

Guided by Principles, Driven by Change:

*Insights on Leadership from
Global University Presidents*



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International Association of University Presidents

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THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS (IAUP) is an association of university chief executives from higher education institutions around the world. Membership is limited to those individuals who serve as presidents, rectors or vice-chancellors at regionally accredited colleges or universities. Its primary purpose is to strengthen the international mission and quality of education of institutions in an increasingly interdependent world, and to promote global awareness and competence as well as peace and international understanding through education.

For more information visit www.iaup.org.





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SHAWN CHEN



Founder & Chairman, Sias University;
President, IAUP
China

INTRODUCTION

As President and on behalf of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), I am pleased to share with you this publication that extends the work begun in 2023 through the IAUP Women's Leadership Initiative, produced an IAUP book last year spotlighting global female leadership, and extends to this new publication that features transformative presidential leaders globally.

Under the leadership of President Emerita of the University of La Verne, Dr. Devorah Lieberman, this year's publication focuses on a select group of Presidents/Rectors/Chancellors, their leadership strategies, their professional trajectories, and advice for other higher education leaders and aspiring leaders. All 10 authors from last year and 13 additional authors for this volume are members of the International Association of University Presidents and have transformed their own campuses and higher education globally.

We are most thankful for the work led by Dr. Lieberman and extend our appreciation to each of the authors, last year (2024) as well this year (2025) who contributed inspirational and visionary thoughts and wisdom.

This volume will be available on our IAUP website, along with the 2024 volume, and portions will be available in paper format.

On behalf of IAUP, I offer our deep admiration and sincere appreciation to Santander Universidades and Arturo Cherbowski, Executive Director of Santander Universidades, Mexico, and Director General, Universia-Mexico, for their generous support of our organization and this publication.

Our intention is that these 2024 and 2025 companion publications will raise awareness, identify best practices, and share important lessons that will assist others who are already in leadership positions, as well as those who are embarking on senior leadership positions.

IAUP continues to support initiatives and global meetings that further the mission and vision of the organization while adding to the success of each member, president and institution.

With profound appreciation,

Dr. Shawn Chen

President, IAUP 2024-2027

President, SIAS University, China

“Our intention is that these 2024 and 2025 companion publications will raise awareness, identify best practices, and share important lessons that will assist others who are already in leadership positions, as well as those who are embarking on senior leadership positions.”

DEVORAH LIEBERMAN



President Emerita, University of La Verne;
Senior Consultant, IAUP
United States

01

THE HISTORY, ORIGIN, AND MOTIVATION FOR THIS BOOK

The International Association of University Presidents: History, Mission, and Purpose

The International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) has a rich history and a significant global mission. This chapter provides an overview of IAUP's distinctive origins, core objectives, and enduring relevance to higher education leadership across the world as well as the introduction to the 2025 IAUP Publication.

History

Founded in 1964 by university leaders from the United States, South Korea, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Liberia, IAUP was created to facilitate international dialogue among university presidents, fostering personal connections and professional collaboration. To this day, IAUP remains a unique organization—likely the only global higher education association devoted exclusively to supporting collaboration and interaction among university presidents, rectors, and chancellors.

The inaugural IAUP conference took place in Oxford, England, in June 1965, drawing approximately 120 representatives

from 21 countries. Since then, IAUP has grown to encompass hundreds of members across nearly 100 nations. Its academic events, global partnerships, and initiatives have earned the attention and respect of world leaders, scholars, and media alike.

Mission

IAUP's core mission is to strengthen the international dimension and overall quality of education at its member institutions. This is accomplished by fostering global awareness, cross-cultural competence, peace, and mutual understanding through education.

To achieve this, IAUP:

1. Maintains independence from ideological and political interests.
2. Promotes dialogue, tolerance, justice, and peace on a global scale.
3. Provides an active global network and forum for university presidents to:
 - Share their experiences and insights.
 - Support universities in economically underserved regions.
 - Broaden access for students from marginalized backgrounds.
 - Advance qualitative development across higher education.
 - Reinforce cultural diversity essential to personal identity, social cohesion, and creativity.¹

The Origin of This Initiative and Two Companion Publications (2024 and 2025)

In line with IAUP's mission, in the summer of 2023, Dr.

¹ More on IAUP: <http://iaup.org>.

Fernando León García—President of IAUP and President of CETYS University (Mexico)—initiated a new project to support and highlight the leadership of international female university presidents, rectors and chancellors. The goal was twofold: to identify the transformative leadership attributes of female institutional leaders and to provide inspiration and guidance to mid-level administrators aspiring to these roles.

This led to the 2024 publication, [“Spotlighting Female Leadership: Strategies, Stories, Perspectives”](#). The initiative had long been encouraged by IAUP members including Dr. Gülsün Sağlamer, Former President of Istanbul Technical University; Dr. Elizabeth Stroble, Chancellor of Webster University; and several other committed leaders.

As a longtime IAUP member and former president of the University of La Verne (2011–2023), I was honored to assume a coordinating role in this effort after my retirement in August 2023. The initial initiative which resulted in the 2024 publication now includes a companion volume for 2025, broadening the conversation by engaging male presidents and chancellors as contributors. Both volumes seek to document and share effective leadership strategies for transformative outcomes and to suggest how both male and female leaders can advance professional pathways for others in higher education.

Goals of the 2024 Initiative

This initiative was designed to:

1. Identify strategic leadership skills demonstrated by female presidents worldwide.
2. Examine how these female presidents globally can foster professional opportunities for women aspiring to top leadership roles.
3. Result in a publication that focuses both #1 and #2.

Goals of the 2025 Initiative

1. Identify strategic leadership skills demonstrated by male presidents globally.
2. Identify the themes that emerged from the 2024 female presidents compared to the 2025 male presidents
3. Examine how both male and female presidents foster professional opportunities for male and female to ascend to the presidency.
4. Result in a publication that focuses on #1, #2, and #3.

Overview of the 2024 Publication - ["Spotlighting Female Leadership: Strategies, Stories, Perspectives"](#)

The 2024 volume features 10 female university presidents, each from an IAUP member institution. The authors represent diverse countries, including Spain, Lithuania, Turkey, Mexico, South Korea, Bangladesh, and the United States.

Despite significant differences in geography, institution type, and culture, striking commonalities emerged among these leaders. Each contributed a chapter structured around the following prompts:

- Institutional Overview
- Years of Tenure
- Professional Trajectory
- Gender and Leadership
- Leadership Strategies
- Advice to Current Female Leaders
- Advice to Aspiring Female Leaders

Emergent Themes from the 2024 Volume

- **Theme One: First Female Leader** - Reflections on being the first woman to lead their institutions.

- **Theme Two: Higher Purpose** - A sense of mission beyond self, serving students, institutions, and society.
- **Theme Three: Mentorship** - The importance of mentors and coaches for support and growth.
- **Theme Four: Listening** - Emphasis on humility, listening to others, and learning continually.
- **Theme Five: Proving Oneself** - The need to overcome skepticism and gender bias.
- **Theme Six: External Perceptions** - The impact of gender, age, nationality, and religion on how leaders are perceived.
- **Theme Seven: Key Leadership Attributes** - Including authenticity, empathy, resilience, focus, and humility.
- **Theme Eight: Imposter Syndrome** - Many shared their struggles with self-doubt and how they overcame it.

Overview of the 2025 Publication- “Guided by Principle, Driven by Change: Insights on Leadership from Global University Presidents”.

The 2025 volume expands the lens from the prior book by spotlighting 13 transformative male presidents/rectors/chancellors, all IAUP members, from institutions across Australia, Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Georgia, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These institutions range from small to large, public to private, and nonprofit to for-profit.

Each chapter addresses these topics:

- Institutional Introduction
- Leadership Tenure
- Professional Journey
- Leadership Contributions
- Personal Identity and Perception
- Advice to Fellow Leaders

- Guidance for Aspiring Leaders
- Strategies for Professional Ascendancy

Emergent and Comparative Themes Across the 2024 and 2025 Publications

- **Theme One: Mentorship and Opportunity Creation** - Authors from both publications emphasized the value of mentorship and coaching. Women were more explicit in discussing their mentors, while men described how they were supported and, in turn, how they actively created opportunities for others, especially women and underrepresented groups.
- **Theme Two: Greater Purpose** - Authors from both publications described their leadership as purpose-driven, committed to improving their respective institutions, access for students, and positive employment outcomes, particularly for underserved populations.
- **Theme Three: Leadership Attributes** - Authors from both publications shared their views of the necessary core qualities for effective leadership. These included: authenticity, humility, communication, resilience, and empathy. Male leaders also emphasized patience, emotional intelligence, integrity, and perseverance.
- **Theme Four: Paths to the Presidency** - Female authors noted that their paths to the presidency were often non-linear, with others observed leadership potential in them before they did. While male leaders also had diverse paths, their narratives lacked the same emphasis on external validation, external encouragement, and, rather, emphasized internal locus of control.
- **Theme Five: Communication and Collaboration** - Authors from both volumes highlighted the importance of inclusive

communication, collaboration, and active listening to build trust and drive transformative change.

- **Theme Six: “I” vs. “We” Language** - Female authors generally used collective language, emphasizing institutional accomplishments. Male authors tended to use more individual language, focusing on personal contributions and vision.
- **Theme Seven: Proving Oneself and Imposter Syndrome** - Female authors often described the need to prove their worth and referenced giving in to the “imposter syndrome”. These themes were absent from the male leaders’ narratives, which focused more on strategic visioning and gaining campus trust.
- **Theme Eight: Earned vs. Privileged Leadership** - All 23 authors, in both publications, described their ascendancy to the presidency as “earned” through demonstrated success, not inherited nor expected. Regardless of socio-economic or familial background, the most successful leaders in both volumes emphasized the importance of embodying principled leadership: humility, authenticity, and a commitment to mission.

Conclusion: Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

As leaders of higher education institutions around the world, we must each recognize the power and responsibility inherent in our roles. Leadership is not defined by title alone, but by a dedication to purpose, an unwavering commitment to equity, and the ability to elevate others while moving our institutions—and society—forward.

AMINE BENSALD



President, Al Akhawayn University
Morocco

02

LEADING WITH PURPOSE,
FOCUSING ON PERFORMANCE*Introducing My Institution*

A Five-Year Journey of Transformation for a Bigger, Better and More Sustainable University.

Nestled in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco, Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI) embodies the remarkable vision of a king (Hassan II, the late king of Morocco) and the spirit of mutual understanding and brotherhood he envisioned – a brotherhood relationship that two humans can share without being biological siblings.

The university was named “Al-Akhawayn,” which in Arabic means “the Two Brothers,” referring to its two founders, King Hassan II of Morocco and the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia – who enjoyed such a relationship.

They established the university to foster this kind of relationship between people of different cultures and civilizations – especially between people from the Arab and Muslim tradition, on the one hand, and people from other civilizations, on the other. This mission was incorporated into the 1993 Royal Dahir (decree), which constitutes the founding charter of AUI. The University

opened its doors in 1995.

To nurture this openness that is married with identity, AUI adopted the liberal arts and sciences model of education, as the foundation for all its majors (including engineering and business majors), established English as the language of instruction, and required proficiency in both Arabic and French. Over a third of AUI faculty are international, and about half of AUI's graduates spend a semester or two on international exchange programs during their AUI journey. Rooted in a rich, multi-layered cultural setting, it brings together local and global perspectives, fostering a dynamic academic environment that encourages critical thinking, ethical leadership, and innovation.

AUI has developed into a unique space in Morocco where intellectual curiosity meets real-world impact. We are committed to offering a transformational college experience that shapes graduates equipped to pursue fulfilled lives who are also both skilled professionals and engaged citizens - individuals who think independently, work interdependently, act responsibly and contribute meaningfully to society.

Our approach blends rigorous academic training with a strong emphasis on civic engagement and experiential learning, preparing students to transition to society, and to navigate a changing and increasingly interconnected world with both competence and purpose. AUI is accredited by NECHE (the New England Commission of Higher Education); it's the only U.S.-accredited university in Morocco, and one of only three US-accredited universities in Africa.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

AUI's commitment to inclusivity is reflected in its focus on community engagement, its diverse student body and its leadership team. Fifty-four percent of its students are women,

who also constitute 65%-70% of the President's List (which recognizes students who have received the highest grades each semester). Further, two out of our three deans are women, and so is our Director of Human Resources and our Chief Employability and Entrepreneurship Officer.

More than half of AUI's students receive scholarships or financial aid, and 48% are first-generation college students, underscoring the university's role as a social elevator. Over 20 years ago, AUI created a community development center (Al Akhawayn Azrou Center for Community Development) about a 30-minute drive from campus. It focuses on serving the underserved local population, especially in the areas of women's health, women's capacity building and entrepreneurship, supporting elementary and middle school dropouts to be reinserted in the school system, and training unemployed college graduates to develop skills and find jobs. The center has served 88,496 beneficiaries - 62% of whom are women - and has achieved an employment rate of 71%.

Leadership Tenure

When I assumed the presidency of AUI in November 2019, I was fortunate to inherit an institution rich in history and solid in its foundations. Still, in a rapidly changing landscape, the university was also facing formidable challenges. In February 2020, we presented to our Board a bold strategic plan to grow the university from 1,900 to 5,000 students in five years, boost ROI through innovations in our approach to career success and partner with GenZ students to learn together and measurably improve their wellbeing and readiness for leading fulfilled lives.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, compelling swift and focused action to ensure community safety and student success. We sent students home, fundraised to support

vulnerable families (both of our students and families in Ifrane), transitioned rapidly to online instruction and catered for our international student population on campus.

We were the first university in Morocco to resume face-to-face classes in the fall of 2021, balancing safety with educational quality. In addition, and as importantly, we had to decide what to do about our ambitious strategic objectives. We decided to pursue them without any change, in spite of the pandemic.

The journey since has been marked by deliberate phased transformation of our institution. With an inspiring vision it was clear that our ability to execute was going to be key. We created a new Chief Operating Officer position and hired a seasoned leader; we created new academic leadership positions to support the Office of the VPAA, and we were fortunate to be joined by inspired faculty who knew the institution very well and who shared a strong passion for making a difference. Our initial focus was on student success – setting up an online quality management system to support online instruction quality, revamping processes, restructuring support teams, and launching initiatives that prioritized mental, physical and emotional well-being.

We created a new Office of Employability & Entrepreneurship, with a mission to boost experiential learning and student job readiness, as well as their entrepreneurial mindset, and to act like a recruitment agency for our partner employers.

We also created a new Office of Academic Support and Progression, in order to advance student success and minimize the time a student needs to graduate - hence serving ROI upstream. In parallel, we worked with the Academic Council (our elected faculty body that serves as the primary instrument of shared governance at AU) to adapt our faculty appraisal policy according to these priorities.

Next, we expanded our academic offerings by developing undergraduate programs in Renewable Energy, Territorial Planning & Management, Environmental Studies & Sustainability, AI and Robotics, Cloud & Mobile Software Engineering, and Big Data Analytics. We also secured funding for campus expansion, and contracted with the government to promote inclusive access to AUI for students and families of diverse socio-economic profiles.

Four years later, we have 19 new buildings, twice the number of full-time faculty, over 4,000 students on campus, an 85% student satisfaction rate, a 92% retention rate, 48% first-generation students, and 84% of job-seeking graduates landing at least one job offer before the end of their final academic year, with nearly one in five graduating students choosing to apply to graduate school.

Today, about one graduating student out of two has had a chance to experience an international exchange (for at least one semester). In addition, while we have proficiency requirements in three languages, AUI students can choose electives from 6 different languages (up from only two in 2019). Each year, a number of students graduating from AUI earn admission to some of the most competitive graduate programs in the world, at universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Columbia, NYU, HEC-Paris, ESSEC, etc., and last year one of our graduating students won a Rhodes Scholarship (a first for the graduate of any Moroccan university) and the year before one of our students won a prestigious McCall-MacBain Fellowship to McGill University (another first for Morocco).

