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CHAPTER 8

CULTIVATING AND FOSTERING ACADEMIC CULTURE IN THE UNIVERSITY

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Preamble

The main essence of education is to improve on the quality of life. He who does not know needs to be taught. He who feels he does not know enough seeks knowledge through different means. The University in Nigeria and other parts of the world is seen as an ambience where knowledge is initiated, cultured and dispensed.

In recognition that no one person is the sole custodian of knowledge, a need arises for some culture to be established to ensure quality and best practice in dispensing knowledge. Therefore we talk about academic culture.

What constitutes academic culture

Culture as the name implies denotes a highly developed state of perfection which has a flawless and an impeccable quality. It also denotes all the knowledge and values shared by a society. Academic culture thus envelops proper teaching, research, community participation and dissemination of quality information.

Teaching: For quality assurance, we would be doing every other thing but not teaching if we indulge in or encourage the following:

- 1) Going to class without adequate preparation to talk to students on topics we are not very sure of.
- 2) Giving unnecessary and unwarranted assignments to students so that we can avoid actual teaching.
- 3) Seeking unnecessary favours, gifts and attention from our students, e.g., sleeping with and dating of students, demanding illegal fees.

- 4) Collecting money in exchange for grades or asking them to submit assignments with cash for typing at identified places.
- 5) Indiscriminate copying from textbooks to form handouts for students.
- 6) Sales of handouts and/or books and using these to replace actual lectures.
- 7) Giving assignments that may not relate to course outline but rather to lecturers current research.
- 8) Leakage of examination questions
- 9) Awarding/allocation of undeserved marks.
- 10) Setting substandard questions so that marking would be easy.
- 11) Hoarding and/or delaying release of results.

Rather, quality academic culture would promote

- 1) Proper preparation and delivery of lectures.
- 2) Graded and course related assignments and examinations.
- 3) Regular and committed teaching which is backed up by research results.
- 4) Timely release of results.

Research:

Psychology tells us that knowledge fades owing to disuse. This calls for constant research. As knowledge is not static the lecturer cannot afford to be static in his own knowledge also. He needs to continually update his knowledge by reading research reports, testing those reports with his own researches and also conducting researches into new areas.

As already highlighted above, no one man is the custodian of all the knowledge in his field. This fact calls for collaboration with others. Partnership/collaboration in research makes for quality and gives more credibility to findings. Collaboration is basically an arrangement involving two or more persons pursuing identified common objectives/actions over a period of time.

Advantages of Collaboration include:

- thoroughness of job done
- different competencies brought in for the same purpose
- non-over reliance on one person and the resultant fatigue
- elimination of potential errors
- width of area of coverage
- possibility of reduction in time used in some cases

This is surely opposed to

- One shot, one researcher based research
- Desktop research and its attendant blemishes
- Hurried and shoddy research
- Protracted and sometimes unfinished attempts.

From the above, it could easily be seen that collaborative researches tend to have more value than individual focused research.

In fact, funding agencies are more interested to fund collaborative research than individually executed research. Even if an individual won the funding bid, academic culture expects him to associate with other academics to enrich the final output of the research. Academic culture also expects one to publicize outlet of funding which are available and accessible to any individual for others to benefit from such avenues. To hoard information on funding, outlet for research results, possible areas of innovation would be working against quality in academic culture.

It would be academic fraud seeking to put down someone's name who may have done nothing on, or known nothing about, a research in the notion of "helping the person have a publication". Infact, collaboration should give equal share of responsibility to results and claims made by the researchers.

Funding of researches could be accessed through the following means:

- 1) Seeking advert in journals
- 2) Consulting embassies to check on their areas of interest
- 3) Requesting information from such funding bodies like DFID, UNICEF, USAID, UNDP, OXFAM, Rockefeller Foundation and the like
- 4) Consulting earlier beneficiaries
- 5) Attending international conferences.

In all these, the only way to be eligible is through a well packaged proposal stating in explicit terms how the research would be conducted and the benefit of such a research.

Please permit me to state that funding once obtained should be used judiciously and the research conducted promptly so as to ensure credibility and continuity with the researchers and future researchers.

Community Service:

Quality community service derives from research findings and experience. It therefore follows that if one is a committed academic, teaching and researching adequately, one would have the ingredients with which to serve the community.

Community service comes in

- 1) accepting to serve in committees and offering useful inputs;
- 2) co-ordinating programmes;
- 3) heading academic units;
- 4) serving in such other ways as to enhance the activity of the primary community (University/State) to which we belong; and
- 5) assisting junior academics in their attempts to achieve excellence.

Obviously, running away from departmental assignments so that one has enough time to devote to personal jobs which may have no bearing on the enhancement of the unit/institution to which one belongs, is working against community service. We erroneously call some of our activities community service but in strict terms one community is suffering while the other is promoted. Such activities include: preaching assignments, our work in our own private establishments like shops, business centres, saloons etc. It is recommended that for fairness, we should determine which is our PRIMARY ASSIGNMENT and our PRIMARY COMMUNITY. By so doing, we would be able to give adequate attention, commitment and time to the Primary Community before other "Communities" are served.

Disseminating information

There are several legitimate avenues of disseminating information open to a serious academic. These include:

- Journal Articles
- Contributing chapters to books
- Seminar papers
- Conducting workshops
- Direct teaching
- Conference participation
- Writing books
- Distribution of facts sheets and other such activities

As a head of department/Dean, therefore, it is expected that you are at the head of academic functioning of your unit. You are expected to lead by example to cultivate best practices, in the areas of teaching, research, and community service. More specifically, you are to initiate, promote and encourage participatory academic research which would benefit your subordinates. Workshops, seminars and conferences are such fora where fruits of these exercises are displayed. We would, therefore, expect to judge our performance in these areas by the number and quality of departmental and faculty workshops and seminars conducted to share research findings with colleagues.

With these conducted in your individual units, you will surely testify to the enrichment of the academic culture of our great institution.

Thank you.