

# **ADDRESSING THE STAFF AT UG**

**2012-01-27**

**Lawrence D. Carrington  
Outgoing Vice-Chancellor**

Thank you for coming to this gathering at such short notice. I would have preferred to have done this with more notice and at a more leisurely pace but recent events have eroded our time and we will soon have to surrender this space, our only large meeting space, to the many classes that fill it on a regular basis during the semester.

As many of you already know, my contract with the UG ends at March 31st and I am proceeding on leave as is usual with effect from February 6th. I want to take this opportunity to update you on where we are in the progress of the University and to ensure that you are conscious of the direction in which we are headed. The occasion also allows me to express my gratitude to those of you who worked selflessly to support the initiatives of the last triennium.

My plan is to report on initiatives that have been completed, inform you on those that are incomplete and in train and comment on the factors that have affected our success as well as on those that could induce failure if we are not vigilant. I feel it is important to include reference to some other matters, not directly part of my own stewardship, but which are parallel developments of a progressive nature contributing to our institutional well being.

## **Physical plant and environment**

In my address to you on June 4th 2009 shortly after I came here as Vice-Chancellor, I mentioned that I had spent time walking around this campus with Mrs. Browman who was at the time my administrative secretary. I was very concerned at the physical state of Turkeyen and sought to address that as soon as possible. When I visited Berbice, the situation was different. The campus was newer and has so far been maintained at a satisfactory level. With the assistance of the Public Relations Officer, we created a photographic album of the conditions of the campus focusing particularly on dangers to health, life and limb, sources of public nuisance and conditions that ill-befit an institution of higher education that is designated a national university.

We have had some success in dealing with our physical plant. I need not detail these improvements as they are visible but I will mention a few. We have removed the unsightly dilapidated storage shed that stood between the Library and the Learning Resource Centre. We managed to install proper water pumps and storage tanks in most of the buildings that had limited water supply. Fire escapes and fire protection equipment have also been installed. The pathway leading to the Sophia gate was widened albeit with inferior concrete to what was laid before and we repaired the approach to the front gate that had been a nuisance before. The floor of the CBJ, which was a haven for vermin, has been re-laid. Some of our buildings have been repainted externally and some of the electrical hazards have been repaired. Our telephone wires remain exposed in uncovered boxes however, and we must not stop

seeing them or we will forget to repair them. A new generator complements the old work-horse south of natural sciences but the cables leading into Natural Sciences building still violate contemporary standards for electrical service. We have seen our flat concrete roofs topped by A-frame metal sheeting with a reduction in leaking when it rains. On the other hand, the so-called new wing of the Library remains a cause for concern since its subsidence into the soil has been uneven. I reassure all of you that we are taking the necessary technical steps to appraise the integrity of the structure and to ensure that it remains safe for use. We still have the Stables operational; Communication Studies is suffering and SEES still has no home.

I recall too that when I came here in 2009, there was no director of estate management. We managed to fill that position and I recognize here the work done by Mr. Ronald Rajnarine during his tenure. I take the opportunity to publicly welcome Mr. Majeed and to express the hope that his tenure will be transformative for our estate. At this juncture, I wish to urge that the University should never allow the position of Director of Estate Management to be unfilled or to fall into abeyance. The maintenance of an estate of this size requires a very highly trained professional who must be given the support of appropriate financial provisions to stay ahead of the decay that besets every structure that is left unattended in a country with the topographical characteristics and climate peculiar to Guyana.

Within the same area of concern (i.e. our physical plant), I wish to compliment Mr. Harris and his colleagues in the Faculty of Technology and the students of the architecture programme for the work they have been doing in creating a master plan for the Turkeyen Campus. We must not drop that ball. The work on the master plan for the campus is sufficiently advanced that we can begin to use it as a reference for decisions on building provisions that will be coming to us. We must associate the master plan initiative with the work that was done by our ten working groups on the infrastructure of the University. Together, they provide a proper record of the state of the Turkeyen campus, a rational projection for its future physical development and an index of the priorities that we would want to attach to the long list of desirable additions to the campus if the University of Guyana is to adequately serve this nation.

