EQ’2003

Pakistan’s First
National Conference on Quality Assurance in Education
May 10-11, 2003, at PCSIR Auditorium, Ferozepure Road, Lahore

What Makes a Good University

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Abstract: Ours is a time of fundamental changes. Higher education is in a state of rapid change everywhere in the world as the benefits of it to the social, economic, and cultural life of different communities are realized. In the contemporary context of change and challenge, reflection is also taking place on the nature and the purpose of our universities. This paper presents the current situation in relation to the challenges being faced by the faculty members of the universities in Pakistan. There are four interconnected critical points that this paper outlines: legitimacy of a university, expectations for faculty work, conceptions of faculty at work, and concern about the locus of control. Finally, a personal judgment is given in the spirit of considering how our universities can be sustained as economically, organizationally, and intellectually viable and attractive places for academic work.

Introduction

Is a university legitimate entity?

Public opinion generally holds universities in high esteem. Universities are important and not just to those who work in them. We are told so by the media, by industry, and by government. Demand for access to higher education continues to grow. And yet universities attract widespread criticism of their effectiveness.
There is a diversity of views about what is expected of universities. The conventional academic view of universities as places of teaching-learning discourse is no longer universally accepted even amongst the academic community. Nor is it commonly shared by students, employers, and government. Each of these partners of education selects its own expectations from the spectrum of benefits which includes creation of wealth, commercial convenience, social advancement, personal growth, intellectual capital, and advancement of knowledge. To sustain levels of support from the society, universities must be seen to be responsive to the aspiration of students, the needs of employers and the requirements of government. It is clear that further and more substantial changes will emerge. The ability of universities to satisfy such diverse aspirations has proved advantageous.

The familiar triad of university functions is teaching, research and service. These factors can be used to examine the role of a university. A university is the place of higher learning and culmination of highest teaching. What role a university should play? Answer to this generic question needs serious attention. In fact, university is truly a place where all the learning acquired is conceptualized, tested, challenged, visualized, and formulated. It is in the university where the individual ventures into freedom and responsibility—freedom to adapt learning and the responsibility to give the vision, thoughts, experiences, research, and new knowledge to the society.

The vital role of a university therefore is to make available the best possible human resource to the society. A variety of teaching-learning modalities can be offered to fulfill the diverse needs of a society. In view of this, the obligation of a university is enormous—a clear understanding of the social dynamics, economic compulsions and political realities. A university must understand the vision of the community and specify the needs it chooses to serve. Not only that, but it
should actively participate in developing the vision and the direction for the society. If we closely examine the critical success factor for a university to play its vital role, thus, the role of the faculty to be made immortal. Faculty is a vehicle to carry forward mission of a university and articulate into a success. Therefore, faculty members of a university have long been central in making of a good university, while admitting, expanding, and diversifying their role.

National Education Policy of Pakistan (1998-2010) views higher education as a source of great potential for the socio-economic and cultural development of the country and believes that through quality higher education the nation can be transformed into a developed nation within the lifetime of a single generation. Meanwhile, the Policy document shows worries that higher education in Pakistan is beset with problems of a gross nature and is in urgent need of reform in order to make it an effective tool of development. In Pakistan, the last fifty years have seen the rapid decline in the quality of university education despite a good increase in the number of universities. Many causes for this deterioration have been cited in various reports and seminars. Principal among them are poor quality of governance and most importantly, the paucity of competent faculty corresponding to higher education enterprise, prevailing throughout the university system. According to such reports and seminars university education have suffered most due to:

- Political decisions in academics
- Political appointments to governing bodies
- Polarization of syndicates and senates
- Appointment of chancellors who most often is political appointee or a political figure
- Meager researches launched by the faculty
- Inadequate system of academic quality assurance, and
Absence of standards that shape faculty work

In recent years, however, a number of decision-makers, opinion-shapers, academicians, citizens’ groups, media, and others have generated external pressures on universities, demanding reductions in cost, increased accountability of university governance, reconstitute University Act, postgraduate education enterprise, faculty-factory linkage, and above all wider scrutiny of faculty productivity. The cumulative pressure on universities has increased to search for new revenue sources and redesigned delivery systems. Within this political and economic climate, it is essential to consider how the challenges facing universities today may fundamentally affect the lives of faculty within them. Moreover, interested observers in university matters feel that public esteem for higher education and making universities less desirable workplaces; faculty member mainly are responsible for such imprints. ‘Town’ should no longer be insulted from ‘gown’.