In the meantime, we have also earned a 10-year institutional re-accreditation from NECHE (the New England Commission of Higher Education) and from the Commission on English program Accreditation (CEA) for our Language Center, as well

program re-accreditations from ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering & Technology), and from EFMD (the European Foundation for Management Development).

We have also balanced AUI's budget for the first time in its history; and we're ranking first among Moroccan universities in Top-of-Mind awareness and in Consideration among students and parents.

Regionally, we engaged with our local community by supporting the city of Ifrane in developing its strategic roadmap, promoting "impact research" among our faculty to address local challenges, increasing public-sector continuing education (about 10 folds), and supporting our student humanitarian clubs (whose actions benefit over 16,000 people per year). Globally, we have forged new pathways into sub-Saharan Africa and China.

Our new ambition for AUI in its next five-year plan is to boost the role of liberal arts and sciences education in a technology-driven world; in an era where machines are becoming better machines, we seek to master technology and use it to make humans better humans.

We will put AI and technology at the service of a liberal arts and sciences education to make it more scalable and adaptive, and we will uphold the humanities and social sciences as essential disciplines that shape ethical leadership, cultural literacy, and the ability to navigate complexity. We will also continue to grow our experiential learning programs to equip our students with the skills they need to add value to their organizations.

Professional Journey

My own leadership journey is deeply intertwined with AUI's history. Having joined the institution at the end of 1994, as a young Assistant Professor, two months before AUI opened its doors to students for the first time, I lived the start-up phase

of AUI, with almost the entire system needing to be built from scratch.

The initial faculty of the School of Science & Engineering consisted of only eight professors. For the first few weeks, as the campus had not yet been delivered, we all shared one office and we gathered for dinner every night. As you can imagine, I've made many life-long friends among the first cohort of AUI faculty, students and staff. I have since served in various roles - faculty member, program coordinator, dean of engineering and vice president for academic affairs & research. It is at AUI that I came to appreciate – as a computer scientist and an AI researcher - liberal arts and sciences education, and to become deeply committed to it. It is also at AUI that I actually “learned-by-living it” how much of a melting pot Morocco was and is.

As you can feel, I have developed a deep emotional connection to the university, to my faculty colleagues, to our support staff, and to my former students and other AUI alumni. It's during this period that my passion for students developed! They're truly endearing, constantly endeavoring to protect “their AUI” from our mistakes! I cherish being with our students, but I'm not always sure how they feel about this President, “who can have ideas from the 20th century” – as one student reflected during one of our meetings!

Through my tenure at AUI, I have developed a comprehensive understanding of the institution's inner workings. It is also at AUI that I've been confronted with making the difficult decision to move my focus from teaching and research to university leadership and management. After being offered a deanship in 1999, I resisted it for two years because I could not see myself as doing anything other than teaching and research. Eventually I gave in to the argument that it was an opportunity to have more impact through systemic measures and through support

to faculty. In hindsight, I believe this turned out to be correct.

On the other hand, I didn't imagine that this work could be thankless. I now believe that to be both resilient and fulfilled in a university leadership job, it's crucial to have deep inner passion for impact, and courage to "do the right thing" – combined with humility to stand corrected when one makes mistakes. I'm very grateful that I've been very blessed by both passion and courage for this job, and I continue my journey as a student of humility and vulnerability!

Prior to returning to AUI in 2019 after a long absence, I spent eight years as president of a private university in Casablanca, leading it through a merger and acquisition process, which had become necessary in order to survive significant market shifts caused by regulatory changes and by the advent of new competition with significantly more resources.

This "existential" experience was extremely humbling to me, and it was a turning point in my mindset. I discovered that academic quality and the purest intentions alone were not enough for the survival and thriving of an academic institution. I've also learned the hard way about markets, finance and the need to be less intellectual, more entrepreneurial and more action-oriented in decision-making. I was also fortunate to work with and observe some leaders who've become role models for me.

I've witnessed the miracles that entrepreneurial grit can accomplish. This experience honed my leadership and management skills, and it deepened my appreciation for the delicate balance between academic quality and financial sustainability, between tradition and innovation (or simply, the need for change). These experiences collectively shaped my approach to leadership: pragmatic and results-driven but also valued-based and rooted in a deep respect for institutional

culture.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

I believe that what sets my leadership apart from others is a fusion of private-sector efficiency with public-sector purpose. I've remained fundamentally an academic – a proud academic – who has grown aware, willing and able to address market and financial issues, and no longer feeling apologetic about this.

My anchor in this significant transformation (which I assume must be difficult for a majority of academics) has been a non-negotiable commitment to my values and principles. At AU, I've been very fortunate to have very strong alignment with our Board of Trustees, as well as mutual trust with a critical mass of faculty.

I've led the implementation of a management-by-results approach, combining the rigor of market-driven practices with a profound belief in higher education's purpose and an understanding of its nuanced demands. This approach was pivotal in our success doubling enrollment, achieving financial sustainability, attaining impressive inclusion and student employability, and securing a 10-year reaccreditation from NECHE alongside key programmatic accreditations. By fostering a culture of accountability and excellence, we redefined what AU could achieve.

Effective Leadership Strategies

Vision and collaboration have been the cornerstones of our leadership strategy. The bottom-up development of two strategic plans (2020-2025 and now 2025-2030) provided clear roadmaps, balancing ambitious strategic goals with actionable steps. Decision-making has been deliberately both inclusive and decisive. We have engaged the Board of Trustees, faculty,

staff and student leaders, through shared governance structures.

Still, we also moved decisively to act with focus, as it is crucial to avoid becoming entangled in (often legitimate) intellectual challenges to equations that have no perfect solution. Central to our strategy has been a relentless focus on our main key performance indicators (KPIs) - from student recruitment and satisfaction, to financial health and graduate employability. The participative approach not only enhanced our decisions but also fostered a sense of collective ownership (or at least acceptance) by a vast majority.

Personal Identity and Perception

Leadership to me is a blend of purpose, passion, values, grit, pragmatism and vulnerability. I am results-oriented but driven by principles and values that emphasize authenticity and integrity, as well as respect and empathy for human limitations. While I hold firm to my convictions, I remain a strong believer that others often have better ideas and am happy to adapt when new perspectives emerge.

This balance of determination and flexibility has been essential in navigating the complexities of institutional change.

I view my team as both a source of strength and a humbling reminder of the interdependence that leadership entails. The commitment, integrity and resilience of my team members have been instrumental in transforming strategic visions into reality, and I am profoundly grateful for their partnership.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

I'm profoundly humbled by the prospect of offering advice. I'm not sure I have any universal answers, or how I can extrapolate from my own experience. However, based on my experience, I can share my belief that college presidency is a highly demanding

“Leadership to me is a blend of purpose, passion, values, grit, pragmatism and vulnerability. I am results-oriented but driven by principles and values that emphasize authenticity and integrity, as well as respect and empathy for human limitations.”

job with enormous potential for impact and fulfillment.

I believe it's critical not to manage it as a popularity contest. Rather, performance, impact and even resilience will result from passion and purpose combined with a values-based compass, a cohesive team and a firm belief in collective intelligence.

Focus, action and grit - with enough sense of vulnerability in order to adjust or correct whenever appropriate – are also critical to success. In my case, my knowledge of and my love for my university, as well as my knowing personally a critical mass of faculty colleagues, enough to earn mutual trust, have been precious assets.

Last, but not least, I have found invaluable support in interacting with fellow presidents of other peer universities, and most of my better ideas – and ambitious dreams - have come from them!

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

If you're like me, you may really appreciate not having to seek university leadership but being offered such privilege. In my case, I believe this came as a result of simply following my passion (long before I got into university leadership and without that even being a consideration in my mind), which itself was instrumental in building a track record that others have identified as useful for university leadership.

After I finally accepted shifting my focus from teaching and research to university leadership, the single most important challenge - and opportunity for improvement – I've faced has been to shift from a mindset of a (subject/content) expert to a growth mindset, where I'm more oriented to better understanding myself, my relationship with others, and with my wider environment; where I'm drawn to investigating alternative perspectives and different “truths,” and to challenging the status quo; and where I learn to own my inevitable shortcomings while turning

to others for help and new ideas - all and always in pursuit of the University's vision as the critical North Star.

In my first presidency I learned the hard way that academic quality is necessary but not sufficient for a university to survive and thrive. Market and finance acumen, as well the President's team are just as important. Finally, I believe that because I find a rewarding personal sense of purpose in my presidency, the opportunity cost associated with it is worthwhile.

TIM BRAILSFORD



Vice-Chancellor & President, Bond
University
Australia

03

CREATING A BETTER AND BRIGHTER FUTURE.

Introducing My Institution

Bond University, founded in 1989, is Australia's first private, independent and non-profit university. The University's mission is to provide an exceptional and life-changing student experience.

The University welcomed the first cohort of 322 students to its brand new, state-of-the-art campus on the Gold Coast on Australia's eastern seaboard, otherwise best known for its famous beaches and tourism opportunities. When those foundation students graduated, they were quickly recruited by Australia's most successful corporations and their subsequent achievements in the workplace firmly established Bond's reputation for excellence.

Bond's vision was to offer an exclusive educational experience of the highest international academic standards, where students from around the world would be mentored in small classes by renowned academics with access to captains of business and industry.

Bond University has since become one of Australia's leading tertiary institutions, renowned for its expertise in professionally

oriented disciplines in business, law, medicine, architecture, screen and media, psychology, and sports-related fields. New disciplines have been introduced in actuarial science, data analytics and allied health.

Bond has been consistently, independently ranked as Australia's #1 university for student experience for almost two decades. Further, employers report that they are more satisfied with Bond graduates than those from any other university.

Bond's achievements have exceeded the expectations of many, meeting every challenge with the unbridled spirit of determination and innovation that has characterised its rich and colourful but relatively young history.

Our University's method for success is simple; we set out to be deliberately different from every other university in Australia.

The majority of programs are delivered in-person, with a student-staff ratio of 11:1, degrees are delivered over trimesters, providing our students with a personal, high quality, carefully curated educational experience that waves farewell to graduates who are primed and ready to walk into their career of choice.

We proudly welcome students from all corners of the globe who make their new home at Bond University, and who make our student body a diverse and enlightened society of perspectives, insights and experiences.

We are home to an elite sporting program which consistently features proud Olympians. These student-athletes choose Bond University for a specific reason – we tailor delivery of their studies around their high-performance sporting careers, making it possible for these impressive athletes to achieve the very best in their sporting endeavours while simultaneously undertaking their academic pursuits.

Our students' experience does not stop once they graduate. Life as a Bondy is not a fleeting or temporary experience. 'Once

a Bondy, always a Bondy' is a mantra amongst staff, students and Alumni alike.

Leadership Tenure

At the time of writing, I have been in the role of President at my current institution for over 13 years. I have seen my tenure broadly through the lens of sub-periods of around five years each.

New initiatives and changes take time to embed in higher education institutions. Universities are places of rich tradition, held dearly by academic staff, students and alumni. This is a strength in providing the bedrock of a University's mission, values and culture. However, all institutions need to adapt and move forward.

My first five years as President were spent embedding core values, elements of which were in place due to the hard work of my predecessors. Bond University is a relatively young institution, and it was important to implement a whole-of-campus approach to key aspects of our mission.

My second five years capitalised on our positioning and previous efforts which resulted in substantial expansion of programs, student cohorts and infrastructure. This was also a period during which significant advancement and brand recognition were achieved. However, as discussed below, the latter part of this period coincided with the advent of the global pandemic.

The current sub-period might be best characterised by an era of innovation and renewal; partly in response to external forces, but also in reflection of a determination to embrace continuous improvement.

During my overall tenure, there has been dramatic technological advancement, most recently including the development of Generative Artificial Intelligence. We have also witnessed

substantial shifts in student sentiment and stakeholder expectations, volatility in geo-political forces and global relations, swings in global and national economies, and unprecedented changes in government higher education policies and priorities, and of course a global pandemic. The ability to respond to these forces with dexterity has never been more crucial to ensure the future success of the institution.

There is little doubt that at the time, the global pandemic, which lasted for two years, and left an aftermath that drifted on for several more years, was an extraordinary moment for my institution and arguably, for every educational institution. In short, it was a defining moment for all leaders of education.

In Australia, the restrictions imposed by the government during the pandemic were particularly stringent by global standards. For two years, inbound and outbound international travel was effectively prohibited in all but exceptional circumstances. Moreover, domestic travel was severely affected due to the introduction of bans on border crossings between states and provinces. These restrictions were particularly problematic for our university which is located close to a provincial border which is regularly crossed by many of our students and staff daily for study, work and daily life.

Bond University's student body is highly diverse and can be broadly categorised by three cohorts. Around one-third of students are drawn from the local region, another third originate from other domestic regions which involve at least 1,000 kms of travel, and the remaining third arrive from overseas. Thus, around two-thirds of the student population leave their homes to live and study at the university.

When the pandemic arrived, these students were faced with the choice of either returning home or staying on campus, or nearby for an unknown period. Understandably many students returned

home. This had a profound effect on how we subsequently taught and engaged with our student and staff community.

Like many educational institutions, we moved to a world of online teaching and learning. Our challenge, while not unique, was to balance the demands and expectations of students who had decided to stay on campus in order to have a 'normal' university experience, with those who were located remotely and expected a high-quality virtual experience. It was difficult and compounded by an increasingly tight fiscal environment as we struggled to replace graduating students with new student enrolments severely hampered by travel restrictions with no end in sight.

We formed an Innovation Task Force in response to the challenges of the pandemic, with membership drawn from all over campus. The Task Force's role was to come up with new ideas and innovations which would pave the future. No idea was regarded as crazy and we broke the shackles of tradition. That Task Force became the engine room for effective change, much of which is still in place today.

While I was confident that we would manage to successfully navigate our way through the chaos of the pandemic, there were daily concerns raised by colleagues. During that time, and as the weeks turned into months, and the months turned into years, we certainly experienced moments of doubt. However, we stood steadfast and emerged post-pandemic as a more tight knit community, with a strong sense of self-belief and pride.

The lessons from that period have been well-learned; the power of innovation brought about by crisis, and those innovations are serving our university well to this day.

Professional Journey

From a personal perspective, I have been exceedingly fortunate

to benefit from exceptional academic supervisors during my studies early in life, and subsequently, during my professional career. Their direction and wisdom gave me much needed insight into the world of academia.

Ours is a unique industry that is heavily dependent on people and their interactions. These interactions may be in a classroom, a research laboratory, a field trip, a committee meeting, an international conference, or through membership of various national and international associations. Each interaction makes a positive impact on our community and is an opportunity for individuals to learn and grow.

Some of these interactions can be more impactful than others. In my personal case, at a relatively early stage of my career, I became involved with a prestigious international accreditation system that involved peer-review and benchmarking. I am still involved with this body, some 30 years later. Through this engagement, I learned about the diversity of international systems, different frameworks, environmental settings, traditions and cultures. For instance, these experiences included the European Bologna process, the UK system of quality assurance, the US tradition of academic tenure, the governance complexity across provinces such as in India, the French culture of industry collaboration, and the German focus on research partnerships.

These experiences enabled me to share international perspectives with my own institution in Australia. Each system held valuable and unique attributes that the people inside the system take for granted, but it is consistently remarkable how some of these features have not been translated into international practice. Hence, my personal approaches to strategy, management and innovation are informed by observations from around the globe.

I have also benefited from strong engagement with other

sectors and industries. University systems can be internally focused, but we do not have the advantage of seeing ourselves as others do. This is particularly relevant when designing curricula, launching new research programs, and remaining at the forefront of new developments.