Within the last two months, we have seen an opening for a structure that can help change our unsatisfactory lecture room conditions in Education and Humanities in particular. I took care to consult the gods and ask that my disclosure will not result in any goat-mouth. We are working towards the establishment of relationships with the Beijing Technological and Business University in connection with the establishment of a Confucius institute for teaching Chinese language and culture. If all goes well, the goodwill of the Government of China would produce a structure, which would enable the School of Education and Humanities to guarantee the place of Chinese in the curriculum of the University and deliver its programmes more effectively. We acknowledge in this regard the sterling perseverance of Guyana's ambassador to China and my colleague, Prof. David Dabydeen.

The campus master plan will also allow us to correctly accommodate a new health facility on the campus for which preliminary drawings have already been prepared. We need here to pursue aborted interaction with the Ministry of Health of the Government of Guyana to advance that development.

Perhaps, the single most important success that we can report is the negotiation of the World Bank Science and Technology Support Project. The project

should see an input to the University of Guyana of about US\$10 million over a five year period aimed at three broad areas – the rehabilitation and refurbishing of our science and technology laboratory facilities in four of our faculties at Turkeyen; the review and reform of our science curriculum and some support for research towards low carbon themes. The proposal includes the creation of a fibre-optic ring and networking for IT capacity in the Turkeyen Campus and appropriate complementary capacity and linkage at the Berbice Campus. The loan to the Government of Guyana is not yet activated because the Minister of Finance is still to sign a crucial financial loan document. We have written to the new Minister of Education (and to the old Minister for that matter) requesting audience to discuss the matter and our Chancellor has been speaking to the Minister of Finance, but the matter is still incomplete. Work on the World Bank loan involved scores of you in repeated data-gathering exercises and many internal meetings as well as meetings with visiting World Bank teams. My hope is that the university will continue to press for this loan to be activated and to cooperate with the processes that it will entail.

In closing this part of my address, I acknowledge the work of the committee chaired by Dr. Marlene Cox working under the patronage of Mrs. Pamela Bourne, wife of our Chancellor, to beautify the Turkeyen Campus. The effect will not show immediately but over 200 trees and shrubs have been planted on this campus. They will become more obvious as they grow and we will be able to enjoy them within the coming years.

### **Operational environment**

I want to move now from the physical to the operational environment of the University. When I came to UG, there was no Chancellor. We were fortunate to have been able to identify Professor Compton Bourne, a Guyanese of significant international repute, scholarly prowess and substance to be our Chancellor. Contrary to popular belief, the position of Chancellor, while not a paid position, is neither a sinecure nor a mere ceremonial gift. A Chancellor is an important referential influence on the manner in which the executive of the university conducts its business. Sir Shridath Ramphal, one of the most internationally famous Guyanese, guided the UWI executive for more than a decade of my employment there. The role of chancellor is very important, especially when matters are of such gravity that a fresh but experienced mind and trained eyes represent the only pathway to correct decision-making.

I trust this university will always have a Chancellor in position for as long as its statutory structure provides for one. A person of urbane manner with diplomatic finesse founded on a background of respectable scholarship and administrative success can bring great value to the institution. A stance that rises about the common political fray of the environment should grace that person so that the university can draw a part of its prestige from the individual rather than vice-versa.

The governance structure of the university is archaic. I made the observation in 2009. Our statutes, rules, regulations, procedures and policies belong to an era long past and cannot be left to clutter the 21st century. We need to bring UG in line with what obtains at other universities around the world. To this end, we have succeeded in obtaining from the Caribbean Development Bank a substantial grant to allow us to engage a consulting firm to review our regulatory framework to improve our operations. We have gone through the rigorous procedures required by the Bank

for managing the bidding process and in a matter of days we are scheduled to engage in negotiations with the successful bidder. Here, I compliment Ms. Andrea Heath-London for her scrupulous management of the procedures and for her guidance of the evaluation team in the conduct of all steps of the process required to obtain the clearances from CDB.

