



COB: Toward College or University

By Gilbert NMO Morris

Our very own bright and beautiful Miss Gabriella Fraser put this question to a number of persons for a response. Such is the importance of the issue, I was compelled to respond extensively, in spite of limited time, or occasion to address the matter fully. One therefore hopes, largely, to have sparked a discussion, the entrails of which may lead to deeper insights not availed to me at this writing.

-GNMOM

There is a definitive path to attaining university status for any institution. It is not a matter for opinion to be sought or won by mere ambition or national pride. By definition, a college is an institution that is and re-produces a learning environment, by means of integration of collegiates. Typically, a college lacks professional schools or specialised research centres. It is an environment in which collegiates can learn, each from the other, through and across a community of peers.

By contrast a university is a place where "universal" learning is

offered and enacted. It is constituted by a series of colleges; which in many respects are their own separate communities of learning. No college – in a true sense – is a university. All universities are a series of colleges.

These distinctions above having been mentioned, COB (as characterised by all those desirous of seeing it become a college), must decide what it really will be: a four-year college or a full-blown university.

There are several considerations that should move the debate:

First, COB is institutional wine in the old wineskin of Government High School; the death of which remains regrettable. (In the view of many, COB has not yet surpassed GHS in reputation, whether that is fair or not). As such, institutionally, the first thing that COB should do, is to restore the institutional memory of GHS, by creating a "Wall of Excellence" and allowing all GHS graduates to sponsor a brick in that wall. This would raise money, and recognise the GHS institutional lineage.

Some will say this is unnecessary. However, it is just that sort of disregard for institutional memory that shows a lack of respect for institutions at the same time that COB hopes to become the most august of institutions.

Second, there is at least one prohibitive issue, that stands athwart from the very idea of a University, and here I leap ahead of myself to make the point: Lecturers at COB cannot secure their employment as members of a union and hope to become lecturers or professors at a college or university. One becomes a member of faculty by entering a Tenure Process, based on a peer-reviewed assessment of one's scholarship, confirm by one's colleagues-on-faculty at the college or university over a specified time.

Therefore the clash between being a lecturer or professor and having the oftentimes-ridiculous job securities of a civil servant cannot go together. It is possible that Adjunct Lecturers and Professors along with Teaching Assistants (TA), can form a representative body that decides their human resources questions. Again ahead of myself, only a Faculty Senate or the University Foundation can decide on tenured employment of a scholar at a college or university; because

only they are equipped to address questions concerning the quality and relevance of scholarship; which is the basis of such employment. Employment tethered to unions are also tethered to politicians, and there is no surer way to undermine the credibility of COB as a tertiary institution of higher learning than to bamboozle the selection or appointment process, as we do most other process in our country, then to ensnare it in politics.

Third, no institution, not even Parliament nor the wishes of the Bahamian people can make COB a college or a University. This is not so because we lack the capacity to imagine a university. But because this must be done by means of the most discriminating process to insure that the institution itself is founded upon a sustainable prestige on the development and enforcement of an enduring standard. This means that once it is decided what is both possible and preferable, given what's possible, a process can be enacted.

In determining what is possible, let's say for COB to become a university, leaping over its establishment as a four-year college first, the initial decision must address a few main components of a university:

- a. Accreditation
- b. Faculty Senate
- c. Method of pedagogy
- d. Teaching quality
- e. Research capacity
- f. Library facilities

There are other considerations – many in fact – however, these are particularly significant and preliminary.

The next order of business would be to establish a Blue Ribbon Accreditation Committee. The best approach is to look at the best education centres in the world, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan and Massachusetts and appoint accreditation specialists from these places. Then include strategic centres, such as Brazil, China and India. Include local professionals such as Dr. Davidson Hepburn, Dr. Keva Bethel and Obediah Michael Smith. The objective here is to have members of the committee from countries with the most advanced education systems and ones that are strategically and economically important, where we want our qualifications accepted to drive

strategic professional experience for graduates.

Once the Accreditation Committee is established, it will lay out a "hurdle path" toward accreditation.

Next step is to appoint a Faculty Senate. This means appointing an interim Vice Chancellor and interim Deans of Faculties both for Humanities, Sciences and Professional Schools. The Senate decides these schools of discipline based on the traditional concepts of a wholesome education, global trends and national needs. A wholesome education is arts and sciences, deep and broad general knowledge of history, literature, arts and reasoning. Global trends involve technology, design, and environment. National needs could be bio-technologies, oceanography, financial services and tourism, etc. The Accreditation Committee and the Faculty Senate would hold a conclave and allow testimony by experts in the schools of discipline; addressing both subject area relevance and the institutional capacities required to advance the university proposition.

Such experts will also assist in developing the character of the University as either a "Blunt Edged", or "Smooth Edged" or "Cutting Edged" or "Bleeding Edged" institution. (For instance, in technology, DeVry & ITT are blunt edged institutions; George Mason & Cambridge University are smooth edged; Cal-tech & MIT are cutting edged and Carnegie Mellon & Stanford are bleeding edged schools, in that they invent what most schools will study the following year).

Having decided on the foregoing questions, the Committee and the Senate can address specific components of accreditation.

Take Pedagogy. Universities have different methods of teaching. For instance, traditional British schools do not hold in-classroom lectures. The tutorial is the basis of teaching. A more direct example is one I wrote of in my book "In Defense of National Sovereignty". Harvard University Law School is a "practice of law" law school. You go there if you want to learn to destroy your opponent in court. Yale University Law School is a "theory of the law" law school. You go there if you want to teach law. Now of course, these are not hard rules. But generally, these characterisations reflect many things about the school, such as its selection of courses and library holdings; not to mention the core expertise of its professors.