A strong and engaged Industry Advisory Board, both at the institutional level and across the various academic schools within a university can provide forums for vibrant, energetic and influential discussion. New, original ideas and strategies can be proposed and informed through listening to the advice of those on the outside looking in.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

Prior to the role I occupy, my experience in academic institutions was heavily focused on research activities. While the teaching of students was also a central role, my performance metrics were heavily weighted in research outcomes and achievements.

I had often pondered whether the emphasis on research had gone too far, and that the interests of students were left as a mere afterthought. During discussions held through the recruitment process for my current role as a University President, it was clear that a distinctive approach was required at Bond University. Moreover, our distinctive positioning needed to be more effectively promoted and used as a platform to align and coordinate a range of strategic plans.

For a variety of reasons, I believed my new institution was in an excellent position to lead innovation and best-practice in learning, teaching and student success. As a result, the motto of “students come first” was instilled in our academic and professional people. This motto effectively served as a call to arms across the institution to accentuate our efforts in student engagement and view their personal successes

as institutional successes. This approach enabled reforms in curriculum, teaching methods, implementation of a range of co-curricular activities and opportunities, investment in student support mechanisms, and the roll-out of a series of positive interventions designed to underpin the student lifecycle from enrolment to post-graduation.

Importantly, this approach was embraced by the student body who quickly realised that the university was their partner and was there to guide and assist them on their educational journey. While nothing in this approach was particularly radical, the whole-of-institution focus and the continual development of improvement initiatives led to the adoption of a culture that evolved from the grass roots of the university and thus it has become entrenched as part of our identity.

The spin-off benefits became infectious, such as the natural development of a strong brand and value-proposition that puts students in the centre and avoided the crowded space of global rankings and hollow claims of 'world class'. We had developed a brand that was authentic, and our graduates were happy to be proud ambassadors and provide strong testimonials. Moreover, our non-teaching staff such as those in support roles and administration also became invested in student success. This created a united and shared purpose across all areas of campus.

Effective Leadership Strategies

"The task of the leader is to get their people from where they are to where they have not been." - Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger's wisdom is simple in its structure yet deep in meaning. Change is hard, and effective change is a constant battle that can seem to be never-ending. At their heart, universities are centred on humans and their interactions with each other,

society and the world around them. The leader needs to be prepared and ready to lead change.

History is littered with case studies of institutional malaise and decline, whereby ex-post analysis reveals critical junctures where decisions were either not taken, or were taken poorly – think of ‘The Kodak Moment’.

People however tire of constant change, and morale can decline when change fatigue sets in. Somewhere on this continuum is a delicate balance between ensuring that institutions can adapt and be ready for the future, whilst not creating an environment that is full of perpetual uncertainty and the appearance of chaos.

Every institution will undergo change, driven by either internal forces or external influences, and often a combination of both. People need to be led on a journey of change, and communication is critical in this regard.

Major change should never arrive as unexpected news. University communities are not immune from rumour and conspiracy theories. An effective change strategy is to communicate early and ensure that the most impacted stakeholders are provided the opportunity for input. Focus groups, discussion forums and working parties are effective mechanisms to float ideas and ascertain pressure points.

In a world of multiple communication channels, it is important for a leader not to rely upon a single medium. Written communiques should be preceded by genuine consultation and discussion. Generally, communities will be receptive to change, even if they dislike it, provided they believe they have been listened to and have had an opportunity to provide feedback.

Thus, the establishment of a clear communication plan should be an essential step in any proposal for change. These can be difficult conversations but there are long-term benefits. If there is difficult news to deliver, then the leader should deliver the

message. Most institutional change should ultimately be focussed on creating a better and brighter future. It is important to stay on message and ensure that other leaders within disciplines and portfolios share in this direction. Hence, the early engagement of sectional leaders is critical.

While the role of a President can be singled out, the reality is that no single individual can operate effectively in isolation. The President's role should be viewed as the captain of a team whose responsibility is to engender trust and respect. A leader should regularly communicate with their team, both collectively and individually, and take the time to understand them as individuals; learning about their families, personal traits and interests all assist in building a culture of trust and respect.

Personal Identity and Perception

University Presidents may sometimes appear aloof and disconnected from their community. This is a common accusation expressed by critics and some in the media. Once this criticism receives airtime, it can spread quickly and embed itself as a more general perception.

The role of a President is complex and requires a different approach at different times to different stakeholders. It is a daily task, and indeed duty, to engage with stakeholders. This may take many forms such as speaking with students, attending faculty and staff meetings, calling donors and supporters, sending best wishes and flowers on special occasions, recognising notable milestones, and being open to an ad-hoc request for a coffee and chat.

The President needs to be seen as accessible and available. This can be challenging given the sheer volume of business and urgency of the administrative demands of the role which leads to limited space in the diary. However, it is essential

to break down the perceived barriers between the executive management of an institution and those who perform critical functions in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and the delivery of services.

I believe that all stakeholders have a strong desire to be seen through the lens of themselves as an individual. Each person is different, with their own needs, wants and peculiarities. Part of the role of a President is to create a variety of opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the President.

Any appearance of personal goals or ambitions by senior leaders can be a recipe for disaster as it might be interpreted that the leader is putting their personal agenda ahead of their community. Thus, a leader must be constantly wary of self-promotion. It is always better for someone else to speak in high regard of one's achievements and successes. Humility is a trait that others respect.

In this regard, it is important for a leader to praise others and not be drawn into personal comparisons. Academic faculty members have often sacrificed a lot in the pursuit of their passion. They typically become experts in their field through an enormous dedication of their time, energy and unswerving commitment to their passion and cause. They do not take kindly to those above who make comments or judgments about the value, relevance or impact of their work or their discipline.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

The often-quoted observation on leadership being lonely is sometimes attributed to Ferdinand Marcos. Regardless of its source, it is a truism. Very few decisions are ever celebrated by the whole. Rather, at best, one can hope that the majority support your judgment. There are other occasions when you feel certain that your decision will be disliked by the majority,

however it is a decision that must be made in the interests of the overall institution.

The hard decisions are made easier if you surround yourself with good people whose counsel is given without fear or favour. Decisions at the top are often not straight-forward, else they would have been made by others before reaching the Office of the President. Such decisions can be those that no one else wants to make. Hence, the outcome is likely to impact others, and not always be well received. In this regard, sage advice is critical.

Key sources of advice may come from the senior management team, such as the Vice Presidents and Deans, and the university's governing body either formally or off-line. Whatever the source of the advice, it is valuable advice if it is impartial, honest and given with full regard to the institution's best interests. This means that discussions may sometimes be challenging but as a President, one must be prepared to listen and hear alternate points of view.

Early on in the appointment of a new leader, there is an initial period of grace, otherwise known as the 'honeymoon period' whereby the new leader is cut some slack. During this period decisions are generally accepted notwithstanding their popularity or otherwise.

After a time, it is inevitable that the surge of goodwill wanes. It is at this stage that senior colleagues may find it difficult to stay fully aligned to their President, knowing that unpopular decisions will also reflect on themselves. These moments can be pivotal in defining the tenure of a leader. Presidents must be open to critical input and maintain a culture where all opinions are valued. Disagreements should never lead to an environment where diverse views are dismissed or rejected out of hand.

In such times, diversity in its broadest form can be important

and influential. We often see the call for diversity centred on colour, race, ethnicity or faith. However, diversity of experience, knowledge, background and perhaps most of all, diversity of thinking is especially valuable.

The foibles, nuances and quirks of colleagues may become difficult to tolerate at times, but provided they bring valuable contributions to the table which cause personal reflection, their presence should be welcomed. Every individual is different, and these differences should be welcomed and valued.

In a university setting, there is a complex myriad of stakeholders. Many universities are too large for the President to be closely across all of the stakeholder groups. The role of senior colleagues is crucial in keeping the President informed as they will typically possess a greater in-depth knowledge of the relevant stakeholders within their respective portfolios. If a President is not receiving frank and fearless advice from their executive team, then steps must be taken to ensure that the executive team can provide such advice.

From personal experience, these junctures occur approximately 3-5 years into a tenure. Collegial friendships may become strained during this period, but it is the role of the 'lonely' President to absorb and respond accordingly.

Difficult times require courage but there are many who have successfully walked the same path. Despite many differences across national and geo-political boundaries, universities face similar challenges and circumstances. International networks, such as IAUP, can be effective conduits for a President to seek advice, solace and mentorship free of competitive forces and influences.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

Leadership is a privilege. Some say it must be earned and

that much is true. However, whatever the achievements, accomplishments, or reasons behind a leader's appointment, they must be parked at the door. For once an individual walks through that door, they must make an immediate transition. I suspect that anyone reading this will recall instances of individuals who failed to make this transition.

Prior to my appointment as President, I had served four terms as a Faculty Dean across two highly respected institutions. Each of these terms were served under different University Presidents. Through these experiences I was able to listen and learn from leaders with different styles, philosophies and approaches to management and stakeholders. I also had the privilege of visiting many institutions overseas as an academic and during my time as a Dean, where I was fortunate to observe and learn from a wide variety of tertiary leaders.

An insight I gleaned is that there is no single perfect style, or a single set of attributes that a successful President must possess. While there are some essential core skills and attributes required to succeed in the role, the reality is that different circumstances, different times, different stakeholders and different challenges all require different approaches to leadership. What may work for one institution will not necessarily work for another institution. Similarly, what may work at a certain point in time will not necessarily work at another time.

While universities are sometimes painted as slow-moving entities hamstrung by tradition, the reality is far different. Academic institutions are generally at the forefront of change. The emergence of new knowledge, new disciplines, new technology and even new societal attitudes are typically associated with higher education. Universities are hotbeds of innovation and new thinking. In such an environment, university leaders must be prepared to embrace change and be receptive to new ideas.

The future is unknown but that does not mean that we cannot be prepared. Arguably, universities are currently facing their greatest challenges in many decades and will do so for several years to come. Most of these challenges are driven by external forces which makes them even more difficult to resolve. Moreover, many of the challenges intersect creating complexity and hence requiring solutions which are multi-faceted and multi-layered.

All of these considerations point to a critical need for those seeking leadership positions to be adaptive, flexible and capable of changing themselves. Psychologists will debate whether individuals possess these attributes innately at birth or whether they can be learned. Notwithstanding, my belief is that any individual can work on improving these attributes irrespective of their starting point.

Universities promote and encourage lifelong learning. While the focus of lifelong learning is typically on students and their future career path, it is equally applicable to those working in universities and particularly those holding key leadership positions. Learning is not restricted to formalised courses and programs with strong structures around them, rather informal learning can be just as valuable, if not more so. Opportunities for informal learning present themselves on a daily basis from observing others, reading widely, reflecting on history, and participating in discussion and debate on topics outside of one's comfort zone.

I would encourage anyone considering a leadership role to gain experience in different institutions under different leaders facing different challenges. Engage in as many informal learning opportunities that present themselves, and reflect on whether your personal behaviours, actions and decisions would have been appropriate and successful in those situations. Learn from others, both successes and failures, and understand why

mistakes were made. Recognise that a leader is never correct all the time, but a successful leader is one who can adapt and adjust so that mistakes are not repeated and successes can be planned.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

There are many programs to assist institutions to achieve greater diversity and work towards addressing historical imbalances from under-represented groups. Some of these programs are quite formalised and embedded within expectations of government, regulators and accreditation agencies at both national and international levels. Other programs are offered by specialist organisations, often non-profit and take a softer approach designed to engineer long-lasting change. Yet other programs can be found amongst a range of commercial suppliers in the HR and training industries.

Many of these programs have strengths and potential to make a positive impact. However, importing any program from the outside is fraught with risk if there is not an appetite from internal stakeholders to undertake genuine change.

Cultural change is the best form of change as it spreads throughout an entire institution, and it can successfully override traditions and norms. However, changes in culture can be hard to achieve and may require several attempts. Quick wins can be reversed when they collide with entrenched views and attitudes.

External programs often specify metrics that are used to measure progress and develop reporting statistics. Such metrics typically boil down to simple measures such as participation and attainment which miss the complexity of change. While measurement of progress is a highly desirable goal, it should not become a means of itself. For instance, appointment decisions still need to have a quality emphasis even though there may

be an underlying desire to chase metrics.

At the least, external programs need to be supplemented by an internal program, and one which is led from the top. For change to last, it must become embedded in the psyche of the institution and its people.

One such program that I have observed to be quite successful is built around three pillars of:

- Role models;
- Creating opportunities; and
- Inspiring confidence.

People love to be inspired, which in turn drives their own aspirations. We can all relate to examples from various walks of life where we have seen someone else achieve the impossible which has subsequently changed our dreams and ambitions as a result. Hence, institutions need to recognise the importance of role models from minority groups and under-represented populations.

Institutions can sometimes get caught up in viewing their world as full of binary decisions. However, within a university and particularly in the academic realm, there are a myriad of ways in which opportunities can be created through some innovative thinking. For instance, if someone is showing promise but not yet ready to step up to a leadership position, then why not look at giving them some experience first through a part-time position, or a short-term secondment? Review each vacancy as it arises and explore options as to how a vacancy could be filled with the objective of creating opportunity. Examine academic leadership roles and see if there is scope to create a deputy or assistant position who could be trained to take over in due course. Establish a mentoring system which enables aspiring individuals to view their future career through the eyes of another.

“Institutions can sometimes get caught up in viewing their world as full of binary decisions. However, within a university and particularly in the academic realm, there are a myriad of ways in which opportunities can be created through some innovative thinking.”

Finally, it is important to create an environment which inspires confidence and one where individuals feel comfortable in striving to realise ambition. For instance, it is widely held and supported by evidence that women take longer than men to apply for work-based promotion. In an academic setting, promotion is one of the key forms of leadership advancement. Thus, equipping good candidates for promotion with support is essential to provide them with confidence.

This might include providing key pieces of information to allow them to fully understand the process, giving them access to individuals who have experienced the process, conducting mock interviews, and sourcing senior colleagues to assist with the preparation of their case are all relatively straight-forward initiatives that can be introduced at minimal cost to inspire confidence.

SABUR KHAN



President, Daffodil International University

Bangladesh

04

TRANSFORMING THROUGH
SERVICE-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP.*Introducing My Institution*

When I envisioned the foundation of Daffodil International University (DIU) back in 2002, I dreamed of creating more than just a university—I dreamed of building a transformative ecosystem where education, innovation, and values come together to prepare individuals to shape the future of our nation. Today, DIU stands as a leader in higher education in Bangladesh, blending academic excellence with innovation, values, and global connections. We are rich with 60K Alumni globally, offering 51 programs, named as the model institutions which have 150 labs, and 580 international programs.

Driven by the vision of Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, DIU is creating the world's first 'Three Zero Campus'—zero carbon emissions, zero poverty, and zero unemployment. Through renewable energy, entrepreneurship, and social business initiatives led by the Yunus Social Business Centre, we empower students to build a sustainable and inclusive future. I may also add here that DIU's Yunus Social Business Centre (YSBC) embodies the spirit of change, fostering research,

innovation, and initiatives that align with the ‘Three Zero’ vision.

Mission:

DIU’s mission is to contribute to national development by producing skilled, ethical, and visionary graduates. We aim to nurture critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and leaders who can address the challenges of the modern world and shape a brighter future.

Unique Attributes:

- **Focus on Employability:** Programs like Employability 360 and micro-credentialing ensure graduates are prepared for both local and global careers.
- **Entrepreneurship Ecosystem:** DIU fosters innovation and supports students in launching their own ventures, transforming them into creators rather than job seekers.
- **Technology-Driven Education:** With cutting-edge facilities and digital learning platforms, DIU ensures students stay ahead in a tech-driven era.
- **Global Outlook:** Partnerships with over 100 universities worldwide and exchange programs provide students with unparalleled global exposure.