What do you have to do with this, you might ask. The review of the regulatory framework of the university is not a matter exclusively for the administration of the university. It concerns all of us in a very intimate way. All of the grouses and mutterings about "the system", all of the experiences that have led you to perceive some of your colleagues as "ogres" or even more uncomplimentary labels, all of the practices that wear down your morale can be exposed in the review process. In that exposure, we will find the arrows that point to our shortcomings, our anomalies and the structural inadequacies in our human resource procedures, in financial regulations, in inter-campus relations, in faculty structure. It is an opportunity to debate and propose the solutions at a structural level that would lead us into genuinely contemporary operational styles. In short, this project is our opportunity to change significant aspects of UG. It will happen only if you all make a concerted effort, not merely to collaborate with the investigative processes but even more importantly, to press our higher committees to make the changes that come from the recommendations of the review. The outcome of the project must not be another shelf report. It has to be an active engagement in change of the many oppressive and inhibiting features of the UG that have prevented it for many decades from fulfilling the potential it was expected to mobilise. The archaic governance and management and administrative structures of the university must no longer be allowed to provide an excuse or a shelter for inefficiency and incompetence.

### **Staffing, staffing policy and the competitiveness of the UG as an employer**

There is a significant amount of unfinished business in the area of conditions of service and staffing policy. The elephant in the room is the matter of staff salaries. At the last annual business meeting of the University Council held on November 11th, I made the following points.

Beyond dealing with the physical environment and the overall governance provisions, we must also address the quality of our staff and how we provide for them to be effective and efficient. That involves interlocking factors such as the competitiveness of the university's **salaries and benefits**, the **terms and conditions** of service, the **confidence** that staff can have in the **fairness of appraisal**, the systems of **incentives, rewards and recognition**. We will not justify the label of university if all we can show in a teaching and research staff of three hundred and fifty-nine (359) academics are nine (9) professors and seventeen (17) senior lecturers. Only two departments are headed by professors, both temporary and only four by senior lecturers, one temporary. If all we can offer a professor at the top of our scales is the equivalent of US\$1,725, we will not be able to compete with a Caribbean competitor offering the equivalent of US\$8,429 at a comparable level. **So our planning has to shift the matter of emoluments to the top of the agenda.**

What have we done in this area? We have more proposals than concrete achievements. However, I do wish to have you know of a few baby steps that relate to the matter of terms and conditions of service.

We shaped an initial proposal for the improvement of salaries which involved a simple knock out of the bottom tier of the scales and the addition of another tier at the top – sort of global shift of everyone up one step on the scale ladder. It has stalled though in the face of severe budgetary handicaps but it can be revived as part of a more widely conceived review of the salary issues.

We have comparative data from all the campuses of the UWI to give us some reference points for our own adjustments and this can be made available to those of you who will be working on new proposals for salaries. Salaries are not the only issue in staff satisfaction and I must make mention of a few other pieces that are pertinent.

We have a design for a system of Awards for Excellence but we have not been able to mobilise it yet. We succeeded in broadening one small benefit so that what used to be the book allowance is now an academic materials allowance. [Baby step again.] We established a credit line to Dell computers that allows the university, its staff and other members of the university community to purchase those computers at significantly reduced prices through our Bursary. [I have not checked recently to find out how much it is being used but it is still available and perhaps has suffered from a lack of publicity.] We have done significant work on reviewing the University's policy on attendance and punctuality in relation to promotion. We have also delved into changing the policy on the participation of members of the UB and UA non-academic staff in study programmes that require attendance during standard working hours. I think we have one guinea pig in the Faculty of Technology. The last of these baby steps is that the road is open for us to formulate proposals for duty free concessions on the purchase of vehicles on a wider scale than is now the case. Mr. Hicks will be leading that work group and they will be reporting to the F&GPC.

Most recently, we have drafted proposals for improving our policy on staffing and staff recruitment and it has already been discussed at the level of the University Council. For several years, we have functioned with an academic staffing policy that is based on the calculation of full-time equivalent staffing. The policy is accompanied by a recruitment practice in which we advertise for recruits in the subject areas in which we anticipate need for teachers but we do not specify the level of appointment. Whether the persons employed are offered full-time, temporary or part-time contracts depends on their age, whether the person already works somewhere else, what they appear to be able to offer in teaching, and the number of FTE to be filled in the department. The level of appointment we offer is determined by appraisal of the individual qualifications of the appointee.