Contemporary discourse on the problems plaguing higher education reaffirms the concerns, as academic organizations are criticized for their inherent inefficiency, unluckily. Faculty members are increasingly cast either as the problem—characterized as unproductive and self-interested—or as an obstacle to the solution, participation at best ineffective, at worst, obstructionist. Anderson remarked with serious concern, for instance: *I do not wish to be a teacher, I am employed as a lecturer and in my naivete' I thought my job was to ‘know’ my field, contribute to it by research and to lecture on my specialism! Students attend my lectures but the onus to learn is on them. It is not my job to teach them.* (A letter to the Guardian in 1991 by John Anderson). This letter I believe speaks about technical and behavioral weaknesses on the part of the faculty. The degree to which such unfavorable conceptions of faculty have become widespread is striking; so, too, is the extent to which a new style of academic management has simultaneously
become more legitimate. The locus of control for decision-making is shifting away from departments and their faculties and toward various, non academicians, who continually assert the need for even greater managerial flexibility to make a wide range of difficult strategic decisions, including those with educational implications.

Generally, faculty has not always been active participants in steering macro-level changes in the mission, finance, and governance of universities. Against this background, it seems inevitable that today’s universities will disappoint and that tomorrow’s will ultimately disillusion both the faculty and those holding in view society’s long-range investment in our universities. I share these concerns to reflect on possible futures. These reflections are offered in the spirit of considering how our universities may be sustained as economically, organizationally, and intellectually viable and attractive places for academic work. Let me finish introductory part of the paper by quoting an educator named Tanner who stated that: “A reasonable university adapts itself to the world around it. An unreasonable one expects the world to change to its ideas. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable university.” University education is not about finding the lowest common denominator. Because that is not going to achieve the progress we are all looking for. And, if we take seriously the issue of vitality of a university, then we need to be ‘unreasonable’ and encourage ‘unreasonable universities’.
University Education in Pakistan

History and Structure

The first university established by the British within Pakistan was the University of the Punjab at Lahore in 1882. Sindh University received its charter in 1947 and it was in the process of organization when Pakistan came into being in that year. Thus, Pakistan inherited a very weak base of higher education. Broadly, universities in Pakistan can be categorized into general and professional universities. The majority falls in the general category. At present (Jan 2002) twenty-seven (27) universities are working in public sector while 8-degree awarding institutions are operating under the auspices of the Education Ministry. The current enrolment in country’s different universities is 100,000. The allocation for higher education is 0.39 of the Gross Domestic Product.

Structure of a University

Universities in Pakistan are autonomous so far as their interval governance is concerned. But this internal governance is subject to the University Act. The provisions in the Act relating to the appointment of Vice Chancellors and Pro-vice-Chancellors by the Chancellor, the president of Pakistan or the governor as ex-officio Chancellors, and nominations by the government in university senates and syndicates, all provide the government with a certain amount of control in the affairs of the universities. Further, the inclusion of the visitation clause in the University Act, which entitles the government to cause an inspection or inquiry in respect of any matter connected with the university, gives an overall authority to the government over universities’ affairs. Most important however, is the control of funding. This is an important instrument in the government’s hand for containing the magnitude of freedom enjoyed by the universities. It enables the government to control the trend and growth of university education, and may be
tantamount to infringing the authority of the university. In addition all the statutes passed by the universities are subject to sanction by the provincial or the federal government, as the case may be, and tilts the balance in favor of the government.