Current Priorities:

- **Enhancing Quality:** Continuously improving programs and research to meet international standards.
- **Fostering Innovation:** Encouraging impactful research and creative solutions for societal challenges.
- **Community Responsibility:** Promoting sustainability and a culture of giving back.
- **Expanding Global Reach:** Positioning DIU as a global hub for diverse learners and international collaborations.

Future Focus:

At DIU, we believe education shapes the future. Our focus lies in nurturing not only skilled graduates but also responsible,

value-driven citizens. Through initiatives like Art of Living, we instill respect, empathy, and social responsibility, ensuring students measure success by the positive impact they create.

Looking ahead, we are integrating advanced technologies, artificial intelligence, and global perspectives into our programs while upholding the human values at the core of education. Our mission is to inspire leaders, innovators, and changemakers who will shape a better tomorrow.

A Story of Transformation:

DIU is more than a university—it's a movement for transformation. Every milestone we achieve reflects in the stories of students turning obstacles into opportunities, building businesses, excelling in careers, and leading with purpose.

Leadership Tenure

Leadership Tenure: My Journey with DIU

When I reflect on my journey with Daffodil International University (DIU), which I founded in 2002, it feels like witnessing a dream take shape over two decades. The journey has been one of challenges, persistence, and an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. From the very first day, my vision for DIU was to build an institution that would not only provide knowledge but also nurture leaders, innovators, and changemakers who could transform society.

Defining Moments

- **Establishing DIU and Witnessing its Growth:** Watching DIU grow from a small idea into a nationally and internationally recognized institution has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. From gaining prestigious accreditations to introducing forward-thinking programs, each milestone has been a step closer to

realizing the vision of a university that stands as a beacon of quality and innovation.

- **Pioneering ICT Education:** In the early 2000s, when ICT was still an emerging field in Bangladesh, I made it a priority to integrate it into DIU's core. Today, I take pride in seeing our students excel as skilled IT professionals, making meaningful contributions locally and globally.
- **Fostering Entrepreneurship:** One of my deepest passions is empowering young people to believe in their ideas. Through DIU's vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystem, we have supported countless student startups, created incubation centers, and nurtured the entrepreneurial mindset.
- **Focus on Employability:** I firmly believe that education must prepare students for the realities of the professional world. Programs like Employability 360 and micro-credentialing have ensured that DIU graduates are not just academically prepared but are career-ready, equipped with practical skills to thrive.
- **Expanding International Horizons:** Building global partnerships has been another cornerstone of my leadership. DIU now collaborates with esteemed universities worldwide, providing opportunities for student and faculty exchanges, global learning experiences, and international exposure.
- **Commitment to Community:** I have always believed that education must give back to society. DIU's community engagement initiatives reflect this philosophy, focusing on sustainability, social responsibility, and empowering underprivileged communities.

Achievements and Challenges

Through these efforts, DIU has been recognized with numerous awards and accolades. Our students and alumni have become changemakers, and our faculty has driven impactful research

and innovation. Yet, the road has not been without its obstacles. Establishing and growing a private university in Bangladesh meant overcoming challenges such as resource limitations, shifting mindsets about education, and ensuring quality amidst rapid growth. But every challenge has taught me resilience and reaffirmed my belief in DIU's mission.

Looking Ahead

As I reflect, I see the faces of students who have transformed their lives through DIU. I see their businesses, their innovations, their impact on society. These stories are the true measure of DIU's success. Moving forward, my focus remains on integrating advanced technologies, fostering value-based education, and preparing our youth for global leadership.

This journey has been one of shared dreams and collective efforts, and I remain committed to building a brighter future—one student, one innovation, and one step at a time.

Professional Journey

Reflecting on My Journey: Building a Purpose-Driven Foundation

My journey into entrepreneurship and education has been shaped by a series of experiences and values that have guided me every step of the way. It is not a story of personal achievement but one of perspective, purpose, and an enduring commitment to creating opportunities for others.

Early Influences: Shaping a Vision

From an early age, I was deeply influenced by the values of hard work, perseverance, and a responsibility to serve the community. These principles were not just lessons but a way of life, instilled in me through my upbringing. Growing up, I found myself drawn to technology—not just for what it was but for what it could do. Technology, to me, represented the

ability to break barriers, connect people, and solve problems that once seemed insurmountable.

With this vision in mind, I pursued studies in computer science and began to dream of a Bangladesh where technology could empower lives, bridge inequalities, and create a platform for new opportunities. The potential I saw in technology wasn't just about innovation; it was about its power to transform the lives of individuals and communities.

A Perspective on Purpose

This foundation of values and vision ultimately guided me to where I am today. For me, entrepreneurship and education are deeply connected—both are about creating opportunities, enabling people to realize their potential, and building systems that leave a lasting impact. As I reflect on this path, it's clear that every step has been driven by a purpose bigger than myself. It has always been about the belief that education and technology together hold the key to unlocking the future of our nation.

This perspective continues to shape my work and inspires me to push forward, not for recognition but for the change it can bring to the lives of others. I share this journey not to look back, but to encourage others to look forward—toward a future where innovation, education, and purpose come together to create a better tomorrow.

Entrepreneurial Beginnings: A Catalyst for Change

In 1990, I founded Daffodil Computers Ltd., one of the pioneering IT companies in Bangladesh. This entrepreneurial venture taught me invaluable lessons about innovation, business management, and the critical importance of skilled human resources. It also revealed a pressing challenge: the lack of a skilled workforce in Bangladesh, particularly in ICT. This realization planted the seed of a deeper purpose—to bridge the gap through education.

A Leap into Education: Building DIU

In 2002, I took a transformative step by establishing Daffodil International University. My vision was clear: to create a world-class institution that could prepare graduates to thrive in an interconnected and rapidly evolving world. My background in business deeply influenced DIU's approach, emphasizing practical skills, employability, and entrepreneurship. I wanted our graduates not only to excel academically but also to be job creators, problem solvers, and changemakers.

Leadership and Global Contributions: Expanding Horizons

As Chairman of DIU, I have had the privilege of steering its growth into one of Bangladesh's leading universities, with a strong focus on academic excellence, innovation, and social responsibility. Beyond DIU, my leadership roles, such as serving as President of the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP) and the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), have broadened my perspective. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the power of collaboration and the critical role of education in driving national and global progress.

Key Learnings Along the Way

- **Vision and Innovation:** The ability to anticipate future needs and innovate has been crucial in navigating the complexities of higher education and technology.
- **Empowerment and Collaboration:** Empowering individuals and fostering collaboration has unlocked immense potential in both education and industry.
- **Social Responsibility:** I have always believed that educational institutions carry a moral obligation to contribute to societal development and address the challenges of our time.

A Journey of Purpose

What drives me most is witnessing the transformation in the lives of young people. From students creating impactful startups to graduates leading global organizations, their stories fuel my

commitment to education. My journey is not just about building an institution—it is about creating a platform for young minds to dream, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society.

As I look ahead, I remain bold in my mission to empower the youth of Bangladesh and beyond. Through education, we can rewrite narratives, bridge divides, and create a future where knowledge serves as the greatest equalizer. This is not just my story—it is the story of Daffodil International University and its enduring impact on society.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

Leadership, to me, is about creating impact, inspiring others, and driving meaningful change. My journey, transitioning from entrepreneurship to education, has allowed me to approach this role with a perspective rooted in innovation, practicality, and purpose. Here's how I believe I bring a unique dimension to leadership:

1. **An Entrepreneurial Approach to Education:** My entrepreneurial background has profoundly shaped my leadership style. From building Daffodil Computers to founding Daffodil International University, I have always prioritized bridging the gap between industry and academia. I see education not just as a theoretical endeavor but as a practical tool to solve real-world challenges. At DIU, this vision translates into a focus on employability, where students are equipped with practical skills and opportunities that prepare them for the ever-changing job market.
2. **Visionary Thinking and Early Adoption:** Early in my journey, I recognized the transformative potential of ICT in reshaping education. This realization positioned DIU as a pioneer in integrating technology into teaching and learning, making our programs dynamic and future-ready.

I continue to emphasize the importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability—skills that I believe are essential for success in the 21st century.

3. **Holistic Education Beyond the Classroom:** For me, education is not confined to academic excellence. It's about nurturing individuals to be responsible, empathetic, and innovative contributors to society. At DIU, we focus on holistic development—where students are encouraged to grow personally, professionally, and socially. Through programs that emphasize social responsibility, leadership, and entrepreneurship, we ensure our graduates leave not just with degrees, but with the skills and values to make a meaningful difference.
4. **Driving Community Impact and Sustainability:** Education should extend beyond the campus walls. I've always championed the role of DIU in addressing societal challenges—whether through community engagement, sustainable practices, or fostering a sense of responsibility among students and faculty. These initiatives aren't just actions; they're values deeply embedded in the culture of DIU.
5. **Fostering Global Perspectives:** In today's interconnected world, education must be global. Over the years, I've prioritized international collaborations, creating opportunities for DIU students to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives. This not only enhances their learning but also prepares them to thrive in a globalized workforce.

I believe leadership is not about following a pre-set path but about constantly adapting, innovating, and inspiring. Through these contributions, I strive to make education at DIU transformative—not just for individuals, but for society at large.

Effective Leadership Strategies

Leadership is an evolving practice that requires a balance of vision, adaptability, and the ability to inspire and empower others. At Daffodil International University (DIU), my approach to leadership has been shaped by a commitment to collaboration, innovation, and meaningful impact. Below are the strategies I have employed, which I believe can serve as valuable insights for others aspiring to lead successfully in dynamic and challenging environments:

1. Crafting a Shared Vision and Driving Collective Ownership

- **Communicating Purpose:** A clear and compelling vision is at the heart of any successful institution. I ensure that DIU's goals are communicated consistently to all stakeholders, from faculty and staff to students and alumni, emphasizing our shared mission to transform education and empower youth.
- **Engaging Stakeholders:** Leadership is not about issuing directives; it's about creating buy-in. I involve faculty, students, and staff in decision-making processes, encouraging them to contribute ideas and feel ownership of the university's direction.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Every initiative at DIU is aligned with our broader strategic vision. This ensures that individual efforts contribute to the collective purpose, creating a sense of unity and focus

2. Empowering Individuals to Lead

- **Decentralized Leadership:** I believe leadership must extend beyond the leader. By delegating authority and trusting individuals, I empower others to take initiative and responsibility in their respective roles.
- **Professional Growth Opportunities:** At DIU, we invest in

our people by providing access to mentorship programs, training workshops, and leadership development opportunities, enabling them to unlock their potential.

- **Recognizing Achievements:** Recognition is a powerful motivator. Whether it's celebrating faculty accomplishments or student milestones, acknowledging contributions builds confidence and fosters commitment.

3. Leading by Example

- **Setting the Standard:** Leadership begins with integrity, accountability, and consistency. I strive to embody these values in my actions, creating a standard for others to follow.
- **Inspiring Through Passion:** My dedication to education and innovation is not just a role—it's a calling. This passion, I believe, inspires those around me to approach their own work with enthusiasm and purpose.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** During challenges, I prioritize demonstrating resilience and adaptability, showing others the importance of staying grounded while navigating uncertainty.

4. Cultivating a Culture of Collaboration

- **Breaking Silos:** Higher education thrives on interdisciplinary collaboration. I encourage departments to work together, bridging gaps and fostering innovation through collective efforts.
- **Transparent Communication:** Open dialogue is the cornerstone of trust. Whether through town halls, informal discussions, or structured feedback sessions, I ensure everyone feels heard and valued.
- **Community Building:** DIU is not just an institution; it's a community. By fostering connections among faculty, students, and alumni, we create a supportive ecosystem

that thrives on mutual respect and shared purpose.

5. Driving Innovation as a Core Value

- **Encouraging Experimentation:** True progress comes from the willingness to take risks and embrace new ideas. I encourage faculty and students to push boundaries, fostering a culture of experimentation and creativity.
- **Promoting Entrepreneurship:** DIU has established itself as a hub for entrepreneurship, offering incubation programs, startup resources, and mentorship to inspire the next generation of changemakers.
- **Leveraging Technology:** In an era of rapid technological advancement, I have prioritized the integration of ICT and emerging technologies into our teaching, research, and administration, keeping DIU ahead of the curve.

6. Committing to Continuous Improvement

- **Institutional Self-Reflection:** No institution is perfect, and I believe in regular self-assessment. By seeking feedback from stakeholders and benchmarking against global best practices, DIU remains dynamic and progressive.
- **Adapting to Change:** Education must evolve with the times. Whether addressing shifts in global industry demands or embracing new educational paradigms, I emphasize the importance of adaptability to remain relevant and impactful.
- **Pioneering Sustainable Practices:** Recognizing the urgent need for environmental and social responsibility, DIU integrates sustainability into its curriculum and operations, contributing to a better future.

7. Inspiring a Global Outlook with Local Relevance

- **International Collaboration:** I have tried to develop DIU's global partnerships, opening doors for exchange

programs, collaborative research, and exposure to diverse perspectives.

- **Local Impact with Global Standards:** While embracing a global outlook, I tried to ensure that DIU remains deeply connected to addressing local challenges. This dual focus ensures that our students are both world-class professionals and contributors to national development.

Reflections on Leadership

To me, Leadership transcends strategy—it is about building an ecosystem of trust, empowerment, and shared purpose. At DIU, I have focused on harmonizing innovation with tradition, integrating global perspectives with local priorities, and balancing ambition with accountability. True leadership lies in serving others, fostering collaboration, and nurturing growth to create transformative change.

This journey has reinforced a profound lesson: leadership is not about the individual but the collective. It is about cultivating an environment where every member feels valued, inspired, and committed to advancing a shared vision. When people are empowered, their collective potential drives extraordinary progress.

Personal Identity and Perception

The trajectory of my leadership as Chairman of Daffodil International University has been shaped by profound elements of my identity and personal experiences. These aspects not only define my approach to leadership but also influence how others perceive and interact with me in this role.

1. Roots in Rural Bangladesh

Growing up in rural Bangladesh gifted me with an intrinsic sense of empathy and understanding for the barriers many face,

particularly in accessing quality education. These experiences serve as the cornerstone of my commitment to empowering underprivileged yet talented individuals through education. My background also keeps me grounded, ensuring that my leadership reflects the realities of our society. This connection fosters authenticity and trust, creating a relatable and approachable persona among diverse stakeholders.

2. Entrepreneurial Spirit

My journey as an entrepreneur taught me resilience, adaptability, and the value of innovation—qualities I have carried into my leadership at DIU. This action-oriented mindset encourages bold, goal-driven decision-making while inspiring others to think creatively and take ownership of their roles. Entrepreneurship is not just about taking risks but about turning challenges into opportunities—a philosophy I strive to instill within the university's culture.

3. Passion for Technology

Technology has always fascinated me, not just as a tool but as a transformative force that can redefine education and society. My belief in leveraging technology for change has made DIU an early adopter of digital innovations in teaching, learning, and operational systems. This vision for a tech-integrated education ecosystem resonates across the university and positions us as forward-thinkers in an evolving global landscape.

4. Commitment to Social Responsibility

Leadership, in my view, must be grounded in ethical principles. My steadfast commitment to social responsibility drives me to uphold transparency, fairness, and accountability across all initiatives. These values not only guide decision-making at DIU but also foster trust and inclusivity within the community, encouraging a sense of collective purpose among students, faculty, and staff.

5. The Mindset of a Lifelong Learner

Embracing the philosophy of lifelong learning has shaped my openness to change and the constant pursuit of improvement. I believe that adaptability and a willingness to learn are essential for thriving in today's rapidly evolving world. This mindset cascades across DIU, nurturing a culture of growth where students and educators alike feel inspired to continuously seek knowledge and self-improvement.

