The University of Belize

The Way Ahead: Transforming the University of Belize
VISION 3000-6000
Preface

This document addresses the principal elements that will direct the continued transformation of the University of Belize into the premier national institution. These elements are anchored in national development priorities and aspirations. They are the means by which the University becomes an important catalyst for development of the country and reflect extensive conversations, observations, and analysis of materials carried out between June 2008 and February 2009. Board members and administrators, faculty and staff members, students and alumni of the university, members of the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions of Belize and members of the public and private sectors participated in the process of generating a rich collection of ideas on the way forward and of identifying and analyzing objectives and strategies for the development of the university. This process was supported from initiation to culmination by four senior practitioners of educational development from COBEC institutions: Betty Flinchum, Keith Miser, Tracy Harrington and Jim McCoy and who were later joined by John Kemppainen.

Santos Mahung, Ph.D.
President
The Way Ahead: Transforming the University of Belize

Mission Statement

The University of Belize is a national, autonomous and multi-location institution committed to excellence in higher education, research and service for national development. As a catalyst of change it provides relevant, affordable and accessible educational and training programs that address national needs based on principles of academic freedom, equity, transparency, merit and accountability.

Vision Statement

The goal is transformation of UB as a recognized university in the region and as THE premier degree-granting university in Belize, which is student-centered and which responds to the national development needs and priorities of the country and aspirations of higher education.

Objectives and Strategies for Transformation

To this end, the Board of Trustees, the Administration, faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders engaged in a process to craft a shared vision and development framework for the university, which recognizes the interests of the university and its community, a framework which responds to priorities and national development plans of the government and to the needs of the constituents the University is intended to serve, a framework which seeks and invites the collaboration of other universities and associations of institutions of higher learning with the purpose of promoting high standards of learning and of knowledge development but also a framework which seeks and promotes partnerships with the private sector, and with non-governmental and development organizations to ensure relevance and currency, a framework which transcends intra-institutional boundaries and brings together existing and new proposals to create synergies and critical masses to make UB a more viable institution and a framework which captures the thinking of the Board of Trustees and various committees of the university on new and imaginative ventures in all facets of university life and a framework which embodies a sense and culture of business to make the University of Belize a more self-sustaining entity.

The framework encompasses eight strategic areas each with listed objective and key result areas that are fundamental to the objective. These in turn will guide the plans and actions
of the university. It is not anticipated that this will be an easy venture. The analyses, planning and organizing are time and energy consuming and the financial and human resources required are often not readily available. Notwithstanding, it is important for the University to have a vision of growth and development, if students and graduates and the nation are to believe that “UB-poised for new horizons” is more than a registration slogan and that, in fact, the University of Belize can and will open new horizons of experience and growth for students and graduates and for Belize, as a whole.

**Objective 1: Improve the reputation of the University of Belize**

Fulfillment of this objective will build political support, assure recruitment success and build opportunities for fundraising from friends, alumni, and Belize businesses. It will provide a lasting “brand” for the university. Vital to this objective are strategies that emphasize the university’s reputation among stakeholders and which serve to differentiate UB from other educational institutions in Belize and which distinguish it as a university of excellence. While the reputation of the university must be grounded in excellence and relevance of academic programs, research and service, and extra-curricular programs, effective communication strategies must be employed to garner recognition of the university. Paramount among these are:

1. Strengthened communication between UB and its stakeholders.
2. An orchestrated national campaign promoting academic programs of excellence, research and service, sports and extracurricular programs.
3. Expanded and effective public relations and information mechanisms, including, an enhanced university catalogue and web site.
4. An established and proactive Alumni and Outreach Office.

**Objective 2: Ensure academic rigor and excellence of all academic programs:**

Strong academics must be the heart of the university. The process of accreditation addresses the academic excellence of the institution and attempts to measure it. Effective teaching and active research that contribute to the resolution of problems and service to the community and nation are the key components of academic excellence. Achieving and sustaining academic excellence require procedures to assure that faculty are qualified and that faculty performance meets high standards. To achieve academic excellence, the university must not only offer quality teaching, it must also provide support services, especially libraries and information technologies that supply adequate and current resources and materials. Once policies, procedures and systems are in place to assure academic excellence, they are largely self-sustaining and become the routines and habits of university culture. To this end, the University must develop and put in place:
1. University appropriate hiring qualifications and policies and procedures for tenure and promotion for faculty based on accreditation standards;

2. Systematized requirements for research, service and outreach with delineated institutional priorities compatible with the role of UB as the national university;

3. Established programs, policies and procedures for faculty development to meet accreditation standards;

4. Improved instruction through systematized evaluation of the quality of teaching and instructional delivery by UB faculty through feedback from other faculty and students and established teaching protocols and best practice;

5. Established procedures and schedule for the assessment of new academic programs and the evaluation of existing programs based on the principles of quality, relevance and sustainability;

6. Mechanisms for fostering students’ career opportunities and professional skills through internships and practicums for appropriate degree programs;

7. Improved academic support services, especially libraries and information technologies, so that resources and materials are current, adequate, and accessible to all students.

