

Universitarian Contingencies: When Downsizing is Equal to Downgrading

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Abstract

The institutionalisation of knowledge, marked by durability and excellence, goes back some ten centuries to the Middle Ages. Its durability has been ensured by two factors, namely, society's respect for knowledge and, for its part, the institution's regard for university tradition emanating from within its campuses. The stability of the institution created an environment in which knowledge could gestate and hatch excellence in all disciplines and the disciplines could shape perspectives and positively influence the course of history. This is all a description of the university, as an institution configured by knowledge, excellence and its own unique tradition, the three important elements responsible for the enduring prestige enjoyed by knowledge institutions the likes of the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford. In Western societies, as far as universities are concerned, changing emphasis in the attitude to specific knowledge disciplines is usually nuanced and reasoned, not hasty and impulsive. Despite the ascendancy of STEM in academic and public discourse, the Department of English or Department of History, for example, still thrives in mainstream and other universities. It has not been shut down because of some signal inability to generate IGR (internally generated revenue) for its self-sustenance. The fact is rather that the humanities disciplines are still enjoying respect and patronage. By contrast, in Africa, the attitude to the advent of STEM in discourse and policy execution has tended to be sentimental and precipitate. This essay attempts a speculative examination of a few policy challenges that might be posed by the issue of STEM versus STEAM in the life of a university.

Keywords: institutionalisation of knowledge; humanities disciplines; policy challenges

Introduction

The University of Bologna in Italy was founded in 1088. It is the oldest university in the world. The word university, from the Latin *universitas*, was coined at its foundation. It was the first university to introduce the notion of academic freedom into university culture. It adopted an academic charter, *Constitutio Habita* in 1158 or 1155, which guaranteed liberty for all its scholars to move unhindered in aid of education. This was the origin of the university tradition of academic freedom that is documented as the *Magna Charta Universitatum* to which the rectors of hundreds of universities worldwide are signatories.¹ The concept of academic freedom is the wellspring of several academic traditions that are extant today, some of which receive analytical attention in this chapter.

When you've been around in academia for long enough as a student and subsequently as an academic staff, and you did not play the ostrich wherever you've been, you cannot but come away with a few enduring impressions and observations. Take the issue of perspective; that of a besetting flux of viewpoint. For example, the fanciful thought about the indestructibility of an institution of higher learning because it is a premier university, the first in the country and hence a national monument. There is also sometimes this nagging puzzle about the imperative of a typical university

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¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Wikipedia*. "List of Oldest Universities in Continuous Operation". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_oldest_universities_in_continuous_operation. Retrieved 21 Nov 2022

population which tends to be accompanied by a fluxional resolution. This is how it plays out: A conventional university campus population comprises academic staff, non-academic staff, students, vendors of assorted retail items, dogs, cats, other pets, and domestic livestock reared as a hobby or to supplement income by their owners. The conundrum? Of the lot who make up the university population, which group is the most critical to the survival of a university system? Is it the group of academic staff, or non-academic staff, or students, or hawkers of retail commodities, or the animals?

The answer to this nibbling enigma is usually circumstantially conditioned. As a student you were convinced that without students the university system would collapse. The thought, which is in part logical, tended to be helpful to the ego at moments when as an individual you had some grouse with a lecturer over the issue of fairness, or the lack of it, in the periodic lecturer measurement of student performance in form of a test, an assignment, or an examination. It also bolstered the ego when students as a body pit themselves against university authority over one issue or another, or simply in response to some feral urge to be disruptive, warranting a class boycott or the carrying of placards listing student grievances. Student sense of importance at such moments would sky-rocket and could flare student agitation to a point of violence and a more dangerous confrontation with authority.

There is a shift of perspective when the student metamorphosed into an academic or a non-academic member of the university population. With the weight of formidable curriculum vitae backing the erstwhile student now turned lecturer, he or she wonders why they ever thought students were the most important presence in a university system. It would seem self-evident that the academic staffs were the most critical component of the university system. For their part, the non-academic staff settled the issue of importance when they insisted that they were also eligible for certain perks reserved for academic staff. In some universities non-academic staff can take sabbatical leave.