University Faculty

University teaching staff are divided into the cadres of professor, associate professor, assistant professor and lecturer, and are entitled to national pay scales from grades 17 to 21; 17 being the entry point. Teacher:Students ratio in general universities range between 1:5 and 1:20 and in professional universities between 1:6 and 1:46. This shows an unbalanced faculty allocation. Only 26 percent of university teachers hold a research degree. University teachers are members of the teaching staff association of individual universities as well as the Federation of University Teachers, which however, is not very well organized for the furtherance of the cause of the teaching profession.
Discussion and Implications of Critical Factors

Concurrent Challenges

Institutions of higher education are today beset by persistent vulnerability, as their legitimacy and even their means of operation still depend upon political and economic resources from the wider environment. Responding to an array of challenges, university teachers and the governing bodies have not attempted to respond to shifting demands in ways that have tangible consequences for the context and conduct of faculty work. In today’s climate, our institutes of higher learning must prove themselves entities worthy of continued investment according to new measures of effectiveness, and good workplaces to serve.

Indeed, universities are seeking a plurality of funding sources now more than ever. For example, it is a formidable challenge to lower costs while simultaneously improving access to and the quality of graduate and postgraduate education. Working together with their governing bodies, university teachers have to cope with this mix of institutional pressures by devising cost-cutting initiatives alongside a series of revenue-generating strategies. Cost-cutting means designing cheaper strategies, lowering staff/student ratio, larger lectures and fewer tutorial. These strategies maybe about early-retirement incentive programs, consolidating and closing unproductive academic programs, initiating aggressive campaigns for private fund-raising, restating the institution’s record of public service, administrative and academic restructuring, rewriting University Act and collaboration with industry. Given this expectation, or many more, faculty work comes to be viewed as an institutional resource that can be assessed in terms of the extent to which it contributes to improved institutional performance along such dimensions. At a deeper level, of course, initiatives to outsource selected academic programs illuminate changing beliefs about what a university ought to look like, calling into question the appropriateness of private sector models of adaptation for higher education. Why is it that the best of university
education anywhere is private? Is it because they have attracted better faculty? Or, is it because of the quality of their governance? This means that universities in public sector are inherently weak due to inefficient faculty. Then, where the fact lies—the faculty matters.

**Expectations for Faculty Work**

*Do Teachers have the skills to perform their job?*

As universities to respond to contemporary economic and socio-political challenges, changes in institutional practices directly alter the expectations of faculty work. The revised expectations which come from a mix of initiatives by government (federal/provincials), statewide University Grants Commissions (federally located / provincial chapters), governing bodies (Governors as Chancellors / Vice Chancellors/Pro-Vice Chancellors / University Senate), and academic leaders (faculty heads / head of the departments) are required not only to raise revenue but, at a deeper level to rethink the purpose of universities. Seeing university education in this way brings some critical concerns to be considered.

One prominent concern of the faculty is to improve graduate education (bachelor to doctoral levels), which is to be translated to spend more time on graduate teaching. A national emphasis on ‘putting students first’. Faculty to be told to recommit their time and attention to graduates while simultaneously faculty should urge to pursue national and international research grants and university-industry collaboration. The emphasis on graduate education raises the question of whether merit pay criteria or promotion and tenure criteria will be revised correspondingly. Moreover, while this orientation is part of an organizational approach to ‘redeploy faculty resources,’ there are significant and at times painful tradeoffs in making this shift.
A second closely related matter is the expectation that some means of assessing faculty performance and productivity be established. Such procedures have been developed in the context of demonstrating institutional performance and productivity, with new means to document teaching (e.g., feedback by the students, portfolios, peer review, employers’ rating of graduates) for annual performance reviews. Numerous additional mechanisms are used to assess contributions to both graduate education and research, students’ engagement for study, faculty-students publication activity and re-search grant awards. Things are available on hundred and thousands websites about effective academic systems. But we lack sensitivity of human engineering for which ‘teacher as mason’ bestowed the responsibility. To-date, several types of performance rating scales are available, have not been utilized for assessment of teachers’ productivity.