8. Established and publicized policy on academic honesty that includes the enforcement of specific penalties for violations.

9. Academic advisory councils populated by representatives of client groups to ensure relevance and quality;

10. Adequate infrastructure to promote teaching and learning effectiveness, including faculty buildings with equipped laboratories, workshops, classrooms, specialized libraries, offices and meeting spaces.

**Objective 3: Fulfill role and obligations of a national university**

UB is by creation and incorporation the national university of Belize. It is by design an institution created to respond to the aspirations of higher education in Belize. In this regard, UB is required not just to respond to the priorities of Belize but must also take a leadership role in identifying, advising and proactively develop academic programs and undertake projects and activities designed to support national development and crises needs of the country. To this end, it is incumbent on the university to:

1. Take a leadership role in formulating national higher education policies and in the affairs of COBEC and ATLIB

2. Engage in dialogue with target ministries of the Government of Belize to identify development priorities and strategies and design programs, projects and activities to address these.

3. Become knowledgeable of country development plans and programs of development agencies and promote projects and activities for the execution of country development plans and programs.
4. Develop a functioning office to engage in intelligence work, design projects and spearhead the development of project proposals for funding—with the caveat that all such projects must relate to and further national and university development needs.

5. Establish a clearinghouse for information on Belize and re-establish the Journal of Belizean Affairs to disseminate research articles by the university and other scholarly and information articles on matters of interest to Belize.

Objective 4: Fulfill the student-centered nature of the university

Assuring the personal and academic success of students is not only the essence of a student-centered university but is also necessary to fulfilling the criteria expected by accrediting agencies. Excellent facilities and effective support programs are vital to the success of this objective. The construction of a student center, improving the athletic facilities, and upgrading and expanding student housing are urgently needed for students. Support programs such as career services, student orientation programs, and counseling centers are needed for first generation students. These services must be provided on all campuses comparable to services provided on the Belmopan campus. In concert with academic development, attention must be given to creating facilities and developing support programs to assure retention and graduation of students. In this regard, the development of the university must include,

1. university-wide health and wellness support programs, counseling services, career planning and placement, and services for students with disabilities.
2. established programs that address women’s issues, problems of sexual harassment, and activities that appeal to diverse students.
3. improved and expanded availability of student housing managed by an office of housing and residential life to coordinate on-campus and off-campus housing and residential services for students.
4. develop an international student program to promote student exchanges and study-abroad programs and provide support services for international students.
5. expanded financial assistance programs
6. established outreach mechanism for leveraging resources and opportunities for students with partner universities through stronger bilateral collaboration and collaboration with organizations such as COBEC and CSUCA; and
7. student centers on all campuses to house all student activities, student government and support programs that also includes adequate space for meetings, large-campus gatherings and performance space.

Objective 5: Provide country-wide access to university programs

The national university has a responsibility to make higher education programs available to all qualified citizens. To meet this responsibility, it is important to offer a wide-range of academic and professional development programs, delivered through appropriate instructional systems,
based on relevant needs and designed to reach all geographic areas. Universal access is a principle of accreditation. To achieve this objective, the university must

1. offer multi-level degree-granting academic programs on all campuses and sites;
2. offer professional certification programs, professional development programs, and short-term workforce training through both on-campus and alternative instructional modes;
3. ensure that the demographic profile of the student body more closely reflects the socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural diversity of the country of Belize as a whole;
4. enhance recruitment, retention and graduation rates through initiatives such as new-student orientations, advising, tutoring, and the establishment of a financial aid office;
5. employ alternative delivery systems and embrace the use of information and communication technology for open and distance learning.

Objective 6: Enhance partnerships with the private and public sectors, nationally and internationally

Partnerships with business and industry, the public sector, development agencies and governments, and voluntary organizations can promote fulfillment of all of the university’s objectives. Relationships with Belize tertiary and international educational institutions are especially important. Such relationships can provide additional resources as well as examples of best practices in higher education. They are viewed favorably by accrediting agencies and help assure sustainability of the institution. The university must employ strategies to:

1. forge relationships with business and industry in Belize to benefit the university and to provide training, research and educational services for the partners;
2. establish relationships with the international private sector, focusing on businesses with interests and operations in Belize;
3. seek partnerships with educational institutions abroad to create student and faculty exchanges, to provide technical support, and to offer professional development opportunities;
4. create linkages with development agencies and governments to identify opportunities to compete for grants and contracts that will benefit and enhance university programs and priorities;
5. enhance relationships with private nonprofit corporations and educational associations;
6. seek avenues for identifying funds for scholarships and research fellowships for students and faculty from corporations, foundations and governmental agencies;
7. advance a leadership presence in COBEC to realize opportunities for study abroad, faculty co-authorships, research partnerships, faculty exchanges, language training, and cross cultural experiences and to
8. activate partnerships to facilitate transfer between UB and other tertiary level Belize institutions.