On retirement, the dilemma returns when the retiree is only an onlooker manifesting some vested interest. Occasionally, as an observer of a confrontation between staff and students, who the retiree sides with will depend on where the nostalgic plumb line falls. This will, of course, also be affected by whether the retiree's child is still a student in the university or is already a staff, and which kind of staff – academic or non-academic. It is just a step shy of infinite regress. This essay examines a few variable factors that shape university life.

Variable Executive Mentality

The Universitarian experience is characterised by a variable attitude to issues. The office of Vice Chancellor (VC) is the hub of the university system because the VC is the chief executive responsible for the day-to-day running of its operations. The office is a university tradition originating in Britain. Comparable titles in institutions of higher learning are Provost and Rector. The VC reports to the Chancellor (an honorary title) who is the official head of the university and chairperson of the University Council. The Chancellor is answerable to the University Visitor who, usually, is the head of government, if a public owned university. Visitor is an appropriate title for the personification of public patronage because it underscores the autonomy of the university, but its import is sometimes lost on political leadership in a post-colonial setting. The office of Vice Chancellor tends to turn up three types of mentality. The first is an intellectual mentality. It is the more durable outlook being almost as old as the very idea of university. The second type is a political mentality. The third is a business mentality. The second and third are more recent developments in the millennial history of the university system as an institution of higher learning. This point is made without prejudice to the personal intellectual or professional accomplishments of the person who in an administrative

capacity exhibits the trait.

A VC as chief executive is a European university tradition. In the United States of America, the university's chief executive is usually referred to as a president. This is an innovation, and Americans are known for the zeal to innovate. To illustrate this point, compare the British educational system which favoured a progression from secondary or high school with a general Certificate of Education labelled Ordinary Level (O Level) through a higher stage known as Advanced Level (A Level) that led to admission to a three-year honours degree programme, or a slightly longer duration for some professional disciplines such as law, pharmacy, and medicine. For its part, American innovation dispensed with the A Level educational segment so that a candidate could enter the university for a four-year-degree-programme with the equivalent of O level grades. This innovation has affected the tradition somewhat which defined a university as a gathering of mature persons (both teacher and student) who were united by a common interest in the pursuit of knowledge.

In the older tradition, the mature student could be left to his or her own devices in the second undergraduate year of study to work according to their interest and pace with minimal interference from their lecturers. Because the students were mature and responsible, they could be trusted to make prudent intellectual use of the liberty and time allowed them. This process can no longer be taken for granted because of the drop in average age and a corresponding fall in the level of maturity of new entrants into the university for study. The switch by some African postcolonies to the American educational method involving a de-emphasis of the A Level component in the progression to university appears to have been a bit precipitate, rather too quick. A postcolony tends often to play the sedulous ape. By contrast in this category, Makerere University in Uganda has been a bit more tenacious in retaining the A Level admission policy, and it shows in the more positive outcomes of its degree programmes, while elsewhere in the continent there is a pathetic fall in academic standards.

A university chief executive with an intellectual outlook would uphold tried and tested institutional values and the durable institutional traditions which have accumulated over ten centuries of the university system. There is, for example, the matriculation ceremony, on admission to university, which gives a freshman/freshwoman a sense of a new community and a formal welcome to it. It ceremonially welcomes the matriculant into a new community whose main goal is a pursuit of knowledge and excellence. The event elicits fine sentiments of dignity and commitment to the pursuit of knowledge. It also fosters a sense of loyalty and mutual respect on campus on the parts of students and lecturers. It is the starting point for a grooming of the spirit of collegiality. A graduation ceremony, on completion of a degree programme, caps a sense of commitment to knowledge and excellence that has deepened in the student while on the academic programme. It consolidates a welter of relationships; for example, the lecturer/student relationship would have upgraded to that of mentor and mentee.

