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## Making the Case for Higher Education Support<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Introduction:

The search for resources is one of the constants for administrators, members of governing boards, and faculty members. Part of the effort is just to maintain the status quo – pay the staff, cover utility costs, maintain the physical plant, cover the costs of instruction, and keep the current level of research going. For most institutions, moving beyond that is a major task – at times requiring an effort so Herculean it may not seem worth it. What would it take to improve laboratories in the sciences to cutting edge? What would be needed to fund a new science building? To lower the student-teacher ratio to 1:15? To provide substantial research support to the best faculty members? To provide an effective program for students and staff with HIV/AIDS?

As we look beyond the campus borders and contemplate the costs of the many other demands on colleges and universities the task seems even more daunting. They include costs of globalization (e.g. state-of-the-art training for students, retraining our best staff, countering the brain drain), the requirements of knowledge societies, contributing to economic development, joining the ICT revolution, increased access, equity, and quality assurance. Where will we obtain the funding to meet all these demands? Where do we start? What is to be done?

In addition to funding, colleges and universities need other kinds of support in areas like legislation affecting them, local rules and laws that impact on higher education institutions, permissions for research, health care for students, help in obtaining land, access to hospitals and clinics for teaching, and a whole host of other needs that require outside assistance and cooperation.

Before turning to the funding and support questions, as administrators and educators we need to ask: How is higher education doing? Is higher education able to do the things we think it should be doing? Is our university? Is it providing high quality instruction and fostering development? Does tertiary education have the broad support it needs to meet expectations? If it does not, what can we do about it? How can we make the case needed to obtain financial and other support? These are difficult questions to answer. While responses in one country may be somewhat different than those in South Africa, or Uganda, or Ghana, or Afghanistan, or Malawi, or the United States, I suspect the similarities outweigh the differences. Those of us in tertiary education generally believe we are doing as well as humanly possible, though most of us feel that with more resources we could do better, make a greater contribution to development, enhance student learning opportunities, and improve quality in areas of weakness. Most of us argue that these changes require additional funding – that higher education is underfunded by government, the public, and the private sector. That is the problem! And, most of us *are*

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underfunded. Yet in the face of current economic conditions, how can we obtain more support? How can tertiary education argue effectively for a larger proportion of the funding from government, students, business, or donors? There are so many national needs! Some of them are desperate and equally compelling. How can we make a better case for support? Let's look at some options.

One of the things we administrators and academics do not do very well is to make the case for higher education. We tend to think that people "know" that what we do is useful and important, that it fosters economic growth, that it prepares young minds to compete in a globalized world, that our research produces answers to critical problems in health, engineering, and economics. But the truth is that most people do not know that, even those in government frequently do not, sometimes our own students, often their parents, certainly not the average citizen. In fact many of them think higher education is wasteful, elitist, and poorly managed. I suspect this view of tertiary education is true in every country to some extent. It certainly is true in some circles in the U.S., though we have been working on these issues and have made some progress informing government and the public. What strategies might be employed? How can the needs of higher education be met? How might tertiary education respond to the demands of knowledge societies, science and technology, ICT, globalization, greater access, gender equity? How can we do a more effective job of making the case for tertiary education?

Political, financial, and moral support must be a major concern of tertiary education planning for the modern age. Can government provide the funding needed to implement change to meet these demands? How will students react if we have to raise fees and/or tuition? What kind of support do we have from the community? What contributions might business and commerce make to our planning efforts? How can we encourage foundations and other donors to assist us? Part of the answer to these questions lies in their current perceptions of tertiary education and the universities or systems involved. Part of it rests with those who talk about and influence opinions in the community, nationally, and internationally. In the end, however, the university community and its leaders have a critical and potentially powerful role in making the case for higher education. If they do not make the case, who will?

## **II. The Case for Higher Education Support and Funding**

Part of the process of making the case is to understand where you are now – to examine what you are doing, to assess your success, and to identify problems. It is useful to start with a number of questions:

- Who is making the case for the institution and for higher education at the present time?
  - Is it the colleges and universities themselves?
  - Is it a National Council for Higher Education, a Council for Higher Education, a Vice Chancellors Association, a national organization representing colleges and universities, or some equivalent?
  - Is it the individual Vice Chancellors, Presidents, or the Principals of the Colleges?
  - The Ministry of Education? Is the Minister or a deputy responsible for assessing and submitting requests for funding on your behalf?
  - Business? Are there business groups that lobby for the universities from time to time?

