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FULL GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT REALITY OR MIRAGE?



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INTRODUCTION

One meaning of education, at the primitive level of the society, was vocational training as we would call it today. The young in the primitive world were taught how to fish and use tribal tools, so that in due course they could carry on the economy of the tribe. In addition to learning practical skills, the young had to learn the mores of the tribe, the custom, belief, ritual, and taboo by which the tribe regulated its daily behaviour.

At the civilized level, the young must master the knowledge and skills that their elders consider essential. When the family can no longer cope with the knowledge and skills that must be imparted to the young, the professional teacher and the school become an integral part of the educational activities. In the late 11th century came the University of Bologna in Italy and the University of Paris in France. The two universities are known as the "university mothers," having been the model and

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stimulus for most of medieval universities of Europe.

Modern universities vary enormously with respect to size, purpose, control, preparation of faculty, qualifications of students, size and style of campus, complexity of administration, and on nearly every other conceivable variable. There are small Roman Catholic institutions providing a basic liberal education for less than seventy-five religious novices and giant state universities with almost 50,000 students on one campus. The idea that a university should concentrate its energies on research, scholarship, and the training of graduate students is a German conception. The belief that a liberal education was valuable to any vocation is a Renaissance idea for the proper preparation of a gentleman. The idea that a university should prepare for the learned professions comes directly from the Reformation. The belief that a university should prepare people for less dignified vocations is an American expression of its democratic ideal. The role of university education as an instrument of national development is a result of the scientific and technical innovations and the post second World War climate.

During the past few decades people do not agree any further that one of the functions of the University is to preserve the wisdom of the past - the wisdom that might pertain to the present and the future. Governments of the so-called developing nations behold the universities as a sizeable investment in the human resources of the future for national development in accordance with national goals and aspirations.

For the economist, education becomes an essential instrument of improving human resources. Since labour is an important factor of production and educated people make more productive workers, increased budget for schools and universities to reduce

illiteracy and to train people in new techniques of agriculture and industry is encouraged. Governments of developing countries are suggested to send their best minds abroad to bring back knowledge of engineering and business. Today sudden increase in the number of school and university graduates in the developing countries brings about the problem of graduate unemployment.

University education American style includes many programs designed to train people for specialized vocations. This concept has been accepted and imitated in many countries. Until recently there has developed a strong suspicion that overly specialized people lacked a sufficiently broad base from which to adjust to changing conditions. There have gradually emerged attempts to broaden and make more general the undergraduate training in the various vocational fields. Many universities have created foundation subjects, sometimes called general education, which are common to the programs of all students, regardless of the vocational specialization, and which are required for every student to take so that most undergraduate programs are broader and more similar.

Employers who look to universities as producers of talented young specialists who can do the jobs they want done begin to be not satisfied with the quality and the vocational specialization of university graduates. They gradually establish training centres for their special purposes, and give little care to employing university graduates. This situation adds to the unemployed university graduate problem.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION

Generally the university today is no ivory tower. Within its domain are established professional schools, such as the schools

of business, education, economics, accountancy, engineering, medicine, dentistry, law, science, journalism, arts, and architecture. A spirit of vocationalism pervades even in the schools of science and arts. Courses are included in the university curriculum for specific vocational needs, or as outlets for professional research, or as training for future graduate study. The creation of libraries and museums and the sponsorship of artists', poets', and writers' exhibitions have indicated the role of the university in preserving and promoting the culture. The university also serves the society. The best way it can do is to prepare people to work on the emerging problems that beset society. The university has to find ways to train people to meet the problems of the future. The university cannot provide only academic learning for mental or spiritual development, but it has to convey the necessary skills for economic progress in addition to cultural and social development. It has to train people to explore and exploit natural resources; to produce, to store, and to distribute products; to manage services; and to conserve resources for future generations. Such skills will not only enable solution for present problems, but also to prepare people to work on the unpredictable, complex, and dynamic problems of the future. The university education, then, has already been vocational-oriented.

With rapid movement of society in the 1990s the university cannot remain unchanged. The increase in the demand for more technology and the new public requirement that the university education must make itself more useful, are factors tending to alter the university. Today the demand is that the university should produce the specialists indispensable to a technologically complex society. If the university will

not do the job, the business and the industry will establish training centres of their own. The university with American tradition that lets the students of the first two years choose a variety of general courses and have only two more years for the courses of specialization may have to review its requirements for the first degree. Moreover one of the most promising developments in the 1990s is the wider demand for interdisciplinary fields of study at the postgraduate level. The university cannot look upon itself as an autonomous institution pursuing its own way in academic freedom. On the contrary, university education must be vocational oriented, as the university must be responsible for society, and must be responsible for the future of its graduates.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

In the 1990s, the relationships between university education and employment will be much more strengthened than formerly. Each level and type of university education must correspond closely to a specific type of job or profession. University education has become a mass education. It must offer a wide and changing range of fields of study to suit the new jobs or professions.

