



A Report from the University of Ghana

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The Registry's decision to place someone at the University of Ghana provided a unique opportunity to assist a place firmly committed to improving the conditions in which learning occurs. The more than quadrupling of enrollments from 6,000 to more than 28,000 over the past sixteen years while only doubling the numbers of faculty created exceptional stress most recognizable in extraordinarily large classes that can have more than a thousand students, one lecturer and possibly one or two graduate students. A voluntary external review commissioned by the University in 2007 recommended extensive changes in governance, fiscal management and academic operations. Now, in 2009, governance change is awaiting action by Ghana's parliament. A new Director of Finance is moving to create greater order and procedural consistency in financial operations. And initiatives in managing academic programming are advancing with the intent that a new degree structure be inaugurated with the entering class that arrives in August of 2010.

The academic part of institutional reform was funded by the Carnegie Corporation and focused on review of the course-credit/semester system that was introduced in 1992 on a presumption it would permit expanded enrollments at very limited additional cost. The subsequent explosion of enrollments had overwhelmed the system and all but eliminated "continuous assessment" of student work during the semester in many of the arts and social science courses at the freshman and sophomore levels. The University wants a system in place that permits campus wide "continuous assessment" and a systematic process of "quality assurance" in academic programming. Further, there is a commitment to have a more flexible degree program that will permit students to explore more course options. The challenge is that all this needs to occur in a setting where there is limited growth in funding, faculty growth of less than 3% per year and instructional space routinely 90% occupied in an academic day that starts at 7:30AM.

Four phases of the project are now complete. Phase I was devoted to a diagnostic review that produced a preliminary assessment of "leading ideas" for change. That preliminary report was widely circulated and positively received. Phase II was characterized by "drilling down" to more fundamental levels via extended consultations with deans, department heads, faculty groups and students to define a system for reducing class size through offering multiple sections and introducing the one-time per week 150 minute class to offset the loss of tutorial sessions. Phase III followed submission of a report with eighty-one recommendations covering all dimensions of how the course credit system is a versatile tool for university administration. It dealt with scheduling, facilities use, daily academic calendar, faculty contracts, faculty development, academic budgeting and techniques of instruction. The most significant recommendation proposed a shift from a three-year British style degree program after an entering "prep" year that did not

count as part of the degree program to a four-year 120 credit, American style degree. At the Executive Council meeting in late May, the four-year degree proposal was accepted, committees formed in each college or school to design new four-year degree programs and a general education committee energized to complete its review. A report deadline of three months was requested.

Phase IV involved a series of workshops for faculty who would participate in a Pilot Program for reducing the size of large classes to be inaugurated in August. Some administrative glitches impacted this plan and its size was curtailed to classes in science, agriculture and business. The reduction in the scope of the Pilot Project was a “canary in the coal mine” revealing how small incremental programs would not work and there must be a plan that would solve for the whole including the Accra City Campus which enrolls 4,000 students. After careful consideration of the complex system of course scheduling, a solution was designed that would limit the largest classes to 300, make better use of space and permit “continuous assessment” campus wide. Now Phase V involving arriving at agreement on a new University-wide degree program for undergraduate learning is in full swing. The five committee reports from agriculture, arts, business science and social science are being merged with the report of the committee on general education, and it is intended that a comprehensive proposal will be advanced to the Academic Board in November. The proposals from the Schools of Law and Nursing will also be part of a final document.

All of this productive effort has occurred because the administration and faculty are committed to change. Ghanaians are unfailingly gracious on a campus which has no drug problem and cigarette smokers are ostracized. Students speak straight declarative sentences that do not include “you know” at each pause and we awake to choral chapel singing from Commonwealth Hall, the largest men’s residence, which is a hundred yards from the house. Settling in took some time with power interruptions and some plumbing issues, but now satellite TV has provided golf’s majors in real time and life is comfortable. A gecko is living in my printer – escaping at high speed when the paper starts to roll. At the Achimota Golf Course near campus if you slice into one of the huge termite mounds you get no relief and no free drop. Travel along the coast has taken us from the old slave castles at Elmina and Cape Coast to Ada Foah where the Volta River meets the sea. In Accra, favorite places the Artists Allianz galleries, the Wild Gecko arts and crafts and the national museum. For cooler air, Aburi, built as a sanatorium for colonial civil servants up in the hills, has extensive botanical gardens.

A REPEAT REQUEST: HOSTING A GHANAIAN SCHOLAR: In closing, it cannot be overemphasized how great is the need to help some 275 faculty complete their doctoral study. The course work is done here. What these scholars need is a quiet place for five to nine months to write up their thesis. Hosting a Ghanaian scholar by providing room, board and a library carrel would be a modest investment that will realize huge future dividends. Please take this seriously! There are too many older faculty members on post-retirement contract who are carrying the load but will soon wear out. Please reread the proposal sent to you earlier by the Registry! Please consider volunteering your institution or an institution with which you have had an affiliation. Thanks to those who have written and let me hear from others in the near future. Email address: DrPLFrench@aol.com

Now, from Ghana where democratic elections are peaceful, Obama has come to visit and the Under-20 Soccer Team won the FIFA World Cup last night, all good wishes!

Peter