

The Values of University Education

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With awe and humility, I assumed office today as the seventh President/Vice-Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Until a year ago, it had never occurred to me that I would one day be entrusted with this important position. Having said that, after spending twenty-five years here, first as a medical officer receiving clinical training and subsequently as an MD student and as a faculty member, I believe that I am in every sense a member of the CUHK community.

When I accepted the nomination for the leadership, I thought that the workload of a university president would be something quadruple that of the dual role of a college head and a department chairman. I was totally wrong. The duties of a university leader are far more complex than I could have imagined. Issues that fall upon the shoulders of a university president and his team include, inter alia, the traditions and ideals of the university, the feelings and concerns of its stakeholders, the pursuit and realisation of its educational mission, the securing and

distribution of resources, and the management of personnel matters, to name but a few.

Nowadays, it is not uncommon for university presidents to take inaugural vows to seek top university rankings. But as rightly pointed out by Professor Yang Fujia, Chancellor of the University of Nottingham and former President of Fudan University, 'The essence of a university lies in its culture and spirit. The culture of a university is that of the quest for truth and reality, the pursuit of ideals and aspirations, the striving for academic freedom, the emphasis on both theory and applications, the upholding of ethics, the spirit of magnanimity and tolerance, and a strong sense of critical thinking.' (Yang Fujia, 'The Mission and Cultural Connotations of a University', *Xinhua Wenzhai*, No. 23, 2007) Nothing is mentioned on resources nor rankings.

I believe that a university should, while creating knowledge and nurturing talent with professional expertise, preserve and promulgate its culture and core values. Without culture and ideals, a university has lost its soul (Harry Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*). However, in today's world where market value seems to rule everything and competition for rankings holds sway, the espousal of ideals and ethics is antithetical if not heretical. The onus is on university presidents to strike a balance in the dilemma.

The duties of university presidents should be focusing on educating students and identifying research talent. To identify and nurture talent,

one has to first understand what students and teachers think and need. I am willing to listen to teachers and students and to communicate with them in a mutually respectful and trustful manner. So, I have created this blog to share my thoughts and feelings with CUHK teachers, students and alumni and to receive their feedback and response. In the years ahead, I hope to be able to accomplish the historic task of leading the Chinese University to scale new heights of excellence.

Let me conclude by quoting one of Sir Winston Churchill's parliamentary speeches: 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.'