Perception and Interactions

The interplay of these elements of my identity shapes how others perceive and engage with me as a leader:

- **Approachable and Empathetic:** My rural roots and empathetic approach make me accessible to those I work with, instilling trust and confidence in the leadership process.
- **Visionary and Forward-Thinking:** My emphasis on technology and innovation positions me as a leader who looks beyond the present to prepare for the future.
- **Ethical and Trustworthy:** A commitment to fairness and social responsibility underscores my interactions, fostering respect and collaboration within the university and beyond.

Ultimately, these reflections on identity and perception affirm my belief that leadership is not merely about authority or ambition—it is about building trust, fostering collective purpose, and empowering others to grow and succeed. This ethos continues to shape the legacy I strive to leave at DIU and in the broader education landscape

Advice for Fellow Leaders

Based on my experiences leading Daffodil International University, I have realized that leadership in higher education is not merely about administration; it is about vision, empathy,

and creating an environment where everyone can thrive. With this perspective, I offer the following key advice to presidents, rectors, and chancellors seeking to leave a meaningful impact in the field of education:

1. Cultivate a Vision with Purpose

- **Define a Clear Purpose:** Leadership begins with clarity of purpose. What transformation do you want to inspire in your students, faculty, and community? What value does your institution bring to the world? A clear and well-defined mission is the foundation of success.
- **Inspire Through Communication:** Vision is only effective when shared passionately. Engage your stakeholders—faculty, staff, students, and the wider community—with your purpose and inspire them to become part of a collective journey. A shared vision cultivates unity, trust, and motivation.

2. Empower Your People to Lead

- **Trust and Delegate:** Positive leadership thrives on empowering others. Delegate tasks not out of necessity, but with trust and belief in your team's ability. This encourages ownership, initiative, and a sense of belonging among your faculty and staff.
- **Mentor for Growth:** Leadership is also about nurturing leaders. Invest in professional development, mentorship, and upskilling programs. When you foster the growth of others, you strengthen the entire institution.

3. Harness the Power of Innovation

- **Embrace Technology:** Technological advancement is redefining education, and it is critical to integrate cutting-edge technology into every aspect of your institution. From virtual learning platforms to AI-driven analytics, innovation must drive student success and

institutional efficiency.

- **Encourage Creative Solutions:** Cultivate a culture where creativity, experimentation, and risk-taking are celebrated. Progress happens when teams feel confident to challenge norms and explore new pathways.
- **Adapt Smartly:** Change is inevitable. Work smartly and stay ahead of trends by being agile and adaptable. Institutions that evolve with societal needs remain relevant and impactful.

4. Foster a Collaborative Ecosystem

- **Build Meaningful Relationships:** Collaboration across departments, disciplines, and external stakeholders is vital for institutional success. Build bridges that connect the university's mission with industry, government, and the global community.
- **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Create an environment where everyone's voice matters. Transparency and open communication pave the way for trust and innovation, ensuring alignment and shared ownership of goals.

5. Champion Student-Centric Leadership

- **Focus on Holistic Success:** Higher education must go beyond academics. Nurture students' personal, professional, and ethical development to prepare them as resilient, adaptable leaders of tomorrow.
- **Understand Their Needs:** Actively listen to students' aspirations, challenges, and feedback. Your policies and decisions must reflect a deep understanding of their evolving needs in an ever-changing world.

6. Lead with Empathy and Integrity

- **Model Positive Leadership:** Empathetic leadership drives loyalty, trust, and inspiration. Demonstrate compassion in your decisions, fairness in your policies,

and accountability in your actions.

- **Be Transparent and Accountable:** Leadership is built on trust. Be transparent in decision-making and embrace accountability as a cornerstone of ethical governance.

7. Commit to Lifelong Learning

- **Stay Curious:** The world of higher education is constantly evolving. Engage with new ideas, learn from global trends, and stay informed about technological advancements and pedagogical innovations.
- **Encourage Continuous Growth:** Foster a culture where everyone—from students to faculty—sees learning as a lifelong endeavor. A leader's openness to learning inspires the same in others.

8. Engage with the Community and World

- **Serve with Purpose:** Social responsibility is not an add-on—it is central to leadership in education. Actively engage with your local community and contribute to solving societal challenges. Education must be a force for good.
- **Promote Global Perspectives:** We live in an interconnected world. Encourage students to embrace global citizenship by fostering cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, and awareness. Prepare them not just as professionals but as changemakers in a global society.

Final Thought:

Leadership is not about authority but about service. It is about building a legacy where the institution becomes a catalyst for transformative change—not just for students but for society as a whole. By embracing empathy, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to purpose, higher education leaders can inspire

“Leadership is not about authority but about service. It is about building a legacy where the institution becomes a catalyst for transformative change—not just for students but for society as a whole.”

growth, create opportunities, and empower a future where learning knows no bounds.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders in Higher Education

For those aspiring to lead as presidents, rectors, or chancellors, leadership in higher education demands preparation, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to purpose. Here is my concise yet impactful guidance, enriched with actionable insights:

1. Preparation: Build a Strong Foundation

- **Deepen Expertise:** Establish academic credibility through advanced degrees, impactful research, and contributions to your discipline. Leaders with robust academic profiles are trusted and respected by their communities.
- **Diversify Experience:** Venture beyond your specialization. Administrative roles, committee engagements, and cross-department collaborations provide the perspective needed to manage complex institutional ecosystems.
- **Develop Leadership Skills:** Prioritize mastering key skills like strategic decision-making, conflict resolution, and effective communication. According to research, 70% of organizational success hinges on these competencies.
- **Commit to Lifelong Learning:** Stay updated on higher education trends, technological advancements, and global challenges. Institutions that evolve are often led by leaders who value continuous improvement.
- **Network Strategically:** Leaders with expansive professional networks are 1.5 times more likely to succeed. Seek mentors and connect with peers at conferences and workshops to learn from diverse experiences.

2. Mindset: Embody Vision and Purpose

- **Clarity of Vision:** Define the impact you want to make. A clear vision not only inspires but aligns stakeholders to shared goals.
- **Servant Leadership:** Prioritize the needs of students, faculty, and staff. A leader is most effective when they empower others to succeed.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Leadership is a journey of growth. Be prepared to navigate challenges with perseverance, viewing setbacks as opportunities to innovate.
- **Ethical Leadership:** Integrity and transparency are the cornerstones of trust. Leaders with a strong ethical compass foster enduring loyalty and respect.
- **Passion for Transformation:** Let your passion for education fuel your actions. Higher education is a powerful tool for individual and societal transformation.

3. Embrace Challenges as Catalysts for Growth

- **Step Outside Comfort Zones:** Take on roles or projects that stretch your capabilities. Leaders who proactively embrace growth are better prepared to manage uncertainty.
- **Learn from Failures:** Mistakes are part of leadership. Analyze them to refine your approach and foster resilience.
- **Navigate Change Smartly:** The higher education sector evolves rapidly—be agile. Institutions that thrive are led by adaptable leaders with data-driven foresight.

4. Build Deep Community Connections

- **Engage Authentically:** Build meaningful relationships across your campus and beyond. Leaders who understand the pulse of their communities create

more inclusive environments.

- **Listen and Empower:** Data shows that inclusive leaders, who actively seek input from diverse perspectives, are 3.5 times more effective in achieving institutional goals.
- **Serve Society:** Leadership extends beyond the campus. Embrace initiatives that uplift your local and global community, ensuring your institution contributes to the greater good.

5. Believe in Your Leadership Potential

- **Confidence with Purpose:** Trust your abilities and let your passion guide you. Purpose-driven leaders inspire not just compliance but commitment.
- **Inspire Others:** Let your journey and dedication motivate others to pursue leadership, fostering a ripple effect of positive change.

Leadership in higher education is not about quick wins—it's a long-term commitment to excellence, innovation, and service. By strengthening your foundation, adopting the right mindset, and embracing challenges, you can leave a legacy that transforms individuals and societies for generations to come.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

At Daffodil International University (DIU), diversity is not just a goal—it's a driving force behind innovation, excellence, and societal impact. Our commitment to equity extends beyond policy, focusing on actionable initiatives that empower women and individuals from underrepresented groups. By fostering an environment that values inclusion, we are equipping our community to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world.

1. Empowering Women: Driving Gender Parity

- **Gender Representation in Leadership:** Over the past five years, DIU has increased women's representation in leadership roles by 28%, with women now holding key positions in academic administration, research, and governance.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Through initiatives like the Women in Leadership Network (WLN), female students and faculty are paired with accomplished mentors who guide their personal and professional growth. Research shows that structured mentorship increases the likelihood of women achieving leadership roles by 32%.
- **Targeted Leadership Training:** DIU offers specialized leadership workshops that focus on negotiation, strategic decision-making, and public speaking for women. These programs aim to bridge the confidence gap that often hinders women from pursuing top roles.

2. Supporting Underrepresented Groups: Equal Opportunity for All

- **Inclusive Admissions:** Our admissions policies ensure 50% of scholarship opportunities are allocated to individuals from underrepresented groups, including those from remote areas, minority communities, and low-income families. This has led to a 40% increase in enrollment from underprivileged backgrounds over the last decade.
- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** DIU has disbursed over \$1.5 million in scholarships annually, enabling students who face financial constraints to access higher education and excel in their academic pursuits.
- **Cultural Awareness Training:** To promote sensitivity

and inclusivity, DIU requires all faculty and staff to undergo regular training sessions on cultural awareness and unconscious bias, creating a supportive campus environment for students from all walks of life.

3. Creating a Safe and Inclusive Campus

- **Zero-Tolerance Policy for Discrimination:** DIU has implemented robust systems for reporting and addressing harassment and discrimination. This includes anonymous reporting channels, grievance redressal committees, and immediate action protocols. Surveys indicate that 92% of students feel safe and supported on campus.
- **Diversity Celebrations:** From multicultural festivals to international student forums, DIU hosts 20+ cultural events annually, showcasing the diverse backgrounds of our community and fostering a sense of belonging.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors:** Student-led ambassador programs ensure that inclusivity initiatives remain grassroots-driven, encouraging students to champion diversity among their peers.

4. Developing Future Leaders: Inclusive Leadership Opportunities

- **Participation in Governance:** DIU ensures that women and individuals from underrepresented groups comprise at least 30% of student government roles and club leadership positions, providing firsthand experience in decision-making.
- **Mentoring Emerging Leaders:** Faculty-led initiatives focus on equipping aspiring leaders with the tools they need to overcome systemic barriers and take on influential roles in academia, industry, and beyond.
- **Global Leadership Exposure:** DIU connects students

with international exchange programs and leadership summits, empowering participants from diverse backgrounds to compete and collaborate on a global stage.

Impact and Progress

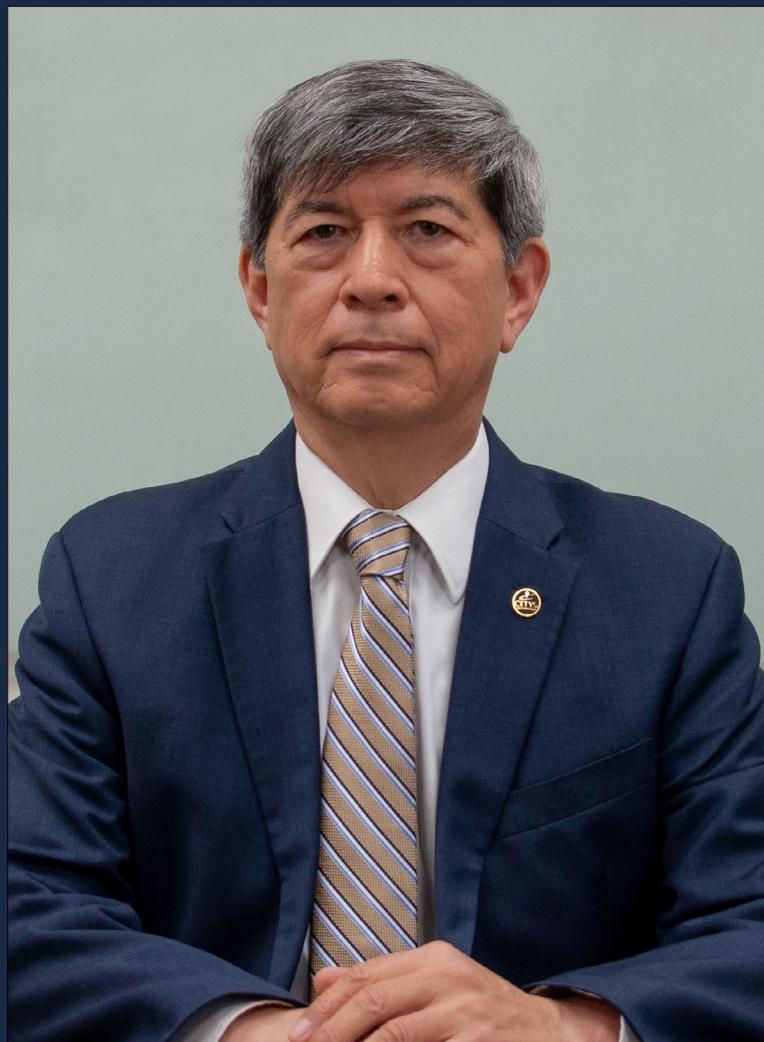
- **Increased Leadership Diversity:** In the past three years, DIU has witnessed a 20% rise in women and individuals from minority groups occupying administrative and faculty leadership positions.
- **Campus Inclusion Index:** Feedback from our annual campus surveys highlights a 25% improvement in perceptions of inclusivity, with students and staff reporting greater satisfaction with DIU's diversity efforts.
- **Empowered Alumni Network:** Many alumni from underrepresented groups have gone on to become influential leaders in their communities, demonstrating the ripple effect of DIU's commitment to equity.

Future Vision: Setting the Standard for Inclusive Education

DIU's ongoing mission is to lead by example in advancing diversity in higher education. By combining innovative policies, evidence-based practices, and a community-driven approach, we aim to create a university where everyone—regardless of gender, background, or circumstance—has the opportunity to realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

Inclusion is not a checkbox; it is a journey. At DIU, we embrace this journey with unwavering resolve, knowing that by empowering individuals, we empower the world.

FERNANDO LEÓN-GARCÍA



President, CETYS University
Mexico

05

STRATEGIC FOCUS, COLLECTIVE STRENGTH.

Introducing My Institution

Nestled in the northwest corner of Mexico and neighboring California in what is referred to as the Cali-Baja region, CETYS (Centro de Enseñanza Técnica y Superior) University is a private not-for-profit institution, founded in 1961 by business leaders from the region with the mission of preparing well-rounded individuals who can make a significant contribution to the economic, social, and cultural development of Northwest Mexico and the US-Mexico border. CETYS has shaped leaders for more than six decades by creating synergies between academia, industry, society, and government. The CETYS University educational model is multi-experiential, humanistic, flexible, and global.

CETYS University currently has close to 8,200 students, distributed across three campuses (Mexicali, Tijuana, and Ensenada), offering over 37 undergraduate and graduate programs as well as high school programs. Key learning outcomes embedded across the CETYS curriculum include Entrepreneurship, Social Responsibility, Internationalization,

Linkages with Business and Industry, Sustainability, and Digital Literacy. Roughly 85% of the student body are from within the State of Baja California, 11% from other States in Mexico, and 4% from California and other States in the USA. Committed to delivering high quality educational programs that support and impact regional development, CETYS is one of the Top 5 private universities and one of the Top 20 public or private universities in Mexico. Several key indicators that reflect the institution's positioning in Mexico involves 73% of the full-time professors having doctoral degrees (among the Top 25), 74% of the most recent graduating class with an international experience (among the Top 3), and an average employability rate of roughly 95% a year or less after completing studies (among the Top 10). CETYS has close to 50,000 alumni and/or former students across different program levels.