An alumni association takes over to ensure retention by graduates of a link to the university after completing a degree programme. A lifetime sense of loyalty is engendered and built up by university culture. It cumulates over time as university tradition. In first generation universities such as the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, some of these traditions have grown for roughly ten centuries and are still cherished by a society that places considerable value on knowledge and excellence. An important tradition dedicated to ensuring that high academic standards are maintained in the process of dissemination of knowledge is that of externalization of certain aspects of the measurement of cognitive and heuristic performance by students. The external examiner or moderation tradition is also meant to obviate any tendency by the university system to lapse into intellectual insularity and stasis.

One of the university traditions that facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas is that of a sabbatical, known also as sabbatical leave. On a periodic basis, usually after an academic has spent six years of continuous service, the individual can take an academic session off to teach or undertake research in another university or comparable institution of higher learning or research. This facility mitigates a tendency to monotony and gravitation into intellectual parochialism. A sabbaticant is refreshed and enriched by the visit to another institution of higher learning and the host institution benefits from the sabbaticant's stint with them. The usefulness of the sabbatical is not only to neutralize a drift into rustiness and narrow-mindedness, but it also strengthens a culture of internationalism with embedded mutual benefits to the source campus and the receiving institution.

Another university tradition of import is respect for and pragmatic recognition of the value of a senior academic. By this tradition, a senior professor who has served meritoriously is, on retiring, honoured with the position as Professor Emeritus and can continue to enjoy certain university facilities as before retirement. For instance, an Emeritus Professor gets to keep his or her office that he or she was using before retirement. This way the university continues to benefit from the wealth of intellectual and administrative experience of the retired senior academic that is being so honoured.

There is the very significant tradition about university degrees. A degree award certifies to anyone who cares to know that the awardee has successfully completed a programme that conferred knowledge and skill on the degree holder. University degrees usually fall into two broad categories, especially at the level of doctor, of an earned degree and an honorific degree which the holder does not have to work for but receives as a token and gift. A chief executive with an intellectual mentality is at pains to keep the two categories of degrees separate from each other. The main concern of this chief executive is to maintain the worthy traditions of character and excellence. When there is loss of focus in a university, a shift of attention from the pursuit of knowledge and excellence, it may lapse into a centre that awards academic degrees which are bereft of intellectual substance or justification. The degrees awarded by it will only amount to paper qualifications.

A university chief executive with a political mentality is usually a political appointee whose tenure of office is often characterised by disrespect for university tradition. This is in office primarily to do the will of politicians who teleguide the university administration from the public sphere, or, for one reason or another, to play one sector of the university population against another on the campus. Under this kind of leadership, the campus population splinters into factions of different allegiances and grievances. The university settles into a bumpy administrative ride on routines and hiccups, and potential and actual conflict. This kind of mentality may annexe crucial structures of the system in favour of a process that serves partisan and personal ambitions. This kind of leadership tends to be surrounded by a coterie of like-minded supporters and sycophants who themselves nurse a personal ambition or a hidden sectorial agenda.

The university chief executive with a business mentality is a product of innovation that is associated more with private universities. A Vice Chancellor with a business mentality is an oddity in a public owned institution of higher learning. This kind of chief executive tends to subordinate the all-important consideration of university tradition regarding knowledge and excellence to financial expediency (Berg and Seeber 2016). A private university names this type of executive a president, and the mentality is appropriate to it because the set-up is first and foremost a business concern before it is a centre of learning, except where it is church owned. The mentality will not only scoff at university tradition, but the policies enforced will also be driven largely by mercenary rather than intellectual considerations. Operating in a public owned university, the models copied by this type of administration will be the smaller, younger business concerns named private universities that

have scant academic tradition. The sparseness of tradition is one reason the private university is content with the label of “president” rather than that of “Vice Chancellor”, which title comes with a formidable weight of university tradition.

The mentality copies private universities because it deems them more financially successful than the public owned university over which it presides. The outlook, for this reason, feels compelled to compete with other business centres and factories to produce retail commodities for sale. In this way, university culture is short-changed to obtain the material outcomes – which are not crucial defining features of a real university. The mentality is also sometimes characterised by arbitrariness and cynicism.