An unintended consequence of our recruitment policy and practice has been that our recruitment is biased towards lower level appointments in the academic hierarchy. That bias reduces the mentoring capacity of the faculty and mentoring opportunities for faculty members. That in turn compromises the development of excellence and special competences because it tends to favour general proficiency at the expense of specialisation. Furthermore, the reliance on FTE reference points for composite staffing by areas necessary for programme delivery invites abuse by fragmentation of teaching loads across part-time staff with small allocations.

I have recommended instead that the University should determine an establishment of full-time core staff for each of its units, departments, faculties and schools. The University would then advertise vacancies against that establishment and seek to fill them at the level advertised. The approach should have the effect of

- increasing our capacity for postgraduate offerings,
- increasing the capability for faculty to develop specialisations that are pertinent to the national agenda,
- enhancing the probability of experienced senior leadership within departments, and
- avoiding the negative aspects of recruitment based on the existing policy.

The University's Council is very well disposed towards the idea and wants to have fuller propositions including details on the structure of the core staffing for our departments. The onus is now on the staff to follow up this initiative. We must be aware though that a policy of that nature cannot work in isolation from more attractive terms and conditions of work and sensibly competitive emoluments and rewards.

### **Financing the University**

So money is a problem. One of the activities that I regret not having been able to advance is a consultation on the financing of tertiary education for Guyana. We need to bring together a select group of the many internationally recognized persons who have dealt with the issue of financing tertiary education in other countries. We need persons from countries with a variety of developmental profiles so that we here at UG and in Guyana can apply ourselves to crafting sensible national and institutional policies and practices on financing tertiary education.

This University has been skillful in doing more with less. I admire what our colleagues have been able to accomplish with the pittance that represent their annual budgets at the departmental and faculty levels. The cry from outside has been that we should increase our efficiency in the use of funds. Heaven knows we try. Others say we must run the University like a business enterprise. But they do not talk of the capital investment that businesses start with in order to earn their profits. These are not excuses. They are realities. In order to earn one *has* to invest.

One a lighter note, if I were an artist doing a caricature of a bursar, I would draw a figure with a very tight belt, a pencil behind the ear with an eraser on the top (Bursars like pencils with erasers); in one hand, a programmable calculator with pre-entered memory constants and in the other hand, a chisel! So like all the other institutions with which I have been associated, we have our fair share of chiseling of our expenditure. So Mr. Seeram, no hard feelings, we know how difficult it must be to share what we get between competing demands and emergencies, but you have to take your place in the list of Carrington's bursars from 1965 to 2012. If I have time, I will tell you my caricature of librarians.

Seriously though, we have been trying. We have exposed our need very clearly by submitting deficit budgets to the government. We have sought to have adjustments in fees when we offer new programmes in an attempt to recover the costs of the specific programmes. We also tried to get ourselves listed for tax relief allowances on donations to the university. In respect of active expenditure, we have worked towards adjustment of the fees that we pay to the UWI for their oversight of

our law programme. So little by little (or *chirrip-chirrip* as we say in Trinidad), we have been chiseling away at our financial embarrassment. However, the financing of the University has to be addressed with much wider reference points than those we have been using. Part of the input has to be a clear state policy on the place of tertiary education and research in national development. My hope is that the University will be able to use the beginnings that the administration has sketched in this regard and advance towards a consultative dialogue that will produce a significantly more tenable financial position for the UG and the genuine development within it of a capacity to sustain itself.

Before I lose your attention, let me turn to the initiatives in quality assurance. As far back as January 2010, we enjoyed a marvelous consulting intervention from a team of UWI colleagues who offered a workshop on quality assurance. Quite apart from the instructional aspects of their work with us, their report was comprehensive in its recommendations on how we might proceed in establishing our quality assurance systems. Regrettably, we have not been able to finance the project. We appointed a QA coordinator, Mr. Mendonca, but his hands have been tied by the lack of dedicated financial support for the initiative. This is an area that we should give absolute priority in shaping the new strategic plan for the University.