With undergraduate and graduate programs organized around three colleges (Administration and Business; Engineering; and Social Sciences and Humanities), CETYS University supports interaction with Business, Industry, Government, and the Community through three Centers of Excellence: Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Design and Human and Social Development. These Centers have been instrumental in developing broad, deep, and substantive relationships with key industry clusters in Baja California, such as aerospace, electrical and electronic, automotive, medical devices, software development, and more recently semiconductors. More recent additions have been the Center for Wine Studies and the Institute for Sustainability Studies.

CETYS is 1 of only 5 universities in Mexico with institutional accreditation in the USA (and the only one to date with full accreditation with the WASC Commission on Colleges and Universities), 1 of about 12 across Latin America, and 1 of

50 around the world. CETYS is also among a handful of institutions in Mexico with program accreditation in the USA (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs or ACBSP; Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology or ABET). In terms of the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, CETYS is 600/800 in the world in employability and economic development as well as in gender equity. Regarding QS Stars, CETYS has achieved the maximum of 5 Stars in Employability, Academic Development, Environmental Impact, and Distance Education and 4 Stars in Internationalization. According to Greenmetric, CETYS is ranked 277 in the world in terms of sustainability, 6 among private universities and 12 among all participating universities from Mexico.

CETYS is strategically connected to higher education organizations including IAUP, ACE, CIC, HACU, CASE, AGB, AIEA, NAFSA, WSCUC, IIE, AAICU, AUAP, IAU, FIMPES, ANUIES, Santander Universidades, CONAHEC, and CLADEA.

Leadership Tenure and Defining Moments

I have been President of CETYS University since 2010, leading the institution on a major transformational effort called Vision CETYS 2020, focused on high quality, global competitiveness, learning communities, and sustainability. Based on a commitment to and tradition of strategic planning, the most recent effort involves Vision CETYS 2036, which intends to deliver transformative experiences, nurture a culture of innovation, create significant impact, and achieve national and international outreach, relevance and recognition.

There have been several key moments that stand out during my 2010-2024 period.

First and foremost, is the opportunity provided by the Board and the outgoing CETYS President Enrique Blancas de la

Cruz to meet during the second half of 2009 with over 50 key Trustees to inquire about their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing the institution, as well as with over 70 academic and administrative leaders and faculty from CETYS. This provided a solid foundation upon which to begin the Presidency at CETYS in January of 2010.

Second were two major events and/or challenges during Q1 of 2010: Inheriting a Board of Trustees with 100 members and a 7.2 earthquake in the region. The governance challenge was one that involved launching a deliberate, concerted, and planned effort with support from AGB that led to a major revamp of the structure and organization of the Board of Trustees under the tagline of “One Dream, One Team”, with many milestones already achieved but still being worked on as a continuous improvement process. The earthquake shook the physical foundations upon which CETYS was offering and delivering programs (overwhelmingly face-to-face with an emerging use of technology) as well as planning its future development. The institution had to shift to distance and online mode quickly to provide the necessary continuity to students in their respective programs. There was not a single physical casualty, and all buildings were still standing but some required structural reinforcement. As a result of a strategic conversation with the Board, rather than just repairing buildings, a decision was made that an important component of the emerging CETYS 2020 development would include a redefinition of the campuses’ buildings and therefore would provide more ambitious construction goals.

A third moment involved the culmination of a long, very laborious and carefully crafted process that led to US accreditation. CETYS was able to move from WASC candidacy in 2008 to initial accreditation in 2012. That was a crowning moment for

CETYS as it had initially approached WASC back in the 1990s and achieved initial eligibility in 2004. This provided a solid foundation to then pursue and be granted program accreditation by ACBSP and ABET. In 2017, WASC re-accredited CETYS through 2027. And in 2024, ACBSP re-accredited CETYS through 2034. WASC, ACBSP, and ABET were essential for CETYS to then engage in THE Impact Rankings and QS Stars.

A fourth moment involves COVID and post COVID challenges and opportunities. The CETYS University community and the Board of Trustees all had to come together and rethink what the institution was doing and what needed to be adjusted to cope during COVID and then reposition the institution for the post COVID era. One important result of this has been the CETYS multi-experiential model.

Cutting across this 15-year period are the development and cohesion of a solid and empowered team that has allowed a shared sense of leadership, reviewing and embarking on the necessary changes to move from an institution known for its excellence in teaching to one that is now increasingly engaged in applied research and projects with business and industry, setting up the ambassadors or leaders or champions of initiatives such as internationalization, and positioning CETYS with global organizations including IAUP, ACE, NAFSA, CASE, AGB, HACU, AAICU, AUAP, WSCUC, IIE, AIEA, IAU, Santander Universidades, CONAHEC, CLADEA.

Professional Journey

The early death of my father when I was in elementary school influenced my development. A product of the border dynamics between Mexicali and Calexico, my father was Chinese and my mother Mexican, both of whom believed and supported the importance and far reaching power of education. That

led to my attending elementary and middle school in the US (Calexico), high school and undergraduate studies in Mexico (Mexicali), and graduate studies including an EdD at Stanford University. These cross border, multicultural foundations and experiences have enabled me to navigate between contexts acknowledging that being different does not necessarily mean that one is better than the other.

From middle school onward, I was extensively involved in activities outside the classroom, including but not limited to working to cover the costs of attending school, being a member of the basketball team, academic tutoring, and the student body council, and serving as a part-time teacher in high school mathematics, physics, and English. Accordingly, these experiences have influenced being able to be engaged in and draw from multiple contexts.

One life changing experience involved working as teaching assistant to the then President of CETYS, Dr. Félix Castillo Jiménez, who inquired about future plans and encouraged me to pursue a doctoral degree so that I could return to CETYS and help the institution and the Board chart out the continuing development and improvement of CETYS. Dr. Castillo's successor, Alfonso Marín, equally motivated and supported me so that I could pursue my doctoral degree at Stanford University.

The doctoral dissertation at Stanford University, under the guidance of Professors Lewis Mayhew and James March, focused on accreditation self studies, a choice that proved to be pivotal for future activities at CETYS University and beyond, as the study provided exposure to leaders and contacts of key colleges and universities in the WASC region.

Another important experience for me has been taking part in the ACE Fellows Program. The exposure to key concepts, distinguished speakers, best practices, numerous college and

university presidents, and my internship placement at the University of Arizona and California State University Monterey Bay, laid the foundation for what I have been able to pursue and accomplish the last 25 years.

Serving under Dr. Jorge Klor de Alva as Chief Academic Officer for the University of Phoenix/Apollo International, I had a life transforming experience from many perspectives. With the openness and support from my wife, Claudia, to move to Arizona and embark on what Dr. Klor de Alva described as an unleashing of all the potential that I had but didn't know with projects based in the US and involving potential partnerships in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. That was followed by my serving as Chancellor of City University of Seattle International Division, leading the development and growth of CityU's programs, campuses, and sites outside the USA, including Europe, Asia and Oceania, and the Americas. There I served as Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and as Co-Acting President.

All of the above has been essential: returning to CETYS as the first alumnus President, strengthening the tradition of developing well-rounded individuals, achieving institutional accreditation (WASC) and program accreditation (ACBSP, ABET), employing high rates of doctorate-qualified faculty as well as excellent graduation and employability rates, and becoming the most internationalized university in Mexico. My extensive global engagement has led to several Honorary Doctorates from Vysoka Škola Financni a Spravni in the Prague, Czechia, Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University in Bucharest, Romania, Caucasus University in Tbilisi, Georgia, and NIMS University in Jaipur, India. In addition, I have been recognized among the Top 300 Overall Leaders in Mexico (2019-2024).

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

Being the first alumnus to become President of CETYS University with many diverse experiences over the years provided a broad, rich, and historically well-grounded perspective I assumed the top leadership role at my alma mater. These experiences at CETYS involved interaction as a student, as a part-time teacher in high school and later lecturer, as the Athletic Director, Dean of Students, Director of Planning and then provisionally Institutional Advancement, Chief of Staff, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and unofficially the Chief International Officer.

While I was technically away from CETYS University, I was pursuing my graduate studies at Stanford and then later on for roughly a decade in leadership roles at US based global institutions, I was always connected to the CETYS Board and to CETYS as an advisor/special consultant. Consequently, I was never really disconnected and always close enough to know about the main developments and challenges facing CETYS University.

This special connection, while at and out of CETYS University over the span of several decades, provided me with a unique angle to return and lead the institution: sufficient knowledge to be considered a local but enough distance from CETYS coupled with exposure to the USA and the rest of the world to provide a global perspective.

Strategic connections and networking have been instrumental in raising the level of quality and profile of CETYS from an excellent regional university in Mexico and among the best private universities in Mexico, to one of the Top 5 private universities and the most internationalized in Mexico. Maintaining, enhancing, and extending the connections of CETYS Universities has been institutional improvement, transformation, and innovation at

the institution, and crucial to the profile that the institution has been able to develop over the last 15 years. The following list includes some of these organizations as well as the role played on behalf of CETYS:

- IAUP (International Association of University Presidents)
- President 2021-2024, Chair IAUP Board 2024-2027
- AMUP (Asociación Mexicana de Universidades Privadas)
- President 2024-2026
- WSCUC (WASC Commission on Universities and Colleges)
- WSCUC Commission, Chair of the WSCUC International Committee, Chair of Re-accreditation Teams to numerous WSCUC institutions
- ACE (American Council on Education) - Chair of the Council of ACE Fellows, Chair of the ACE Commission on International and Global Engagement
- AGB (Association of Governing Boards) - Council of Presidents
- CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education)
- ABG Board, President of the CASE Latin American Advisory Council
- CIC (Council-Independent Colleges) - CIC Board
- HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities)
- Board of Directors, Chair of the International Education Committee
- IAU (International Association of Universities) - Administrative Board
- AIEA (Association of International Education Administrators)
- Presidential Ambassadors Council
- NAFSA (Association of International Educators) - Board of Directors
- AUAP (Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific)
- Advisory Council

- FIMPES (Federación de Universidades Mexicanas Privadas de Educación Superior) - Consejo de Directores, Presidente de Comisión Permanente de Evaluación Actualización del Sistema de Acreditación, Presidente de Comisión Ejecutiva de Internacionalización
- ANUIES (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior) - Consejo Nacional
- Santander Universidades México – Consejo Nacional

Effective Leadership Strategies

There are several concepts that have been a part of my leadership experience at CETYS University.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins talks about having the right people on the bus. After an extensive round of meetings and conversations prior to the beginning of the Presidency in 2010, it was clear that many of the leaders that were required for the next stage of development at CETYS University were already “on the bus”. What was needed in many cases was a possible repositioning and potential re-energizing opportunity. This meant not only having the “right people on the bus” but “the right people on the right seat on the bus”. Accordingly, most of the teams that had been a key part of the development of the institution in the past were invited to continue in their roles and others were offered an alternative leadership role. Overall, an overwhelming majority remained and as the years have gone by some have retired. There have been new additions when and as required. It is perhaps the faculty where the greatest change has occurred, less because faculty have left and more because there has been an increase in the total number of full-time faculty as enrollment has increased by more than 33%.

Unwavering commitment to the mission and to quality programs has been essential in moving CETYS University

forward and to the next level. And linking these to KPIs and to dashboards for periodic and systematic reviews has been essential.

Acknowledging and not being shy about starting and operating as an institution that is still an enrollment driven institution allows all the relevant parties to view student recruitment, admission, enrollment, and retention as an essential function that does not begin and end with enrollment management but that is cross functional.

Making sure that leadership is seen and promoted across the different levels and hierarchies of the university as empowering others to move forward on behalf of CETYS has been crucial. This includes promoting evangelizers and champions of strategic initiatives and priorities.

Reinforcing the need to have and recognize progress based on information and KPIs has further moved the institution to be more data driven rather than on hunches, impressions, and opinions.

Making sure that there are mechanisms and processes whereby there is recognition of commitment, progress, and achievement is essential whether this is a certificate, a token of appreciation, a special ceremony, a note from the Office of the President, bonuses, promotions, ceremonies recognizing years of service, etc. - any and everything possible that will convey to the university community that they are a key and integral to the development and success of the institution.

Leadership development programs as well as faculty and staff development programs are all important components to ensure the necessary breadth and depth of talent that is required for the present and future of CETYS.

Establishing channels and conduits through which key areas of the institution come together for periodic and systematic

communication and information sharing works wonders in terms of conveying that we are all part of one big effort to serve students.

Keeping an eye on the annual budget and plans but with an outlook on the long term and long-range goals.

Personal Identity and Perception

Some colleagues have described my leadership at CETYS University as that of a President and a Poster Child. CETYS University has highlighted the fact that I am one of its graduates as well as an important part of the institution's development for many years. My identity as CETYS' first alumnus President figures prominently in student recruiting materials and diverse newsletters. My personal tie to the institution slides into conversation when I give interviews or field questions during presentations to CETYS faculty members, local town hall meetings or regional and national events. In some ways, this puts a face to a success story about CETYS University.

As someone who relied on several scholarships and various jobs at the university to pay for college, I occasionally stress, at relevant events, how these (working hard and scholarships) can be the path for others to move forward in life. Accordingly, raising and contributing money for scholarships and student experiences is something close to my heart. Roughly 8 out of every 10 students at CETYS receive some form of financial aid.

Given that at some point in time in the past, I was also involved in athletics and extracurricular activities, student development and student success are an important component of my leadership agenda.

Having been on the sides of planning as well as institutional advancement, I am equally comfortable presenting the vision of CETYS to business, industry, and government leaders, as well

as to faculty and to potential donors. In a team effort with the Board Chair and several other key Trustees, CETYS has been able to reach unprecedented levels of fund raising including the establishment of the first endowed fund, the most aggressive construction effort in the history of CETYS, achieving multiple donations of a million dollars each through multiannual pledges, and more recently the largest single donation in the history of CETYS.

As expressed in previous sections, my leadership espouses empowerment and a delegation of strategic roles, a belief in and relying on the strength of my leadership team, a focus on strategic priorities rather than minutia, promoting the notion of evangelizers across the institution for key initiatives, recognizing and rewarding progress and achievement, a preference for KPIs and data driven decisions, supporting leadership development of the those in core functions, an investment and belief in quality and quality improvement, and the synergy of CETYS across its 3 campuses rather than the strength of each campus on its own.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

- Know and show your commitment to the mission and quality of your institution. Link these to KPIs to dashboards for periodic and systematic reviews.
- As often as necessary, remind and reinforce across faculty and staff that the university exists to serve and support the development and success of students.
- Acknowledge and do not be shy about the importance of enrollment as an institutional priority and a cross functional task. Financial sustainability is based, to a great extent, on success in enrollment.
- Make sure that you empower others to help move the institution forward.

- Promote evangelizers and champions of strategic initiatives and priorities.
- Reinforce the need to have and recognize progress based on information and KPIs and being data driven rather than relying on hunches, impressions, and opinions.
- Ensure that there are mechanisms and processes whereby there is recognition of commitment, progress, and achievement at all levels whether this is a certificate, a token of appreciation, a special ceremony, a note from the Office of the President, bonuses, promotions, ceremonies recognizing years of service, etc. - any and everything possible that will convey to the university community that they are a key and integral to the development and success of the institution.
- Support leadership development programs as well as faculty and staff development programs as these are all important components to ensure the necessary breadth and depth of talent that is required for the present and future of your institution.
- Establish appropriate communication channels and conduits through which key areas of the institution come together for periodic and systematic sharing of information thereby creating a shared sense of community.
- With the appropriate engagement of the university community, establish a compelling and inspiring vision.
- Provide follow-up to the annual budget and plans but with an outlook on the long term and long-range goals.
- View and work with the Board of Trustees, and particularly the Board Chair as a team.
- As possible, have one or more colleagues who can serve as a sounding board or mentors for best practices, ideas, challenges and opportunities.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

If you have an aspiration or simple curiosity about whether leading an institution is in your nature and on the horizon, give yourself some time to learn about your strengths and weaknesses. Talk to sitting presidents about their experience. While you can rely on the philosophy of the strengthsfinder, which espouses and highlights your distinctiveness in a particular set of skills and/or experience, a leadership position in higher education will likely require more than your breadth of knowledge and reliance on the expertise of your team rather than your depth per se. Spend some time trying to work on improvement of your weak areas.