By contrast, a chief executive with an intellectual mentality is at pains to protect university tradition and culture. This outlook does not interpret innovation as meaning giving up university culture wholesale in exchange for financial gain. It understands that university culture is an unquantifiable product of time, careful consideration, and experience. While the chief executive with a business mentality squanders academic experience in exchange for a few millions saved for the university coffers, an intellectual mentality devises a less self-stultifying method of financing a university’s running and other costs. Lopping off senior academic staff in one fell swoop to save a few millions for a public institution of higher learning runs counter to well established productive academic norms that have evolved over several centuries of university history. While money cannot buy experience, the valuable time-tested processes are also crucial to a university’s prospects of intellectual standards and academic excellence.

To illustrate the point, public owned universities, Oxford and Cambridge, and private owned university, Harvard, to cite just three examples, are doing well despite (and because of) their age, not because of money as such, but mainly owing to consistent support and patronage stemming from great respect for knowledge and excellence (Stover, 2018; Faust, 2010). It must always be remembered that, originally, university was not conceived to generate money as a primary goal. It was started primarily to develop human capital. The discussion that follows critically examines a new age strategy of development of human capital that is the current craze among academic and political administrations and the dilemma that undergirds it.

STEM or STEAM?

STEM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. STEAM unbundles as science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Usually, the “arts” is a synonym for the humanities; arts and humanities may then be used interchangeably. Historically, the “arts” have been the bonding material for all academic disciplines. Virtually all knowledge came into a formal ken of interrogation subsumed in the discipline named philosophy. It may be argued that all the academic disciplines branched out of philosophy as they became more intensive, rigorous, and specialised in their individual processes of self-enlargement. The arts or humanities are human centred. For example, a part of the humanities named “language” is concerned with a natural facility common to all peoples in all cultures since the origin of human life. The study of language as an academic discipline has revealed much about the miracle of creation. Another feature of the humanities named “literature” is described as experience given linguistic expression. So, every human being is implicated in language and literature, because the one is a universal facility for communication and creative expression and the other is experience which characterises humanity.

As a discipline, the arts or humanities is relevant to all humanity. Another aspect of the significance of the arts or humanities is that despite the schism of other disciplines from philosophy,

the vestiges of all academic disciplines are residual in philosophy. For example, philosophy still retains remnants of mathematics in symbolic logic, and of science in the philosophy of science, the history of science, etc. Apart from that, literature as experience creatively explores all aspects of life in the literary genres of poetry, drama, and prose fiction and nonfiction. Experience is expressed in other creative forms such as drawing, film, music, painting, sculpture, archaeology, etc. So, it does not seem far-fetched to aver that the arts or humanities are a receptacle of all knowledge.

It is probably the reason the humanities enjoyed a huge prestige over several centuries of university culture (Stover 2018). Also, it is little wonder that famous Swedish physicist Alfred Nobel gave much attention and support to literature. He was in his lifetime a bibliophile. His legacy of the Nobel Prize, awarded annually by the Swedish Academy, does not exclude literature but is informed by the spirit of STEAM. Most times, when the Nobel laureates gather for the annual award ceremony, the Nobel Prize for Literature laureate is selected to be the spokesperson for the other awardees at the occasion, such as Wole Soyinka was in 1986. Moreover, after the ceremony, the most long remembered awardee is the literature laureate.

Despite the myopic hype over STEM, the older more durable universities with a much longer academic tradition of a demonstrable respect for knowledge and reward for excellence will not disdain any branch of knowledge for any reason (Faust 2010). Harvard University Library and Yale University (all-imported marble) Special Collections Library vied to purchase for their holdings the original manuscripts of 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature laureate the novelist Toni Morrison. Yale University lost out to Harvard University in the public auction of the said manuscripts which were valued in millions of dollars¹. The point here really is that the durable universities are still investing good money in the arts or humanities which some new age thinking believes is moribund. These prestigious universities have been around for long enough to know that it is imprudent of a centre of higher learning to allow itself to be buoyed about by a passing fad. University obsession with making money is fuelled by ephemeral whim, for reasons already explained. Money is useful but can be volatile. Its idolisation only confers transient benefits on the votary. A university's more permanent accolades are closely connected to individual and corporate accomplishments in the academic spheres of knowledge and excellence.