As a result of technological progress today, the structure of the labour markets changes much more rapidly than in the past. Its flexibility is one of the main conditions of economic growth. If the supply of qualified manpower is not sufficiently elastic to meet this situation, the university supply system will inevitably become blocked and will face graduate unemployment and a shortage of skilled personnel. The university, then, may be blamed for overproduction of graduates who are not qualified for any jobs or professions of the new era of employment.

For the case of one country, Thailand, the unemployment situation has been studied and reported by Thailand National Statistics Office in 1989 as follows :

Population = 54,599,300
 Labour Force = 30,393,200
 Unemployed Labour = 929,200 (3.06%)
 Unemployed University Graduates = 87,700 (0.29%)
 (or 9.44% of the Unemployed Labour)

Source : Office of National Statistics.
 1989. **Labour Survey, 1988.**
 Bangkok, Thailand.

According to Chulalongkorn University, it is impossible for all graduates of all fields of study to be employed every year. There were 7 professional schools : medicine, veterinary science, dentistry, pharmaceutical science, architecture, commerce and accountancy, and engineering, having more than 75% of their graduates employed. The professional schools of communication arts, education, arts, science, economics, political science, law and fine arts had from 41-72% of their graduates employed from the academic year 1984-1987.

**Percentages of Chulalongkorn University's
 Graduates Reported Employed**

Academic Year (%)

School of	1984	1985	1986	1987
1. Medicine	100	94	93	91
2. Veterinary Science	100	75	87	94
3. Dentistry	98	94	91	93
4. Pharmaceutical Science	95	87	99	86
5. Architecture	87	76	80	89
6. Communication Arts	84	58	68	69
7. Commerce & Accountancy	83	66	66	81
8. Engineering	82	60	72	79
9. Education	73	49	50	60
10. Arts	73	52	60	72
11. Science	71	44	56	64
12. Economics	63	47	45	53
13. Political Science	62	29	36	64
14. Law	34	18	24	41
15. Fine Arts	—	—	48	57

Source : Chulalongkorn University. 1988. **Survey of Chulalongkorn University Graduate Employment, 1984-1987.** Bangkok, Thailand.



UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, ABSTRACT LEARNING, AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Academic "excellence" has been defined by the renowned U.S. National Commission of Excellence in Education as performance on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or university that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to assist students reach them. They expect the school or University to have really high standards rather than minimum ones. Academic excellence means high-quality schooling.

The decade of the 1980s among American educators is the decade of searching for excellence in education. They believe that it is now the time when the demand for highly skilled workers in new fields is accelerating rapidly. They consider that computers and computer-controlled equipment are penetrating every aspect of human lives - home, factories, and office. They estimate that by the end of the 1990s million of jobs will involve laser technology and robotics. Technology is enormously transforming all occupations including health care, medical science, energy production, food processing, construction, and the building, repair, and maintenance of sophisticated scientific, educational, military, industrial, agricultural, and business equipment. This situation indicates the demands for new skills that only university education can supply. To abide by this belief the university can justify its existence only if its educational process and research help to improve and train new types of workers. All universities are now facing the challenge to support research and demonstration directed to the

pursuit of excellence in their education.

The universities cannot do their jobs alone. High schools which graduate the university inputs must significantly devote more time to the teaching of both traditional and "new" basics : the mother tongue, foreign language, mathematics, science, computer science, and basic vocational training for the university-bound students.

Abstract learning such as philosophy, logics, culture, and religious teachings may have to play insignificant roles in the universities of the 1990s. However, they may be inserted in the extra-curricular activities of the university students' clubs. This is to save regular time for instruction of more essential courses. But some other courses of liberal education that are necessary for a trained elite from which the nation's leadership may come will be kept. Students must be trained to become public leaders. National history and government must be required for everyone to study, so that the democratic ideals of representative government will be cultivated in everyone's mind.

Since the university is a producer of research and new knowledge, and research fertilizes teaching, academic research in the universities of the 1990s must be supported and promoted together with technological and vocational training. Research in the 1990s should be related to general practice in industry and business. With this concept in university education, the university graduates will find their promising future in employment.

CONCLUSION

The university today is no ivory tower. The professional schools of different vocations or professions have been established. University education has, then, been vocational oriented. Besides vocational and

technological training and instruction, the university education has included research, services to society, and preservation and promotion of culture.

University education has become a mass education. It offers a wide range of fields of study to suit the new jobs or professions. This is because the university is responsible for employment of its graduates and service to society. However, full graduate employment is impossible. Full graduate employment cannot be reality since there are many other factors beyond university education involved.

The U.S. Government has done a great

deal during the decade of the 1980s to bring up academic excellence in the country. They have tried to reduce abstract learning and promote research practical for industry and business, but success is still far away.

With widely accepted philosophy of mass education up to university level in the world of today, a great number of university students graduate every semester. Growth of the number of jobs cannot correspond with the growing number of university graduates. Full graduate employment can only be mirage and will not be reality in the 1990s or far beyond. ■

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