not need to labor in foreign lands in order to realize their true potential.

I have tried my best to demonstrate by example that tenable progress could still be achieved by a Filipino scientist even under the unfavorable socio-economic conditions of an emerging economy like that of our country.

Willingness to serve as Chancellor on a full-time basis. I am offering the knowledge and experience that I have gained in the last 29 years as a UP scientist, teacher, mentor and administrator to serve as the next Chancellor of UPD.

Reference

1. Office of Vice President for Academic Affairs.