The unimaginative will be unable to foresee the imperative relevance of the humanities in a dehumanising Internet age seeking to convert men and women into unthinking, unfeeling machines! Therefore, it stands to reason that a STEAM perspective and strategy is required to produce a university graduate who is rounded and not one-dimensionally mechanistic. As already argued, all knowledge is represented or residual in the arts or humanities, so the emphasis of the humanities as a discipline can only be excellence for its graduates. Moreover, not every aspiring student has an aptitude for STEM related subjects; but the right to education applies to everyone. STEAM caters for all abilities and interests. While a STEAM approach conduces to a national goal for an optimal development of a country's human resource and the fundamental right to education, a STEM or nothing strategy can only aspire to outcomes that are inauspicious in a cyber-age. The inclement potential for STEM extremism as policy is correctible at university level by making humanities programmes a requirement for the award of a university degree to students who are based in disciplines that run outside the arts or humanities. The outcome of such a strategy will be a production of rounded university products that are appositely humanised.

There is another important reason an African university should not hasten into the bandwagon of scoffers of the humanities. The African postcolonies are yet to produce their own home-grown equivalents of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Milton, William Wordsworth, Charles

Dickens, and Thomas Hardy, etc. etc. almost ad infinitum. Nobel Laureates in Literature T. S. Eliot (1948), Bertrand Russell (1950), Winston Churchill (1953), to mention only three winners out of the lot from Britain, received university education of a STEAM rather than a strictly STEM package. Bertrand Russell, for instance, first studied mathematics, became an influential thinker and philosopher, and ended up an award-winning creative writer of literature. A rigid STEM diet would have crippled Russell's creative potential in philosophy and literature. Churchill, journalist, later wartime and post-war prime minister of Britain, in his autobiographical *My Early Life*, discloses how he had trouble in passing his Ordinary Level examination subjects because his interest and aptitude were mainly the arts subjects. Also to the point, Morgan State University president's job offer to poet Amanda Gorman who gave the inauguration poem at the United States of America president-elect Joe Biden's January 2021 inauguration seemed quite imaginative, proactive and progressive. Both the momentous national presidential ceremonial event and the thoughtful job offer to the young poet by a university were engendered by a STEAM spirit in the world's most technologically advanced country. Specifically, the interest in public poetry performance by a scop or bard is a continuation of a centuries-old courtly tradition that is worthy of consistent support even in a digital age of bionic humans and machines.

An African university worth the name must play its part to research and preserve the languages that are indigenous to its geographical location and encourage their study and development. It must think out pragmatic strategies to arrest the slide of the languages into extinction. It must find ways to promote creativity and reading in them to stop their premature demise and make them grow and flourish once again for enhanced communicational and other purposes. However, this will depend on the kind of mentality running the university. A cynical mentality that is obsessed with STEM and money-making will prefer to gloat over the plight of culture to demonstrate its allegiance to the STEM stance. It will commit time, energy and resources to supervising an asphyxiation of the humanities disciplines and custodian of culture. Operating a tunnel vision, it will not see that the humanistic aspect of culture and experience is crucial to new age human survival. It will be blind and deaf to the point that the world's continuance cannot be entrusted to robots. The discussion moves now to a few details of administrative strategy.

Restructuring, Downsizing, and Downgrading

A university restructures its programmes for several reasons. It may restructure to update the content and delivery of academic programmes. A university does this on a periodic basis as a part of university tradition. It may restructure to optimise the use of available infrastructure. It may restructure to upgrade its carrying capacity. It may restructure in response to financial factors. Of the lot, the most painful to execute is the last. If the sole motivation for the restructuring process is pecuniary consideration, it can lead to unaccustomed outcomes in a university setting. University in this context is used to contrast with a business centre of learning that puts out as a private university and awards degrees that are of doubtful intellectual value.