### **Planning matters**

In April 2009, we had a stalled strategic plan. It was supposed to cover 2006 to 2011 but there we were in 2009 with a stalled plan. Dr. Marlene Cox is a Trojan. She worked with me to help me understand the background to the plan and explained very carefully what had contributed to the stall. It was vital knowledge for me in leading us to a new plan. I want to pay tribute here to the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Mangar, and to the members of the then senior administrative group including Dr. Cox and Mr. Alexander for their unstinting support through the many hours of interaction that allowed us to create a new plan and to have it approved by the University's Council. Sometimes, we have to be careful how we use the term "approved" because every now and then we find that things that we thought were approved, weren't! But take my word for it, it was approved. The plan has been useful to us in stabilizing our direction in the face of constant distractions from within and without. It helped us to maintain focus on our real goals and suppress the temptation to be distracted by the flare ups of fires (literal, like the one we had in the Library some time ago and the one in Technology one night) and figurative (too numerous to mention) that have been strewn along the three years.

We are at the point where we need a new plan. I record here my appreciation and admiration for the team led by Mr. Da Silva, Assistant Director of the Berbice Campus, which undertook the mid-term review of the strategic plan. The review has been widely circulated to all members of the Academic Board, the Committee of Deans, the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the University Council. It is not a privileged document and Deans can share it freely with staff.

The review of the 2009-2012 strategic plan and in particular the section entitled "Where do we go from here" at pages 24 to 26 is an important plank for the University to build its new plan to take it into its second half century. Our fiftieth year of existence will be 2013 and you will have to build the next half-century by making wise and bold decisions in shaping our new plan.

We spent a great deal of time over the last three years planning in a number of areas that we have seen as critical for the University and for Guyana. When the Government of Guyana proposed its Low Carbon Development Strategy, this University responded by appointing a multi-disciplinary working group to provide scholarly commentary of the proposed strategy. We submitted a substantial appraisal in the form of a report to the then President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. We submitted it under confidential cover because we did not wish to become embroiled in the partisan exchanges that characterized that period of public discourse. Our submission was a privileged communication to the Executive of the Government and it remains privileged.

We continued to address the national needs in respect of the low carbon development strategy. During 2010, we held a string of workshops to identify research projects that this University could undertake with appropriate financing to support that policy. We came up with seventy (70) different project sketches in support of the strategy. More recently in 2011, we conducted a groundbreaking public consultation on the development of an International Centre for Biodiversity Research and Low Carbon Development (ICBR). The initiative was interrupted by the shift of national attention to the recently concluded elections but all the work is fully documented and is ready for resumption of the thrust to take advantage of the Guyana-Norway agreements that are to support the LCDS. I might mention that the World Bank Science and Technology Support Project to which I made reference, includes funding for feasibility studies for the ICBR.

## **Curriculum**

Related to this attempt to serve the nation are our initiatives to engage in serious curriculum review. The Faculty of Social Sciences was the first off in starting to look at itself in relation to contemporary social science knowledge and the needs of Guyana in their fields of work. The Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry has advanced further because they have received support from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) to overhaul their curriculum and they have wisely associated the Guyana School of Agriculture with that initiative. The World Bank loan has funding earmarked for curriculum reform in science and technology.

Most recently, I have made proposals to the Committee of Deans and to the Academic Board on initiating programme renewal. (That was in fact the title of the document.) I would urge the Academic Board to consider the pathway towards change that I articulated in that document and to adopt some version of it as a coherent work plan to propel the University forward. In the absence of this or some other plan, UG will continue to drift or stagnate. Piecemeal efforts, no matter how attractive each piece, cannot provide the forward momentum required if the University is to support the developmental aspirations of Guyana.

I associate with this curriculum initiative the brief report done for me by Dr. Judith Soares of WAND, the Women and Development Unit of the UWI Open Campus. Dr. Soares visited us about a year ago and offered public lectures that were very well attended and received. Beyond that public engagement, she provided me with a report on her observations on women's studies here in Guyana and recommendations on how we might advance from the very limited capacity now we have. The status and plight of women in Guyana is an area of grave concern to many

activists and academic engagement with women's issues is important to addressing the concerns.

## **Collaborators**

As I near the end of this address, I need to make special reference to the collaborators who have become extremely important to the progress that we have made in some areas. I make specific mention of the Iwokrama International Centre and Conservation International (Guyana). Dane Gobin and his staff, David Singh and his staff have been giant supporters of our work to push forward the agenda of the biodiversity initiative and of integrated natural resource management in the interest of Guyana. Both agencies have provided us with financial support for which we thank them. But to me they have offered us significantly more by participating in our brainstorming, by thinking through with us the concepts that we have worked with and by providing an independent view of some issues that fall prey to inter-departmental competition and other conflict blockages through which I have had to find pathways.