Variety and having a broad perspective provide you with a more peripheral vision and understanding.

Believe in yourself and avoid falling into the imposter syndrome trap.

If you have the time and can secure the necessary resources, participate in a leadership development program.

Assuming you have the necessary rapport and trust with your leaders, talk to them about your future plans. Whether or not this leads to opportunities within or outside your current institution, it will put you on the path of personal and professional growth and fulfillment.

Nurture key relationships within and outside your institution. Networking is a very powerful and far reaching tool for progression in higher education.

Share with your family and/or partner your plans. Their support will be essential in what is commonly a very lonely path or experience if not appropriately communicated and planned for.

If in the end you decide that the leadership of a college or university is not for you, you will have at least analyzed and

clarified that your priorities and fulfillment are elsewhere.

If your conclusion is that the leadership of a college or university is for you, make sure that you seek a reasonable institutional fit between the nature and context of the institution and your own profile.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

Although diversity in Mexico has been understood and promoted overwhelmingly from a gender perspective, it is only recently that diversity in a broader sense is being promoted and addressed. In general, until recently, the prevailing notion has been that we are all Mexicans (rather than Mexicans with an ethnically, country or sex preference-based distinction).

Accordingly, this section only reflects what has been done in terms of gender.

- Among the full-time faculty, 53% of the professoriate are women, with the Mexicali and Ensenada Campuses above that percent and the Tijuana Campus below said percent.
- Out of 4 Vice Presidents, 2 are women and 2 are men.
- Regarding the Campus Deans, 2 are men and 1 is a woman.
- Concerning the Deans of the systemwide colleges, 2 are women and 2 are men.
- With respect to Campus level Directors of Academic Affairs, 2 are women and 1 is a man.
- In terms of the initiative on succession planning for the top 25 roles and functions at CETYS University, close to two thirds are women.
- As part of said initiative, out of 6 internal candidates who have a profile for possible CETYS University Presidents in the future, 3 are women.
- Since 2019, out of 12 CETYS participants in IAUP seminars on leadership development 6 have been women.

Besides having a DEI statement for several years, in 2024 CETYS established the Center for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion which is intended to raise the level of awareness about DEI, promote workshops on sensitivity towards and more active role regarding DEI across the institution, and act as a channel or conduit to address any issues or problems concerning DEI.

RICARDO MAIRAL USÓN



Rector, Universidad Nacional de Educación a
Distancia
Spain

06

STRATEGIC FOCUS, RESILIENCE,
AND GLOBAL IMPACT.*Introducing My Institution*

The Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), for which I have the honor to preside, was established in 1972 and is Spain's premier public institution dedicated to distance learning. Headquartered in Madrid, it operates 61 study centers across all Spanish autonomous communities and maintains a global presence with 24 Centers in different countries of Europe, America and Africa.

The mission of UNED is to provide accessible, flexible, and quality higher education to a diverse student body, regardless of geographical location or personal circumstances. By leveraging distance learning methodologies, UNED aims to promote lifelong learning and equal opportunities in higher education.

The unique attributes of our university could be summarized in the following points:

- **Comprehensive Academic Offerings:** UNED offers a wide range of programs, including 30 official undergraduate degrees, 80 master's degrees, and 21 doctoral programs.

Fields of study encompass disciplines such as Physics, Chemistry, Computer Science, Engineering, Economics, Philology, Philosophy, History and Geography, Psychology, Political Science, Law, and Education.

- **Flexible Learning Modalities:** The university provides a blend of online and face-to-face sessions, accommodating students' varied needs. This hybrid approach allows learners to balance their studies with personal and professional commitments.
- **Inclusive Admission Policies:** UNED's open admission policy for undergraduate degrees, without grade cut-offs, enables a diverse range of students, including professionals and younger learners, to pursue higher education. Furthermore, we are the university that allows for 40% of the students with disabilities (approximately 8,000) in the whole Spanish system, as well as a great portion of the military and people in the correctional system. Regarding the latter, the UNED has signed agreements with the Ministry of Universities, the Ministry of Defense and the Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions so that interns that are deprived of liberty in correctional institutions are not deprived of the access to Higher Education for that matter.

Regarding the university priorities, the great challenge we are pursuing at the moment is ensuring financial support of our university; namely, to secure an agreement with the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities to obtain a long-term financial funding system (multiannual financial plan). Other than that, our current priorities focus on key goals such as internationalization, quality research, lifelong learning, technological advancement and inclusion.

As far as the international sphere is concerned, I am proud to say that we are the biggest campus in Europe and the

only Spanish university that has 24 Centers abroad, with an extensive capillarity that allows us to take our methodology and education “wherever you are”, as our motto says. Also, and very importantly, as of December 2024, the UNED is a key participant in the European project OpenEU, the European Alliance of Open Universities (ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV). This partnership focuses on modernizing higher education with an emphasis on lifelong learning, inclusivity, and digitalization. The alliance addresses global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and the promotion of democracy.

In the technological arena, the university is committed to enhancing its digital infrastructure to improve the distance learning experience for all. This includes developing a common virtual campus and recognized micro-credentials to facilitate continuous learning, upskilling, and employability.

We place a strong emphasis on quality research and on making higher education accessible to underrepresented groups, such as women in STEM fields, individuals with disabilities, residents of rural areas, and migrants. Efforts are therefore directed toward creating an inclusive learning environment that supports diverse student needs and success.

In particular, and considering the present complexity of the global situation, I am firmly convinced that we must foster knowledge and scientific rigor against any kind of dogmatism, hate speech or misinformation, these being so far away from the true values of academia. We undoubtedly must combat these negative issues, but at the same time remain optimistic, trying to search for balance in all our movements and decisions.

All in all, through all these initiatives the UNED continues to uphold its commitment to providing quality distance education and adapting to the evolving demands of the global educational landscape.

Leadership Tenure

I have served as President of the UNED for more than 6 years, and even if I have had to face many defining moments, the most challenging by far has been the management of the university affairs and in particular, the realization of the final exams during the COVID pandemic. This was an extremely tough situation, where we were obliged to provoke a change of paradigm, considering that our Statutes say that our final exams have to be carried out in situ at the UNED premises, and therefore they are normally conducted in person by our faculty and students in all our physical Centers in Spain and abroad. But on this occasion, we had to create, in fewer than three months, a system of on-line exams for more than 150,000 students, which would guarantee their quality and reliability. And I am proud to say that we succeeded in doing so, without any major complication being reported or experienced. However, I have to confess in all honesty that it was a very stressful situation that involved a great deal of previous work, effort and sleepless nights for the government team and the entire UNED community. Once the lockdown was over, we returned to our policy of in-person exams, and the online exam is now used on some occasions for practice on some subjects, but never for final exams.

Professional Journey

My path to the role of Rector of the UNED has been deeply rooted in both personal commitment and professional milestones, shaped significantly by previous roles and the challenges I faced during a pivotal period in Spain's economic history.

My previous tenure as Vice-Rector of Research was instrumental in developing my leadership skills. During this period, I worked tirelessly to foster innovation and collaboration across our

academic departments. Research is the cornerstone of any university's global contribution, and I prioritized creating opportunities for interdisciplinary projects, even in times of limited resources. This role also deepened my understanding of how knowledge production fuels societal progress, equipping me with the strategic vision required to guide our university through an era of rapid technological and educational transformation.

Subsequently, as Vice-Rector of Academic Staff, I was entrusted with the immense responsibility of managing one of UNED's most vital assets -its faculty. This position coincided with a period of financial austerity in Spain, requiring difficult decisions and careful negotiation to ensure academic quality was preserved despite budget constraints. I focused on supporting staff development, encouraging flexibility, and ensuring that morale and productivity remained strong under trying circumstances. This experience prepared me to make tough but empathic decisions that prioritize both institutional integrity and the well-being of our community.

These leadership roles were further complemented by my firm belief in the mission and impact of distance education. Through UNED, we provide access to quality education for students of all backgrounds, including those who might otherwise be excluded. My candidacy for Rector was deeply informed by these values and a vision for making education more inclusive, innovative, and globally competitive.

These experiences shaped me into a person who understands the inner workings of academic institutions and also the challenges and opportunities that come with managing them during times of crisis. They gave me the resilience, strategic foresight, and empathy necessary to serve as Rector and lead the UNED into a future. My desire is that it will continue to thrive as a beacon of accessible, high-quality education.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

First, I feel compelled to express my most profound recognition and respect for my predecessors, each of whom left an invaluable legacy that has shaped the institution into what it is today. As proof of this profound respect, one of the first events I organized as Rector was a meeting with the ten Professors that occupied the position of Rector of the UNED before me. Fortunately, at that time all of them were alive, and I had the honor and pleasure of being able to express my deep gratitude to them, because I firmly and honestly believe that gratitude has to be an inherent attribute in every leader. The efforts of my predecessor Rectors have laid the groundwork for UNED's global recognition as a pioneer in distance education. Thus, my approach is not to replace their contributions but to build upon them, bringing a perspective that is logically shaped by my own professional experiences and the challenges of our current global landscape.

If I am to think about the defining features of my tenure, I believe I can assert that one of them is my commitment to fostering dialogue and conciliation. We are living in a time of profound social, political, and economic upheaval worldwide. These “turbulent times,” as I often refer to them, demand leaders who prioritize unity and collaboration over division. My leadership is centered on creating spaces for open dialogue among faculty, staff, students, and external partners because I believe that the best solutions come from collective intelligence. I see myself as a bridge-builder, ensuring that every voice in our university community is heard and respected, even amidst disagreement. I aim to lead with a balance of pragmatism and optimism, ensuring that UNED survives and also thrives in a rapidly evolving educational and technological landscape.

My vision for UNED is one where education continues to be a unifying and transformative force.

Finally, my respect for my predecessors ensures that I approach this role with humility. I draw inspiration from their successes while striving to adapt to the unprecedented challenges of our time. In doing so, I aspire to leave a legacy of conciliation, innovation, and unity, ensuring that UNED remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for future generations.

Effective Leadership Strategies

At our university, as at many other institutions, successful leadership hinges on clear objectives, open dialogue, and measurable outcomes. As Rector, I have adopted strategies that emphasize not only consensus-building but also accountability and critical self-assessment. This dual approach ensures that we maintain a collaborative spirit while also driving tangible progress toward our goals.

One of the most effective strategies I have implemented is the development and communication of a robust Strategic Plan for 2022-2026. This plan is a cornerstone of my leadership. It is built on two essential pillars:

1. **Clarity and Measurability:** Unlike plans that remain vague or overly aspirational, the Strategic Plan sets out clearly defined objectives that are both qualitative and quantitative. These include specific goals for expanding access to education, enhancing digital infrastructure, improving student satisfaction rates, fostering internationalization, and increasing research output, among others. By making these objectives measurable, we ensure that progress is transparent and that success -or lack thereof- can be critically evaluated.

2. Continuous Evaluation and Reflection: To foster accountability, we have implemented mechanisms to assess our progress at regular intervals. This allows us to identify areas where we excel and those where improvement is needed. Such critical reflection not only strengthens our strategic approach but also ensures that our leadership remains flexible and responsive to challenges as they arise.

Further, I have tried to integrate data-driven decision-making into the institution's leadership culture. Whether evaluating student performance, faculty productivity or operational efficiency, decisions are grounded in empirical evidence. This has been instrumental in ensuring that our actions are effective and aligned with our strategic goals.

Last, I have focused on fostering a culture of shared management. Successful leadership is not about acting unilaterally but about empowering others to take ownership of their roles in achieving institutional success. A good leader delegates authority but not responsibility, and by delegating authority and providing the necessary resources, I have tried to cultivate a sense of collective commitment to our mission.

Personal Identity and Perception

As I have pointed out, my leadership style is deeply influenced by my belief in the power of dialogue, collaboration and group work, as well as by the unique identity and global reach of our institution. My background, experiences and values shape my approach to leadership, and I am fully aware that how others perceive and interact with me is directly tied to my ability to embody the mission and vision of the UNED as both a national and international university.

First and foremost, my belief in the diversity of opinions is at the heart of my leadership philosophy. I am convinced that

no single perspective or voice can capture the complexity of the challenges we face in higher education. For this reason, I approach leadership as a facilitator rather than a unilateral decision-maker, encouraging open dialogue and critical reflection. Whether shaping our Strategic Plan or addressing day-to-day challenges, I actively seek the input of diverse stakeholders -faculty, staff, students, and external partners- because as I previously remarked, I know that the best solutions emerge from collective work and intelligence.

Second, my awareness of UNED's global presence, with 61 centers across Spain and 24 centers on three continents, profoundly influences how I lead and how I aspire to be perceived. I see the UNED as a bridge between cultures and different knowledge fields, and I work to ensure that this identity is reflected in every decision we make. As a leader, I prioritize initiatives that strengthen our international partnerships, promote multilingual education and multidisciplinary as much as possible, and celebrate the diversity of our students, faculty, and staff. By embracing this global identity, I aim to reinforce the perception of UNED as not just a Spanish institution, but a leading example of multicultural and international education, especially now that we form part of the European Alliance of Open Universities (OpenEU), which includes not only ten European universities as full members, but also four other universities as associated partners, four university associations and eight non-academic partners from different countries (industrial associations, digital networks, city and rural groups, and mentorship associations).

In this context, I am particularly mindful of how others perceive me in this role. I aspire to be seen not only as a steward of UNED's rich academic traditions but also as a forward-thinking leader who embraces innovation and collaboration. I strive for

my leadership to be defined by openness, transparency and humility, qualities that I believe help foster trust and mutual respect among the university community and our global partners.

In sum, my background and beliefs drive me to position UNED as a university that embodies unity through diversity. In an increasingly interconnected world, I see the UNED as a model for how education can transcend barriers, borders, languages, and cultures. My goal is for others to perceive and interact with me as a leader who represents the shared values of our institution: inclusiveness, collaboration, and a commitment to excellence on both the national and international stage.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

Based on my experiences as Rector, my advice to other presidents/rectors/chancellors is to approach their roles with a mindset rooted in humility, active listening, and a clear vision. Leadership in academia is not about dictating from the top but about guiding an institution through collaboration, respect for diverse perspectives, and unwavering commitment to the values of knowledge and science. Here are the key principles I would share:

- 1. Practice active listening and respect for all opinions:** A successful leader understands that the strength of an institution lies in the collective wisdom of its community. Actively listening to faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders fosters trust and ensures that decisions are informed by diverse viewpoints. Even in moments of disagreement, respecting all opinions cultivates an environment of inclusivity and shared ownership, which is vital for institutional success.
- 2. Embrace humility and gratitude:** As academics, we stand before the immense and ever-expanding fields of

knowledge and science with humility. This perspective is essential for any scholar. Recognizing the limits of our own expertise allows us to value and be grateful for the contributions of others and reminds us that leadership is a collaborative journey. Humility also ensures that we remain open to learning and adaptable to the evolving needs of our institutions.

3. **Foster respect and dialogue:** Respect and dialogue are the cornerstones of academic leadership, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. In moments of tension, it is the leader's responsibility to create spaces where constructive conversations can take place, bridging divides and finding common ground. The ability to engage in meaningful dialogue, even with those who hold differing views, is essential to maintaining unity and fostering progress.
4. **Define a clear vision and path forward:** Leadership requires clarity of purpose. As Rector of my university, I have found that defining where I want to take the institution—and communicating this vision effectively—has been crucial. A clear and actionable plan provides a roadmap for the future, aligns efforts across the institution, and inspires confidence in the direction we are heading. This vision must be rooted in the institution's mission while also being adaptive to the changing global landscape.
5. **Advocate for the values of science and knowledge:** Above all, academic leaders must champion the values of science and knowledge as the foundation of progress and societal betterment. Upholding academic integrity, encouraging critical thinking, and fostering innovation are responsibilities that extend beyond the university to society at large. As leaders, we must be advocates for education as a transformative force that addresses global

challenges and promotes equity and opportunity.