- Professionals? In medicine and law, for example, are there professional associations or supporters of the universities, medical education, or the law school?
  - The public? Does the public ever express views to legislators or government officials about increasing the level of funding and support for colleges and universities? Could they be encouraged to do that?
  - Members of Councils? Do they make the case on behalf of the institution?
  - Others?
  - All of the above?
- How well is the case for higher education being made at the present time?
    - Are tertiary education institutions getting the support they need from government? The funding they need?
    - Is higher education a high priority for government?
    - Have development plans resulted in new support? Have they proved to be effective blueprints for funding?
  - Is the current level of funding from non-government sources adequate?
  - Do colleges and universities obtain needed support from government policy makers on legislation that is important to colleges and universities such as their amendments to their respective acts?
  - Is the community supportive? Do you hear public encouragement?
  - Is there support from the media? Is the media in general a champion of higher education?
  - Overall, is higher education getting the funds and support it needs?
  - If it is not, what should be done? In some ways we know that there is never enough support – financial, moral, and other. Yet, I have never seen a university that would say it doesn't need more support. As we have gone through the list of types of support, all of you have a sense of what is “reasonable” and of what you are getting. Is it sufficient? Is it reasonable?

### **III. What do the most colleges and universities want to accomplish?**

#### Some examples:

- Budget support from the government – at some “adequate” level to provide good quality education. This support should be stable and predictable over several years for effective planning.
- Funding to meet the challenge of knowledge societies including ICT. Colleges and universities are the main providers of the formal education that is essential to knowledge.<sup>2</sup>
- The ability to produce first-rate graduates. Tertiary education institutions are viewed as the key to economic development in several ways, one of the most important of which is training high quality graduates. High quality graduates are a critical product of tertiary

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<sup>2</sup> Peter F. Drucker. May 4, 1994. *Knowledge Work and Knowledge Society: The Social Transformation of this Century*. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. p. 2.

education. They will provide, develop, and pass along the “knowledge” that is a “major driver of economic development.”<sup>3</sup>

- Real cost-sharing by students and their families. This would be through tuition or fees.
- Freedom from the requirement to provide housing, meals, and allowances. The ability to privatize these services.
- Greater government support in approving policies needed for reform and transformation, including a revised Act.
- Government recognition of the importance of university research and provision of funds to support it. This is a key to national development.
- Business support for the university: funding, technical assistance, practical training of students in some fields, hiring of graduates, contributions to the university endowment.
- Public support – recognition of its importance, the need for tuition and fees, support for funding, encouragement of students, cooperation, contributions to the endowment fund from those that can afford it.
- NGO and foundation funding and support

### An Example from Uganda

The recent approval of a new national strategic plan for higher education provides an opportunity to use the changes proposed to help us think about what is needed and how one might make the case for the changes desired. At the national level, Uganda’s vision, mission, and goals are set out in “The Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2003-2015.” The Strategic Plan lists a number of themes including, “...enhancing quality and access, efficiency and effective higher education based on reformed financing for higher education, improving governance in higher education and prevention of HIV/AIDS.”<sup>4</sup> For purposes of illustration, let’s look at a few of the implications of these goals.

- Greater budget support from the government and other stakeholders to rehabilitate, construct, and improve facilities so that tertiary education can grow from approximately 80,000 students to 126,396 by 2015.<sup>5</sup>
- Funding to expand ICT equipment, capacity, curriculum and staffing.<sup>6</sup>
- Establishment of a salary package based on staff training.<sup>7</sup>
- Set up a research fund at each institution that constitutes 3-5% of the wage bill.<sup>8</sup>
- Provide quality higher education “accessible to all qualified Ugandans by 2015.”<sup>9</sup>
- Improve access for students from poor families.
- Improve gender equity with a target of 51% women by 2015.<sup>10</sup>

This is a small sample of the very impressive list of goals from the Strategic Plan. Added to these are the creation of knowledge societies and national and regional development. All of these require resources from some sources – government, students, parents, donors, business, the

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank. 2002. *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. p. xix.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Sports. 2004. *The Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2003-2015*. Kampala, Uganda. pp. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

public. Each requires substantial changes at colleges and universities, in funding, and in some cases the method of funding. All of them have implications for “making the case.”

#### **IV. Planning Strategies for *Making the Case for Higher Education.***

A. What resources do the colleges and universities have to draw on for support? As you try to make the case for higher education, what assets can you use?