A third concern to the university faculty shaping the new expectations of faculty work is the ability to justify academic programs on the basis of their contributions to the country’s economic development, a function that is increasingly regarded as falling within the university’s service mission. Academic program review is now a regular exercise in ranked foreign universities, even if a unit is not undergoing program review at a given moment, evidence demonstrating how the program or the faculty member contributes to the country’s economy is encouraged, if not expected. When the time comes for selective reinvestment among academic programs, the close-to-the-market programs appear to be thriving, while those programs that appear less relevant are weakened. At the same time, universities maybe asked to search out and serve a new clientele: adult learners, those in the workplace, and those at a distance. A re-stratification of academic programs is emerging in this light, laden with implications for intensifying differential status within the faculty.
The cumulative effect on faculty of these shifts in the academic workplace is substantial. A strong case could be made that the absence of faculty input into these revised expectations is appropriate. It is entirely possible that faculty may not want to deal with such issues. By preferring the administration to act as a buffer while faculty engage in their core academic functions and students study, leaving educational managers (Vice Chancellors / Faculty Deans) to respond to the challenges rather than mobilizing the entire campus community for input.

However, as university Chancellors and governing bodies are at the forefront of responding to contemporary challenges and repositioning their institutions, these non-faculty actors have also to take on the role of speaking for the institution in discussions of how much time faculty should teach, what and how faculty should teach, and how administrators can enhance faculty teaching. Whether by design or by default, traditional faculty governance structures have been bypassed in formulating these expectations, prompting us to consider how faculty have come to be characterized in the academic workplace.

**Conceptions of Faculty at Work**

*Do teachers know what they should be doing?*

The overall impact of change and challenges is a substantial re-conceptualization of faculty work. Seen in quite new ways, faculties are employees, potential revenue sources, resources to be redeployed, and competitors rather than colleagues. As universities have been pressured to become more like businesses, university administrators have become the major reshapers of the academic workplace. If administrators have become educational managers and spokespersons for the university, faculty has become more like employees in a job setting that emphasizes the need to meet performance expectations. Faculty is not exempt from being given revised or additional workload, or from being told how to spend their time (teaching, research, service) and which programs to devote their energy to, or how faculty spends time and what they produce. In
addition to the evaluation of faculty performance, there is a more comprehensive surveillance of academic work, including requests from campus administration to report office hours, consulting activities, and time spent out of town. If faculty is employees, an interesting question is raised—for whom do they work? The administration, the state, their students, the public? In any case, this approach treats faculty as workers who need to be monitored rather than as professionals who are trusted to work according to internalized standards 10.

Moreover, to treating faculty more like employees, such an approach holds that faculty contributions can be measured in terms of the revenue they generate, and quality education faculty impart in the academia. In an instrumentalist approach, faculty work can be divided into measurable components with demonstrable production. As data on individuals are aggregated to the departmental level, faculty members can be accounted for by such measures as number of courses taught, student credit hours per term or per annum, genuine-research brought in, other than ghost or pirated research, and publications produced (of national and international repute). Within this performance paradigm, institutional service (such as committee work) and community service (such as promoting town-gown relationships) should also be valued. According to this set of criteria, it is possible that the domain of faculty work will expand to reflect new sources of revenue and better standard of Teaching-Learning Process (TLP). On the horizon, in addition to the technology-transfer activities in which knowledge is applied for economic development in local, provincial, and national needs, new markets are emerging for intellectual property for teaching-learning (e.g., courseware, tutors’ manual, manuals of accreditation, software for electronic-schools, developing distance learning mechanism, educational software, computerized testing). Whether this arena of potential revenue will benefit the individual faculty member or the institution will likely be determined through negotiations.
between faculty and those administrators whose duties have come to include knowledge management.

Along with the performance-assessment approach, the new academic management paradigm regards faculty as competitors rather than colleagues. The organization and its workers are seen as atomistic—reduced to a set of discrete operating units that have expenditures and revenues as well as production, thus opening a unit’s performance to cost-benefit analyses. Departments are business units that spend and raise funds within fiscal constraints and are thus liabilities or assets for the university’s balance sheet. Stratification among academic units is not new, and acceptable too. It is no surprise that the division of ‘academic labor’ among faculty reflects not only different types of work but also what has come to be differently valued and differently compensated work. Moreover, if faculty were characterized as unduly individualistic before this climate, such a climate will surely exacerbate a survival-of-the-fittest orientation. A key consequence for faculty is that they are considered resources that need to be redeployed for the institution to improve its delivery of educational services. Facing competitive pressures, flexibility in organizational redesign is paramount.