A state-sponsored premier university is in certain respects a national monument. As the first major institution of higher learning in the country, the institution would have an admirable history of accomplishments in processes dealing with human capital development. It would have impacted society cumulatively right from its inception. This would be so because it is the oldest such institution in the country. For this reason, the extent of its accumulation of university tradition would surpass that of any university or comparable institution that sprang up after it. It would have produced a considerable amount of educated and skilled human resource for both the public and private sectors as

well as the education chain of teachers, trainers, lecturers, and research scholars. Its products would have been instrumental to local and cross border significance and value. As a national monument, its influence and impact would have been made sustainable by factors that are internal and external to the university. Owing to its national import, the university and all stakeholders would have begun to work together to ensure its maintenance and sustainability.

Under normal circumstances, newer institutions of higher learning in the country should look up to the premier university for influence and motivation. A premier university should serve as a citadel of learning, research and excellence, among other demonstrable outcomes. It would then be anomalous that the first university in the land be an imitator of the newer universities that are mostly private institutions whose main concern is to break even financially from the proceeds of tuition and other sources of internally generated revenue (IGR). The younger institutions are not normally expected to be comparable with the premier university in terms of quality and experience of staffing, soundness of curriculum, infrastructure, university culture, and graduate quality. Again, this is so because the premier university is the first and should be and remain the best. Hence, if the premier university is superior to the newer, younger, and mostly privately owned learning centres on those grounds, what can possibly be the reason for a strange inversion of the orientation of deference in an older university administered by a business mentality? Funding?

Funding has a place in university tradition, but money is not the lodestone of university relevance. A university is not the same as a business enterprise and so should not confuse its identity with that of a factory producing commodities for the wholesale and retail markets. A university is first and foremost a centre of learning whose main commodity is knowledge, and whose watchword is excellence. As such, its products are not always amenable to the same metrics that are used to quantify commercial products. Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, etc. will outlive many of the universities that tie their survival to the ability to produce IGR because these universities' fortunes are not dependent on IGR but on a time-tested university tradition of public and/or private patronage and support. This is so because these prestigious universities have demonstrated over the centuries that putting money in knowledge, which is power, without immediate or discernible pecuniary returns on the investment, is in the long-term never a wasted investment. This kind of visionary patronage comes from a society that university culture has taught, over the years, to value knowledge and reward excellence. It is the type of moral and material support that is set to outlive the current parochial hype over STEM that has distorted some universities' sense of identity and compromised the formulation and implementation of their vision, mission, objectives and strategies (Stover 2018; Berg and Seeber 2016; Faust 2010).

In a nation with a laudable vision for a knowledge-based economy, its premier university is on course when it foregrounds postgraduate programmes and research. But the university needs its older more experienced academic staff as much as it does its younger academics and aspiring scholars to obtain the required outcomes for a knowledge-based economy. But when it cavalierly does away with its senior professors, what can possibly be the rationale? Is it to save up a few millions in money for the university? Then the gain becomes a short-change of the durable for the ephemeral, owing to the huge opportunity cost involved in the process of obtaining this kind of pecuniary outcome. The staff load-shedding measure short-changes the university tradition of procurement of excellence, competitiveness, and cross-border marketability. A counter argument seems unreasonable that you can get the same results with only younger academic staff as you did when you had both categories of staff on board, apropos, the older, more experienced professors and the younger, less experienced academics. There is bound to be a qualitative difference if the said older staff were not deadwood.

As a condition the deadwood syndrome is not necessarily a correlate of age though. Millennial long university tradition does not give short shrift to its older, more experienced professors. Rather, it values their input and holds on to them and what they stand for in the university system for as long as is reasonably possible.

Furthermore, mass dispensing with functional experienced academic staff and professors is a recipe for academic insularity and intellectual mediocrity in some other ways. In a university system that has discarded the academic tradition of external moderation and examination of first-degree programmes, the more experienced staff becomes a necessity to provide the requisite input for standardisation. Disregard for international quota in academic staffing and the cancellation of sabbaticals will accelerate a slide into institutional decline. The standard of staffing relates in direct proportion to both the quality of the academic programmes on offer by the university and the infrastructure on ground. In other words, academic programmes and infrastructure will also only deliver in proportion to the quality of staffing. Put another way, it is academic staff that brings demonstrable worth to the academic programmes and the infrastructure available in an institution of higher learning.