I also single out for mention Rory Fraser of the Alabama A&M University who was our visitor during most of last year. It was Professor Fraser who set us on track to shape the concepts that led us to the World Bank Loan. It was a gargantuan labour and without his easy comfortable manner, his wealth of experience and his commitment to our success, we would have foundered in the sea of data that we had to generate and control in order to land that loan. I need to say thanks as well to Prof. Lloyd Kunar, a former campus mate of mine, who came here to help us in a field where our resources are totally depleted, namely physics. His input on matters related to our advance in science has been invaluable.

## **Area of sadness**

I would be failing in my duty to you if I did not mention a specific area of deep sadness that I have experienced here at UG. Earlier in my address, I made reference to one document as a privileged document and to another as not a privileged document. My concern here has been the failure of confidentiality at all levels of our operation. Breaches of confidentiality result in outflows of privileged information not like drips from a faulty tap but like the effluent of the mighty Essequibo itself, complete with silt. It has been one of the more revolting and distressing features of life in our community that there has been no respect for the privacy of University affairs and no respect for confidentiality in the management of our colleagues' affairs.

We have suffered dreadfully from public disclosure of discussions at the Academic Board, the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the University Council and the Senior Administrative Group. Some of the members of our senior administrative group might have been wondering why I have not convened meetings for quite a long time. Why should I, if our discussions find place in newspapers, blogs and other public repositories? So, I have contented myself with one on one consultation, small group convocation and other devices that improve the security of discussions. This has to be corrected. We can't develop CIA, KGB or Mossad tactics to track down the guilty in some kind of search and destroy mission. Instead, we

have to try and cultivate the ethic of privacy, the characteristics of self-restraint and the habit of respect for the boundaries between private and public affairs.

### **Brighter side**

On the brighter side, I will miss our end of year party. The sights of Mr. Hicks dancing chutney, of Mr. Alexander boogying down, or of Mrs. Harnanan doing a quiet dignified trip are priceless memories. The earthy frankness of some of the dancehall displays by our colleagues from Maintenance and the Library will take their place in the annals of dancedom! Great fun.

There are hosts of you to whom I carry debts of gratitude. I have been made very welcome in the society of Guyana and in the university community. My wife has felt similarly welcome when she has visited and we have shared time with supportive friends. At work, I have been similarly made comfortable by the courtesies and concern of all levels of staff, including the men who rotate the plants in my office, the cleaners and tractor drivers, the security guards and clerical officers in the many departments that I have physically visited. The administrative personnel of the Bursary, Personnel Division and the Registry have been marvelous in ensuring that the VC was comfortable.

Let me close by expressing special thanks to Ms. Hemwattie Singh who kept my office clean. Ms. Singh would flick her pointer broom artistically around me as I sat in my chair; no disturbance and the floor would be clean. The papers on my desk remained the way I left them and I could resume working at the desk without having to reshuffle things to refocus my mind. I record my gratitude to Mrs. Joan Browman, who kept our records straight; Ms. Karen Wishart, who keeps my brain straight; and Ms. Jacqueline Morris, who keeps our office straight. I express my thanks too to my driver, Mr. Derrick Harper - always punctual, regardless of the hour of day or night, keeping a clean vehicle and ensuring that I don't get murdered by one of the crazy mini-buses in town. My housekeeper, Mrs. Zandra Watson, has been a great boon to my comfort here - keeping my house spotlessly clean, turning me out in proper clothing (sometimes stopping me at the door with "Aw! Sir! That don't look right") and feeding me good Guyanese food, including obstacles now and then.

Finally, let me restate my purpose in making this presentation. I am offering you an agenda for action after my departure. I am also seeking to embolden you to insist to my successor that certain of the initiatives that are now embryonic should be given a fair chance of development. I would hope that you would also be persuaded to persevere with initiatives that you have already begun at individual and unit levels for the development of the University. There is hope for a better UG and you must keep the faith for change.

So! Thank you and no regrets! Enjoy life!