- *Contributions to the community.* We are talking about building support through service in areas such as agricultural extension, community health, teacher training. These build support and resources that can be priceless as the University of California found on several occasions when it needed support dealing with the legislature and was able to mobilize farmers appreciative of its agricultural extension programs.
- *General reputation.* The overall reputation of tertiary education in the country and of specific institutions is vital. If it is generally very good, that is an asset you can build on. Institutions such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Ghana-Legon, and Makerere University are good examples. In talking to donors, business, government, they have an advantage. The expansion in the number of institutions in most countries, including private colleges (for-profit and not-for-profit) and universities, means that each will establish its own reputation – and the assessment made could have critical positive or negative consequences.
- *Influential citizens.* Are there groups of influential citizens who might be mobilized to encourage support for higher education or your institution – e.g. professionals, service clubs (e.g. Rotary), farmers, and business people?
- *Alumni:* They can be a great source of support with policy issues – especially those who are in key positions in the public or private sectors. Alumni contributions to colleges and universities in most of Africa are not a tradition – but neither was it for public institutions in the U.S. not many years ago. The initial amounts contributed may be small, but sustained contact can pay big dividends in many ways. The University of Wisconsin-Madison was a late comer to fundraising. It now is among the most successful public universities in the U.S. at about \$200 million per year.
- *Business:* Support and assistance from business can fill vital needs. This kind of assistance is not a tradition in most of Africa. Indeed, most businesses do not appear to see either an obligation to assist or a direct benefit to themselves if they do. With cultivation, that attitude can change. A notable exception in Malawi recently was the donation of the cost of a student hostel for the medical school at the University of Malawi, totally funded by a successful business family.
- *Agriculture:* Given the fact that 80% - 90% of the population of most African countries is involved in agriculture in one fashion or another, this is an area of high potential mobilization. While most of this population is very poor, it too can be a very powerful voice in support of tertiary education. They see the results of agricultural innovations and outreach, such as help with disease or improved varieties of crops.
- *The Public:* The potential for support is especially high since there is every indication that the public accepts the principle that higher education is important to them and to their children. Is anyone making the case to the public on a regular basis? Are they benefiting from college and university support? Are there other benefits that might be

shared? It is important to make the case to the public, showing the benefits in concrete terms. Cost is a high hurdle for most people. It might be that a campaign for increased support for higher education should include information about the opportunities for access and support for those who do well, regardless of economic situation. If access is truly available to the brilliant and outstanding poor – on some kind of transparent, competitive, quality basis – the public will be both more interested and concerned about any financial crisis or needs in higher education.

## B. How can support for higher education be assessed and fostered?

Most of us have a rough sense of current levels of support for tertiary education in different sectors of the nation. To our surprise, we have found that our own self-assessments are often way off the mark. In the United States we have tended to underestimate the support and in so doing did not take full advantage of it. You may want to assess your own support. To be effective in making the case for higher education it is useful to obtain a more accurate sense of existing levels of support. How much support exists already? Could it be increased with thoughtful information and contact from the university? Where does higher education fit among people's priorities? Is there opposition to increased government funding? Are there areas that might be "ripe" or "ripened" for seeking funding assistance? Are there policy issues for which a case needs to be made such as "cost sharing", "privatization", "student fees", or "research funding?"

What might be done?

- Carry out interviews with key people (major political, professional and business people, opinion leaders, religious leaders, and members of the public) to get a broad sense of:
  - the importance people give to higher education;
  - whether or not people believe government support is adequate and if there are differences among groups;
  - how they would solve the current financial problems;
  - who they believe should be responsible for funding higher education;
  - who they think could be mobilized to help make the case.
- Carry out a dozen or so "focus groups" in a variety of communities including urban citizens, rural people, parents, farm leaders, and business people.
- Assess the success of graduates of the universities in gaining employment. Talk to some of them about their experiences and the importance of higher education for them. Assess their level of support and whether or not they might be willing to be involved in a major campaign to make the case.
- Assess the demand (and expected demand) for university graduates by talking with those responsible for hiring teachers, professionals, government workers, health workers, etc. How do they view the quality of graduates from your institution? How do they view the appropriateness of their training? What kinds of changes (if any) would they recommend? What would it take to mobilize their support?

### C. What kind of information is needed to make the case?

It is essential to have extensive institutional data, or system data to help “make the case.” While a campaign to make the case can begin once some of the most important data have been collected, it is vital to have good statistical records to help make the case. Collecting such data should be an ongoing process centered permanently in an office such as the Academic DVC. Much of the data gathering can be done by faculty members, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates at very little cost other than transportation (as was done recently by the University of Development Studies in Ghana). Some of the data should already be collected as part of normal university record keeping.

What kinds of data are most useful?

- Employment data on graduates including their success over the last 10 years.
- Unemployment data on graduates (by field) – even if that is incomplete.
- Throughput data – i.e. average length of time to degree and drop-out rate.
- Cost data. What is the average cost per student to the student and their family?
- Salary and income data (even if incomplete).
  - What is the average income of a university graduate by type?
    - Teacher
    - Professional (doctor, lawyer, engineer)
    - Business person
    - Government civil servant
    - Corporate employee
    - NGO employee
    - Other important areas (e.g. forestry, police, accounting, local government).
  - What is the average income of a secondary school graduate? Primary school? One important comparison for encouraging students to go on to college is the average rate of pay at each level.
- Create a list of distinguished alumni. Identify those who might be willing to advise you on making a case, or to participate in such a campaign.
- University service to government, the community, regional and international programs.
- Research output of the teaching staff.
- Awards to members of the teaching/research staff such as research grants from foundations, Fulbright Professorships, UNESCO teaching awards.