As for the curriculum, it is all right to review academic programmes periodically as this is part of academic culture. But care must be taken so that the exercise is not driven exclusively by an obsession with making money for the university. A mere change in nomenclature of academic programmes, academic department and faculty designation or name may not yield lasting benefits. Tinkering with how programmes and departments or faculties are named, if ill-considered, may be tantamount to a cosmetic exercise. For example, why would a university with a mission to specialise in postgraduate studies and research seek to give up subject specific names like Department of English, of French, of African Languages and Literature, etc. etc. in favour of something vaguer, over general and unengaging like Department or School of Languages and Literatures into which all the related departments are collapsed? Usually, it is a fledgling university that starts this way. For convenience it lumps together the few start-up disciplines initially as a tentative measure, while gradually spreading out and consolidating with the passage of time, and academic growth and experience. Therefore, it might seem retrograde for an older university to rob its academic disciplines of the identity and reputation they have built up over the years by an antiquarian innovation that shrinks them into a huge undifferentiated basket packaging. Prospective students of the subjects with specific departmental names would gravitate to other universities which in their own preferred way of naming advertise those academic disciplines *ab initio*. A doctoral candidate seeking admission to do further studies in English or French or an African language will choose a university that advertises those subjects in the names by which the departments are better-known.

Equally cosmetic and potentially futile is an exercise of restructuring the faculties into schools in a process that simultaneously deletes an existing school of postgraduate studies. A centralized postgraduate school or school of graduate studies is needed to relieve the various faculties (or schools) of distractions from the administrative aspects of the research process so that the departments, faculties (or schools) can concentrate fully on the teaching and supervision of their postgraduate students who should swell in number with the passage of time. Disestablishing an extant school of graduate studies to decentralise research matters might turn out a retrogressive measure that is informed by cynical pessimism. The backward step will lead to a questioning of the university's seriousness about its mission to emphasize postgraduate studies and research? The setting up of a graduate school by the premier university at the time it did could only have qualified as far-sighted and apposite to its vision, mission, objective and strategy to foreground graduate studies

and research in line with the national vision to have a knowledge-based economy. A manifestation of teething problems by a school of graduate studies may not be a good enough reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Ill-considered business decisions must be jettisoned from a citadel of higher learning that doubles as a national monument.

Conclusion

As was the case with the fabled Ozymandias a monument's advance into total eclipse is presaged by a visceral loss of identity and a retreat into anonymity, an induced obscurity that is underlain by wilting personnel, declining patronage, incremental posturing, and infrastructural atrophy due to disuse. It seems imprudent on the part of a university to sacrifice excellence and competitiveness on the altar of pecuniary liquidity. It is anomalous when a premier university seeks institutional mentorship from newer universities which have lesser academic culture and whose non-negotiable mainstay is financial profitability. Downsizing becomes equal to downgrading in effect, if the cost-cutting process is motivated and driven solely and rigidly by a desire to keep funds in while discounting its asset of the repositories of intellectual experience. In some important respects, the measure stymies public ability to trust the premier university to live up to reasoned expectation.

Funding in university culture is important, but it is subsidiary to the pursuit of knowledge and excellence. Character and learning are what define the products of a university. Therefore, knowledge and excellence and their undisrupted sustenance should be the overriding concern of an institution of higher learning worth the accolade premier and the designation university. The world's premier university, the University of Bologna, is still doing well today after ten centuries of its existence. The secret of its longevity is the consistent support and patronage of a community that highly esteems all dimensions of knowledge and rewards excellence. The community that sprouted this university and global monument does everything possible to keep it afloat and preserve it: with minimal interference with its academic autonomy. It is the kind of model to emulate.

Notes

¹ The Special Collections Librarian disclosed this to visiting delegates of the African Literature Association (ALA) 43rd Annual International Conference hosted by Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA, 14-17 June 2017.

² Ozymandias names an objective correlative depicting an illusion of greatness, a delusion of grandeur in sculptured disintegration in a poem of this title written by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

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