Teaching quality is another core issue. For instance, there is no doubt that Harvard is a great university. However, many students will tell you that undergraduates hardly get to see their professors at Harvard. It's because they are, many of them, superstars, travelling the world, doing amazing things. But at the London School of Economics, "freshman students" are taught by the best, most famous professors. This insures that the teaching power of the university is "front-loaded" as part of the formative experience of its most vulnerable students. Also in respect of teaching quality, the Committee and the Senate must decide on who administers examinations, whether the University does in a "Federal System", or the various schools will do so on a collegiate basis. They must also decide on marking examinations; whether it will be done in-faculty, or External Examiners will mark; to prevent favouritism, maintain transparency and promote independence of results; a particularly set of concerns for small communities.

Again, respecting teaching quality, the Committee and the Senate must decide on Faculty Ranking. An issue I will not discuss is the University Foundation. It plays a significant role, one aspect of which is as the home base of University Foundation Professors. These will be the highest ranked and highest paid professors at the university, who are as much Ambassadors as they are scholars. Typically, these people do not have to have PhDs. They are people of such robust achievement and learning in their field that they are invited, by vote of the Foundation Board, Confirmed by the Faculty Senate as professors. These could be people such as Leon Williams, or T. B. Donaldson, Dr. Duane Sands, Mr. Justice John Isaacs or Maurice O. Grinton, etc.

The next level of faculty would be tenured and tenure track professors. I will not discuss that here. Additionally, you have Distinguished Visiting Professors; who are people like your Foundation professors but who cannot remain with the university indefinitely. Finally, you have your lecturers and Adjunct Professors. A lecturer is usually a generalist, teaching say, biology, chemistry and physics, but not seeking a university appointment. An Adjunct is someone who has deep knowledge and can cover for a term or a year for a professor who is absent for whatever reason.

Faculties, Departments, Institutes and Research Centres are the cores of a university's capacities. This distinguishes it from a college. These

institutions are a means of attracting independent minded geniuses, who will not conform to the traditional university formats, but are, in any event, so powerful a voice in their subject and a presence in the academic world that they are given their own “genius factory”; as Albert Einstein was at Princeton’s “Institute for Advanced Studies”. Here the scholar is given every resource to pursue whatever ideas pleases him, the benefits of which adds to the luster of the school, by attracting scholars from all over the world to hear new ideas.

At universities, groundbreaking research and innovation are constantly interwoven in university life; which is the method by which Stanford gave us so many technology companies including Google. This requires enormous resources. Harvard's Endowment in 2007 was 5 times larger than the Bahamian economy; in fact larger than all CARICOM economies combined. A major question will be what will be the research direction of a Bahamian university? Sir Arthur Lewis – the Nobel Laureate Caribbean Economist – established a research tradition in economics that was respected worldwide, which the University of the West Indies has lost. Ralph Bunche developed an approach to diplomacy (and won the Nobel Prize), which Black Colleges in the US have lost. Our lack of discipline, disregard for traditions of the sought mentioned, and our inability to see the nobility of everyday methodologies in our own society that struggle against our worst habits will factor into whether a university of any credibility can rise on our soil.

As to the library, this ties into something that may appear quite strange. 5 years ago, I was asked by The Rt. Hon. Perry Christie's speechwriter to write a speech for the CANTO Conference in Nassau; which, I was told, was to push the cutting edge. Mr. Christie in his style did not read the speech. But in that speech was a call for a Caribbean wide "Electronic Compendium of Global Knowledge" to be led by BTC. That is, an electronic library containing the whole of human knowledge. The telecom companies of CANTO were/are in a position, I thought, to build out an infrastructure and delivery system, even via the mobile phone that would place this knowledge in the hands of every Caribbean person. This sort of audacity should already be evident in a population seeking to establish a university. Here is the thing: A university must have a comprehensive library, of research quality on every subject in which it has a faculty. But if you think of the temperatures in the Bahamas, and that a good law library, for instance has at least one million volumes, which must be

kept at room temperature 24/7, you begin to see that just establishing such an institution is a \$50 million dollar enterprise. Maintaining a traditional library is impossible in our setting. As such, the electronic platform I suggested is the best way to get an advanced library at a fraction of the usual cost.

There are many more issues to be discussed on this question. However, I am in an airport and this is the best I could do at short notice. I will say that our culture frustrates the idea of a university. Anti-intellectualism, and an attitude that a demand for intellectual exactitude is a personal affront, means the intellectual can gain no true respect for scholarship or place in our discussions; most often. Moreover, cronyism and lack of transparency, the absence of which is central to the credibility of a university, cannot go hand in hand. Yet, we “thrive” in our wanton disregard for ideas, because we have cultivated a system in which convenient relationships drive or our stalled development process rather than ideas; which are often labeled as impractical, by people whose “practicality” has left our country in a shambles.

In the march toward a university, the Accreditation Committee and the Faculty Senate would consider these and other enduring questions, then lay out, say, a 150-point hurdle path to accreditation, with a timeline of say 3 years. Every quarter, the Interim Chancellor would give an assessment of whether the hurdle path targets are being met. The collateral benefits of this approach are many: the establishment of a university should revolutionise a society; forcing it to face analytically what it may deny culturally; forcing it to see the sheer intellectual power in those whom the political and social system may ignore, but whose scholarship forces the nation to see itself in new ways; for good or ill.