For example, the preferred approach to faculty hiring becomes one of filling vacancies with part-time faculty. They (visiting faculty members) are considered better result-oriented than the permanent faculty. Will part-time faculty have greater involvement as organizational members? Although uncomfortable, it is nonetheless necessary to consider this emerging trend as a change over time in the nature of faculty recruitment. The increased reliance on part-timers is not inherently bad for higher education enterprise; whether it is appropriate for universities is another matter.
It is a concrete fact that no society can afford to have poorly performing teachers, irrespective of the levels of education, they provide a poor education for students and give poor value for efforts and money. We have to help ourselves to know of the reason of poor performance where it has arisen, and prevent poor performance in the future. At all levels of governance (Head of the Departments, Faculty Heads, Pro-vice Chancellors, Chancellors) we must understand how to tackle poorly performing faculty and to offer a structured framework to minimize such problems and identify a number of potential solutions.

**Concern over the Locus of Control**

*Does bureaucracy innately effective?*

It is a matter of serious concern about the drift of authority from academicians to academic administrators and the tension between managerial and academic temperaments. This fact can be witnessed through many contributions appearing in leading newspapers, the way the parties are alleged each other. In fact, the ideal of interdependence among faculty and administrator is historically rooted in the need for effective coordination of an increasing complexity of academic affairs in the universities. The rationale for mixing professional and bureaucratic authority grew out of major changes in the nature of academic work: the specialization of faculty and the rise of bureaucratic coordination. The growing ranks of faculty became increasingly unspecialized, unfortunately, such that their primary expertise as educators is supposed to be located in departmentally based domains of curriculum designing, instruction delivery, mentoring, students’ counseling, career guidance, students’ evaluation and research. Whereas, faculty assert their professional excellence and autonomy by controlling standards for entrance and promotion, as well as standards of work. Faculty participate in a variety of governing structures, such as Faculty Boards, Academic Council, Committees, and University Senate. But could not present and prove some viable plans of effective sharing. Although faculty tend to see
students unions (true representative of political parties and saviors of the faculty) as appropriate to their situation and to look at students’ leaders for collective bargaining arrangements for their potential to safeguard job security and work the terms of academic work. Faculty pursue political decisions in academic affairs. Effective sharing authority between faculty and administrators rest on a key premise of shared goals and values, perhaps it is missing from our national character. These complex arrangements for sharing authority have been further complicated by the expanding managerial presence of nonacademic administrators. Thus, decision-making effecting even the academic domain has moved out of departments, as all important resource allocation and restructuring decisions have come to be made by university administrators.

As institutional purposes have evolved alongside external demands, so have expectations for faculty work. In the contemporary era, faculty have come to be understood as a management challenge, rather than as professionals who are integral to the reshaping of the enterprise. Non-faculty actors are at the forefront of critical decisions about what will be eliminated and what will be protected, as well as the basis on which these decisions will be made. I suggest that faculty not only have a right to participate in this reshaping, they have a responsibility to do so. Failure to participate effectively will not stop the process; it will only render them outside of the process.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Faculty is the heart and soul of an institution. If this is still the case, I wonder what kind of heart and soul the institution of tomorrow will have. Who will the faculty be? Who will make the critical academic decisions? What contexts will foster academic work such that faculty can educate and nurture future generations of Pakistan—workers, scholars, and ideas? Short-term
adaptations may prove to be shortsighted, jeopardizing what is in the long-term interest. I worry that faculty are missing an opportunity to involve themselves in this crucial discussion among those who claim to speak for the national interest. In this climate, institutional autonomy and professional autonomy vis-à-vis self-governance have been recast as a luxury that universities cannot afford. This is a profound change in stance. Autonomy in the past was a professional obligation, one that was tied to high ideals—a trust in academic expertise, a commitment to noble cause, as well as a point of departure for fresh thinking about that which is not currently valued. Will those ideals simply be dismissed as mythical, nostalgic, or an entitlement for the few? Must faculty entirely abandon the notion of being buffered from the market? Will faculty internalize a conception of themselves as employees, competitors, revenue-generators, and redeployable resources? And what educational consequences will result? If faculty in universities want the privilege of mulling over their ideas for teaching, of reading writing and new research not replication, will they have to remove themselves from their workplaces to get it?