### D. What strategies need to be employed to raise the level of support and mobilize it?

The most important parts of the process of “making the case” are: 1) information gathering; 2) assessment of the meaning(s) of that information; 3) preparing the case for higher education; and 4) choosing an appropriate strategy or strategies for the process at this particular point in time. Part of that should include ranking your goals. You may not do everything at once but pick out the most critical and start there.

- *Information Gathering.* One result of the process will be to bring the needs of the University to the attention of many people who have not thought about it. Thus, prior to gathering information from interviews and focus groups, it is important to put together an overview of the “case for higher education” so that those who interview will have some

answers to give when asked. Develop thoughtful questions that will generate differentiated responses (e.g. everyone will be in favor of education at some level; if you ask if everyone should be entitled to a university education you will get some differentiation).

- *Analysis.* Some kinds of data will be very hard to gather and to analyze. That is likely to be the case with employment data. Some of the information you gather will suggest areas in which the University needs to work – either on its image or on real problems people identify. Being responsive will help you make the case.
- *Preparing the case.* You may want to make somewhat different cases – i.e. emphasize different points – to different audiences. The public may be more concerned about some areas (such as access) than politicians (who may be concerned about cost). This is where data from the focus groups will be invaluable in helping you target appropriate audiences by knowing what is of greatest concern to each.
- *Picking strategies.* Usually several strategies are employed in “making the case.” Part of this effort will involve providing people with basic information about the university (or the system) and the benefits and costs of higher education. That will improve their understanding of the university, its contributions to the nation, and its challenges. Some of the campaign may target specific groups (e.g. business) to suggest why it is in their interest to help the colleges and universities or your institution. The appeal to government may be a very different one. Working with multiple strategies will strengthen the chance for success. A campaign may focus on several different parts of government from members of Parliament to the head of state. Since the time with each will be limited, careful preparation is essential.

#### E. Preparing the budget and documentation

Nothing will be more important to success than a carefully worked out budget and justification for the funds requested. The budget should be multi-year showing how funds will be expended each year and estimating income (if any) showing how it will be used. Cost estimates should include expenses covered from other sources such as staff time, equipment and repair costs, depreciation (where appropriate), and overhead. The descriptive material should spell out how long-term costs will be met after the funds requested have been exhausted. Will they be covered by other grants, by departments involved, by a new request to government, by sources yet to be identified? The requests should include a detailed text explaining the importance of the project, its place in the university (or system) strategic plan, its expected impact on teaching and research, and its projected long-term contribution to the institution and the nation. This list is not intended to be a definitive statement of budget requirements but is intended to suggest the importance of a detailed discussion and justification of the request.

#### F. Checking to be sure your house is in order

It is important to start your campaign for funding and other types of support from a position of strength. Even if the college or university is up-to-date on its budget controls and has taken great care to make sure all proper procedures are followed for appointments, leave, building, travel, research, and so on, it is important to carry out a review to be sure you can answer any questions about expenditure that might come up while you are seeking greater support and more funding. Mistakes here can destroy your effort. Take a little extra time to be certain things are in order, or

if they are not, that you have a good explanation for the anomalies, or have taken corrective action. Thus, review the income and expenditure statements for the last few years before you embark on the campaign. Be sure you can defend the budget request, that last year's budget was audited, that any anomalies can be explained (e.g. an above scale salary for a recently recruited star). Are faculty-student teaching ratios reasonable? If not, are these changing? Are study-leave arrangements in order? Are people returning to the university? Are they being paid only for the time allowed? Are they getting the expected degrees? Are there any other areas that might be questioned such as travel? If so, be ready to respond.

## **V. Conclusions**

Now you are ready to make the case for higher education and for your institution. You have prepared your arguments, talked with major figures, carried out focus groups, reviewed previous budget expenditures, and prepared the supporting material for your requests. You are well prepared for your campaign to "make the case" for your college, university, or for higher education in general. Remember too that you can not take a campaign to the public, or government, or funders very often. Make the case well and you will have credibility and support for some time to come. However, if people think your arguments are self-serving, elitist, unrealistic, selfish, partisan, or badly presented, you may lose their support and interest for a long time.

Remember, if you don't make the case, who will? No one can make it better than those who know and love college and university education. Too often we educators don't think we have to make the case for higher education – that everyone should know how vital and central it is to the lives of students, government, development, and well-being. The reality is that most people do not know. If you are well prepared, you will be surprised at how easy it is to make the case, and how much you will enjoy the process.