Objective 7: Improve morale and sense of community among faculty, staff, and students:
A strong sense of community enhances the development of common purpose, shared aspirations, and teamwork that are essential to building and maintaining a strong university. Improving morale requires sound leadership and management and a campus environment that is safe, attractive, and well-maintained. Morale is strengthened through continual and inclusive communication, facilitated by a modern and universally accessible electronic communication system. Team spirit and morale are enhanced through athletics and arts activities, service learning programs and community outreach initiatives. If the University is to build its identity and the sense of community and belonging among its stakeholders, it must engage in efforts to:

1. initiate ongoing training programs in leadership and management for administrators and staff that include evaluation of effectiveness by all participants;
2. strengthen safety measures designed to ensure the well being of faculty, staff and students on all campuses;
3. improve campus environments and amenities for faculty, staff and students on all campuses by establishing common areas, food services, and transportation assistance;
4. create on all campuses an environment that is aesthetically pleasing, kept to a high standard of cleanliness, with well maintained buildings;
5. develop and maintain an electronic information system that communicates daily with all constituencies;
6. expand athletic and intramural sports activities, service learning programs and student clubs and provide active support for student government community-building initiatives; and
7. develop a campus layout which integrates the academic, student and management functions of the university and that is culturally sensitive and is user and environmentally friendly.

Objective 8: Strengthen the governance and management systems

The University of Belize has moved from a period of amalgamation of separate tertiary institutions and focus on consolidation to a period of development of an independent and cohesive entity with a new identity as THE national university. In this new institution is to function well and be productive, it must have a well-developed, effective and efficient management system. This system should provide the basis for each operation to interact and to be effective and efficient in meeting relevant educational goals. It is important for roles and responsibilities to be clearly stated, directly related to function, and integral to the university mission. Institutional governance and effectiveness are cornerstone principles of accreditation and if the University is desirous of seeking accreditation, development efforts must include:

1. A review of Act of incorporation with necessary revisions reflecting the way forward and status of the university as an independently governed institution, clarification of the roles and functions of the Board and Administration in this regard, and the accreditation of the
university to grant degrees and the obligations of the university to the government and to the public at large as the national university of Belize;

2. clear and comprehensive job descriptions for all administrators and a policies and procedures manuals that includes performance standards for all administrative and support units;

3. policies and procedures manuals for all university administration functions including financial management and accounting, procurement and asset protection, personnel and payroll functions, general services and physical plant maintenance, security and communications services;

4. clear policies and procedures governing relationships between UB administration and BOT and between UB and MOE.

5. retaining the services of an attorney to assist the University with legal issues and policy matters;

6. an accepted budget preparation and management process, and a university-wide system of planning, training in supervisory management, project management and the use of management information systems and software for more effective planning and management;

7. a system-wide interface program for admissions, student records and accounts and services;

8. establishment of academic and administrative councils to foster transparency, accountability and shared decision-making.

9. an approved organizational chart showing the multi-campus relationships and lines of authority;

10. adequate administration facilities with adequate space, equipment, offices and meeting rooms which are conducive to and appropriate for management and communication.

**Objective 9: Foster a sense of business efficiency and entrepreneurial spirit at the university:**

Given the fiscal reality of limited resources, it is imperative that the University not only explore all avenues and develop multiple mechanisms to leverage external resources BUT that faculty and staff of UB use resources efficiently and find ways to use its existing assets to increase revenues. Sound accounting policies and procedures help assure efficient use of financial resources. It is important to identify opportunities to leverage existing physical and human resources in creative and entrepreneurial ways which both support the student-centered mission of the university and increase revenues. Sound accounting policies will be required by accrediting agencies, while cost effective use of existing resources and expanding available financial resources support sustainable growth of the university. The sustainability of the university will be enhanced by strategies to:

1. develop and enforce business plans for all profit centers, e.g., bookstore, cafeteria, copy center, rental of facilities;

2. create budgetary autonomy to units and permit retention of funds remaining at end of the fiscal year to motivate efficient current year spending, while ensure that internal
accounting policies and procedures incorporate unit and individual financial accountability;
3. develop a spirit of economy and efficient use of utilities, materials, and supplies through a concerted promotional campaign;
4. undertake profit and loss analyses of academic programs and enforce good business practices, such as, minimum enrollments for classes to be offered and review of productivity--number of degrees awarded--of all academic programs;
5. establish a Grants and Contracts Office to identify external funding opportunities and to assist faculty and staff in securing external funding;
6. develop policies and procedures for institutional approval of external funding proposals;
7. adopt formal accounting procedures for managing externally funded projects;
8. introduce incentives, including financial rewards and professional recognition, for pursuing external funding;
9. maximize the use of facilities, land and programs for the potential of generating income; and to
10. engage in private sector and alumni development activities for soliciting donations.

Conclusion

The vision and the means to achieving that vision are clear. Moving forward now requires fixing dates and responsibilities for reaching the targets and strategies in a reasonable and realistic way. It also requires determining the needs for infrastructure, human resources, support services, and budget. The end result of this process will be the establishment of the University of Belize as THE national university and as an institution integral to the development of Belize.