Faculty must realize that the contemporary arena of institutional repositioning is at least as much about political positioning between competing interest groups, both within and outside their workplaces. To speak of mutual trust and cooperation is pie-in-the-sky thinking. Perhaps faculty should be delighted that the public still views higher education as a key to the future prosperity, as a means of individual upward mobility, providing socialization and good citizenship as well as work force training and perpetual economic development. But given that public interest comes with scrutiny and demands for accountability, it is incumbent upon the faculty to insert themselves into the conversation and do a better job of explaining what they do.
Obviously, many questions remain to be answered about the future of the academic profession and the future of our universities. In examining the nexus of these two turbulent areas, I yearn for surer footing. Perhaps faculty themselves can provide some answer of that, what makes a good university. My hope is that faculty, together with their administrative spokespeople, can make the case that there is something worth preserving that is being rendered obsolete by today’s managerial paradigm and performance metric. I am not making a case to preserve academic ideals that now seem nostalgic, nor am I calling for faculty participation in a way that is tantamount to making a case for waste, which would be politically indefensible and imprudent in tough economic times. My call is simple and timely. I want faculty to listen to external pressures but to be ardent in their advocacy of intangible but essential values. The university has immeasurable societal values; it nurtures people and their ideas. Faculty, who has expertise in academic matters, must not be silenced. Otherwise they may one day soon find themselves in a very different institution, or perhaps even outside it altogether. Thus, the baby can be saved to grow up to meet the challenge but care must be taken to continually replace polluted bath water where privilege protects itself, lobbying outweighs analysis and rivalry constraints cooperation

I should like to emphasize that faculty serving universities ought not to exaggerate what they can do for the development of their countries. Looking at the history of recent decades one finds too many times and places where education was made responsible for too much, and good institutions were hurt by trying to do too much. Education can do everything. But it cannot. I think, education takes its life from the society around it and it can only nudge that society toward the betterment we call development. Education can only get better as the teachers themselves become better educated people. And we all know that at best we improve slowly.

Note
The views expressed in this paper must be seen as of the author and not necessarily of the official documents concerning universities in Pakistan whose procedures and processes will continue to evolve reformation over time. Having said this, the author has been actively involved in the organization and management of quality assessment activities, and the paper does provide a snapshot of his views. In this capacity, the author has benefited from involvement with the faculty members of higher education institutions over a period of time and discussion with colleagues, notably Academic Advisors University Grants Commission, members University Senate, Faculty Deans, Faculty members, and Vice-Chancellors.

References and Notes

1. The Education Policy (1998-2010) recognizes the contributory role of higher education in economic development and has proposed new initiatives for increasing the efficiency of higher education, strengthening existing graduate study programs, improving the delivery system, expanding the capabilities of the universities for creating new knowledge, and enhancing the entrepreneurial role of universities in Pakistan.

2. See also, for example, Seminar Proceedings, compiled by the Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan (1998).


4. John Anderson read this statement during his presentation in a seminar on, Higher Education: A Pathway to Development, organized by Aga Khan University, Pakistan in 1998.


7. There is currently great concern over higher education policy in Pakistan. See, for example, *Education Sector Reforms: Strategic Plan* (2002), Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education. The Strategic Plan proposes, increase the current enrolment in country’s universities to 200,000 from the existing 100,000 by 2004, increase in allocation for higher education from 0.39 percent to 2 percent of GDP by 2010. The Plan also suggests to set up the National Education Testing Services (NETS) and establishment of National Council for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (NCAQA). At present, 27 universities are working in Public Sector while 8 degree awarding institutions are operating under the auspices of the Education Ministry.

9. See Julius, ed., *Managing the Industrial Labor Relations Process in Higher Education*. Of related interest, within a work-place model that sees administrators as managers and faculty as workers, students become mere consumers.

10. This may, of course, be part of a broader societal trend in which a logic of accountability is imposed on other progressions as well. See the argument offered by Gary Rhoades, *Managed professionals: Unionization and Restructuring Academic Labor*, NY:SUNY Press, 1998.