Pithily, my advice to other academic leaders is to lead with humility, openness, and a steadfast commitment to the values of science and knowledge. By listening actively, fostering dialogue, respecting diverse opinions, and defining a clear vision for their institutions, they will surely be able to navigate the complexities of academic leadership and ensure that their universities thrive as centers of excellence and inclusion.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

To individuals aspiring to become presidents/rectors/chancellors, my advice would center on thorough preparation, cultivating the right mindset, and prioritizing collaboration. Leadership in academia is a unique challenge that requires a combination of institutional knowledge, management experience, and the ability to inspire and unify diverse teams. Based on my journey to becoming Rector of the UNED, here are the key recommendations I would share:

- 1. Develop a deep understanding of the institution and its governance:** One of the most important steps in preparing for academic leadership is gaining comprehensive knowledge of the institution you aspire to lead. Understanding its mission, values, structure, and governance processes is essential. Familiarize yourself with how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how the institution interacts with external stakeholders. At UNED, where our governance spans national and international centers, having this knowledge has been indispensable in aligning leadership with the needs of the community and the broader context.
- 2. Build strong experience in management:** Leadership requires more than academic credentials—it demands

practical management experience. Seek roles that give you responsibility for budgets, personnel, and decision-making, as these will prepare you to handle the complex operational aspects of leading a large institution. In my case, my previous roles as Vice-Rector of Research and Vice-Rector of Academic Staff helped me develop the strategic thinking and resource-management skills necessary to lead effectively. Look for opportunities to manage teams, projects, and resources, and try to learn and find the positive outcome not only from successes, but also from failures.

3. **Prioritize teamwork and collaboration:** Leadership is not a solo endeavor; it is a team effort. A successful leader surrounds themselves with talented, dedicated individuals and empowers them to contribute to the institution's goals. Recognize that the success of any project, whether strategic planning, research initiatives, or operational improvements, depends on group work and collaboration. Cultivate the ability to bring people together, foster mutual respect, and encourage shared ownership of decisions. Building trust and a culture of teamwork will be the foundation of your success.
4. **Adopt a growth-oriented and resilient mindset:** Leading an academic institution is both challenging and rewarding. To succeed, you must approach the role with a mindset that balances ambition and resilience. Be prepared for difficult decisions, moments of uncertainty, and the need to navigate competing priorities. At the same time, embrace challenges as opportunities for growth, both personally and for the institution. Maintain a focus on long-term goals and remain adaptable to change.
5. **Engage with the broader academic and policy landscape:** Aspiring leaders must also understand the broader

trends affecting higher education—both nationally and internationally. Whether it is advancements in digital learning, shifts in funding models, or evolving societal needs, being informed about the external context allows you to position your institution for success. At UNED, our presence across three continents demands a global perspective, and I have found that staying engaged with international networks and policy discussions has been invaluable.

In summary, preparation for academic leadership requires a deep understanding of the institution, practical management experience and a collaborative mindset. Success comes from leading with honesty and integrity, building strong teams, and embracing challenges with resilience and a clear vision for the future. If you aspire to lead, approach the role with humility, a commitment to service, and an unwavering dedication to the mission of education and knowledge.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

At the UNED, supporting women and individuals from underrepresented groups is a fundamental priority, deeply embedded in our values and initiatives. We recognize that achieving equality and fostering diversity are not only moral imperatives but also essential to the advancement of knowledge and the enrichment of our academic community. To this end, we have implemented a range of policies, programs, and initiatives to actively promote gender equality and inclusiveness:

- 1. Our commitment to the Equality Plan:** Our university has recently published its second Equality Plan, which outlines concrete measures to promote gender equality across all levels of the institution. This plan serves as a

roadmap for eliminating glass ceilings and all barriers to equality, including actions related to recruitment, career advancement, and work-life balance. It reflects our unwavering commitment to building a university community where everyone has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their gender or background.

2. **The Equality Office:** Our Equality Office is at the heart of these efforts, working tirelessly to monitor progress, implement initiatives, and provide support to those who experience inequality. This office acts as a resource for faculty, staff, and students, ensuring that issues related to discrimination or gender bias are addressed effectively and that our policies promote a culture of inclusion and respect.
3. **Education and research on equality:** UNED's academic offerings include a Master's Degree in Gender Equality, which equips students with the theoretical and practical tools to address gender disparities in society. In addition to this, we organize numerous courses, workshops, and research activities on equality, encouraging academic inquiry and public discussion on this crucial topic. These efforts underscore our belief that education is one of the most powerful tools for driving societal change.
4. **The Elisa Pérez Vera Award:** One of our most prestigious initiatives is the Elisa Pérez Vera Award, named in honor of not only UNED's but also Spain's first female Rector. This annual award is a trailblazer in the pursuit of equality, recognizing outstanding academic work on gender equality and women's rights, and highlighting the critical contributions of scholars to this field. By celebrating and rewarding these efforts, we not only honor Elisa Pérez Vera's legacy but also inspire others to continue advancing

equality through research and action.

5. **Leadership by example:** At UNED, we lead by example. More than 60% of the members of the university's government team are women, demonstrating our commitment to gender balance in leadership positions. This reflects our determination to create pathways for women to rise to the highest levels of responsibility and influence, breaking traditional barriers and reshaping the landscape of leadership in higher education.
6. **Support for underrepresented groups:** Beyond gender equality, UNED is committed to supporting individuals from all underrepresented groups. We actively work to ensure that our policies, academic programs, and research initiatives address the needs of marginalized communities. Our inclusive approach extends to fostering diversity among our students, faculty, and staff, recognizing that diverse perspectives are essential to academic excellence and innovation.

Through these efforts, the UNED is proud to be at the forefront of promoting equality, inclusion, and diversity in higher education. We view this not only as a responsibility but as an opportunity to shape a more just and equitable society. By providing resources, education, recognition and opportunities, we are actively empowering women and individuals from underrepresented groups to reach their full potential and to lead in their fields.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Rector of the Spanish Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, I am deeply committed to fostering a leadership style that reflects the values of collaboration, inclusivity, and a clear vision for the future. Drawing on my experiences and preparation, I have sought to create a culture

of dialogue, respect, and critical reflection, ensuring that all voices within our diverse academic community are heard and valued. Through strategic planning, measurable goals, and data-driven decision-making, we continue to align our efforts with UNED's mission as a leader in accessible, multicultural, and multilingual education.

Our dedication to promoting equality and diversity is evident in initiatives such as the Equality Plan, the work of our Equality Office, our Master's Degree in Gender Equality, and the prestigious Elisa Pérez Vera Award, which honors exceptional contributions to gender studies. With over 60% of our government team composed of women, we demonstrate that leadership in academia must be representative and inclusive.

To those aspiring to academic leadership, I emphasize the importance of humility, respect, active listening, and a deep understanding of one's institution. Leadership is a collective endeavor, rooted in teamwork and collaboration. It is only through the shared commitment of our university community that we can uphold the values of science, knowledge, and equality, positioning UNED as a beacon of excellence on both the national and international stage.

GONZALO MENDIETA



Rector, Universidad de Las Americas
Ecuador

07

LEADING THROUGH DATA AND DIVERSITY.

Introducing My Institution

Universidad de Las Américas (UDLA) stands as a leading private higher education institution in Ecuador. Founded in 1995, UDLA has rapidly evolved into the country's largest private university, distinguished by an innovative educational model focused on comprehensive student development.

What began as a focused academic portfolio in business administration, communication, and technology has expanded to include diverse fields such as medicine and health science, engineering, law, culinary arts, architecture, and music. Today, UDLA operates several campus locations in Quito featuring state-of-the-art infrastructure and specialized laboratories. Our main campus, UDLA Park, spans over 65,000 square meters with EDGE Advanced certification for sustainability. Additional campuses include Granados, Colón (specializing in dental health sciences), and our experimental farm in Nono (46 hectares dedicated to agricultural sciences, veterinary medicine, and sustainability research).

The university's mission centers on "forming competent and

entrepreneurial professionals with an international-global vision, committed to society and based on ethical principles and values.” Our core values include academic freedom, pursuit of excellence, innovation, humanism, respect, integrity, resilience, inclusion, and environmental respect.

In 2019, UDLA achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first Ecuadorian university to receive international accreditation from the WASC Senior College and University Commission. Currently, we hold the most international accreditations among private universities in Ecuador, including ABET for engineering programs, COMAEM for medicine, and accreditations from the Chilean Accreditation Agency and ACBSP for business programs.

Our academic community comprises over 20,000 students supported by more than 1,600 professors, UDLA has graduated over 36,000 professionals, with impressive employment outcomes.

The university maintains a strong commitment to research, ranking among Ecuador’s top three universities in scientific production. Through innovative initiatives in education, research, international partnerships, and sustainability, UDLA continues to advance its position as a leading institution of higher learning.

Leadership Tenure

I have served as Rector of UDLA since 2019, following six years as Academic Vice Rector. My journey in higher education leadership spans over three decades, including roles as Dean of Academic Affairs at Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, and deanships across disciplines including Medicine, Technology, and Hospitality.

The defining moments of my tenure have revolved around three key achievements: international accreditation, research advancement, and institutional resilience.

The most significant milestone was successfully leading UDLA

through the WSCUC accreditation process, making us the first Ecuadorian university to receive this international recognition. Another defining achievement has been the remarkable growth in research productivity, with UDLA rising to become one of Ecuador's top three universities in scientific production. This transformation from a primarily teaching-focused institution to one that balances teaching with impactful research represents a fundamental shift in our identity.

Additionally, successfully navigating the institution through the global pandemic demonstrated our resilience. By implementing innovative approaches to educational delivery while maintaining financial sustainability, we ensured continuity and quality during unprecedented challenges.

My leadership approach emphasizes data-driven methodologies reflecting my background as a statistician, while building collaborative relationships with stakeholders. I currently serve as Representative for Private Universities to Ecuador's Council of Higher Education, President of the Association of Private Universities of Ecuador, and Board Member of the International Association of University Presidents.

Professional Journey

My path to university leadership has been characterized by a willingness to accept diverse challenges, allowing me to develop a comprehensive understanding of higher education from multiple perspectives. Rather than following a conventional linear trajectory, my career has involved both vertical advancement and strategic horizontal moves across different academic and administrative domains.

One of the most formative experiences was serving as the interim Dean of the School of Culinary Arts, a position distant from my statistical expertise. During this tenure, I led a curriculum

transformation by integrating theory and practice through the establishment of a professional restaurant and bakery where students applied their learning under academic supervision. This innovative model proved so successful that other universities across Ecuador have since replicated it.

Similarly, serving as Interim Dean of the College of Medicine expanded my understanding of diverse academic ecosystems. These experiences outside my discipline showed how an external perspective can overcome entrenched barriers to innovation. Coming from outside the disciplinary tradition allowed me to question assumptions and introduce new approaches when faced with the common obstacle: “this is how we’ve always done it.”

After completing my doctoral degree in the United States, I began my academic career at a public university in the US. This international experience provided a valuable perspective on different models of higher education. Beyond academia, my experience as CEO of a market research company enhanced my understanding of organizational management and data-driven decision-making in practical contexts.

The culmination of these experiences led to my appointment as Rector of UDLA in 2019. My path illustrates that there is no single route to university presidency; rather, it is the breadth of experiences and willingness to embrace challenges that best prepares one for the multifaceted demands of institutional leadership.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

UDLA has been led by only three presidents throughout its history, with each leadership transition marking a distinct phase in the university’s development. Until 2007, UDLA was a small private institution with programs primarily in law, business

and design. The leadership transition that year initiated rapid expansion, with many new programs added and the student population growing fivefold.

When I joined as Academic Vice Rector in 2013, I brought a distinctively different focus to leadership. Rather than continuing to emphasize growth alone, I concentrated on strengthening the university's academic reputation—a fundamental shift from expansion to consolidation and quality enhancement.

My distinctive approach has been characterized by three key elements:

First, I initiated an aggressive hiring campaign for full-time faculty with advanced degrees and research credentials. This shift from a primarily adjunct model to one with dedicated full-time academics created a stronger foundation for academic excellence.

Second, I developed a comprehensive research initiative that transformed UDLA's identity. My leadership approach emphasized that research excellence and teaching quality should be complementary rather than competing priorities, resulting in UDLA's recognition as one of Ecuador's leading research institutions.

Third, I brought a strong commitment to international standards through accreditation.

Perhaps most distinctively, my leadership philosophy has balanced ambition with sustainability. While maintaining the growth trajectory, I've focused on financial sustainability to pursue academic quality and institutional resilience—an approach that proved invaluable during the pandemic when many rapidly-expanded institutions faced difficulties.

Through these contributions, UDLA was transformed from a growth-oriented teaching institution to a comprehensive university with significant research output and international

recognition.

Effective Leadership Strategies

Throughout my career, I've developed strategies that have proven effective in fostering institutional success and innovation. Central to this philosophy is a collaborative approach that empowers colleagues to take ownership of their ideas and responsibilities.

I consistently find that allowing colleagues to come forward with their own initiatives yields remarkable results. Viewing those under my leadership primarily as peers rather than subordinates encourages them to take both initiative and responsibility for their teams and projects. This distributed leadership creates a more agile, responsive organization.

This philosophy proved particularly effective during our institutional accreditation process. By trusting team members with significant autonomy, we developed a comprehensive self-assessment that led to success. Similarly, empowering research leaders to organize themselves was key to developing an efficient and sustainable research model.

I recognize this approach occasionally has failures. When initiatives don't succeed, I maintain awareness that ultimate responsibility remains with me. This balance between delegating authority and accepting accountability creates an environment where innovation can flourish without fear of failure.

My leadership philosophy was shaped by a football coach who used to say, "We have a plan for the game, now it's your turn to play." His wisdom that "the wins are ours; the losses are mine, and as for the draws—who knows" has guided how I distribute credit and responsibility. By celebrating collective successes while shouldering the burden of setbacks, I've fostered a culture of experimentation and continuous improvement.

Having worked under leaders who trusted me with new ideas, I'm committed to creating similar opportunities for those I now lead.

Personal Identity and Perception

My upbringing has fundamentally shaped my leadership style. I was raised to embrace the possibility of failure—it was always better to try and fail than not to try at all—while understanding that failure should never result from insufficient effort. This duality continues to influence my approach to leadership.

As Rector, I encourage my team to explore different approaches without fear of failure, emphasizing that while success has merits, failure often presents the greatest learning opportunities. This perspective has fostered an institutional culture that values innovation and calculated risk-taking, essential for transformation.

My fascination with mathematics and science led me to pursue degrees in statistics, establishing a foundation for decision-making rooted in critical thinking and evidence. This analytical background—uncommon among university presidents, who typically come from fields like law, business, or humanities—offers a distinctive lens for examining institutional challenges, particularly valuable in today's data-rich environment.

In a recent conversation with fellow university executives, we reflected that none of us had planned administrative careers when completing our doctoral studies. Yet we found ourselves in leadership positions because we were willing to step outside our comfort zones at critical junctures—reinforcing another core value from my upbringing: leading by example.

This combination of analytical thinking and personal authenticity shapes how others perceive my leadership. Former colleagues often characterize my style as “firm but gentle,” suggesting I've balanced high expectations with empathy and support.

My international academic experience has given me a global outlook, positioning me as a bridge between Ecuadorian higher education traditions and global educational practices.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

While each institutional context presents unique challenges, my tenure in Ecuador has taught me valuable lessons that may resonate with fellow university leaders.

As both former provost and now rector, I've navigated profound changes in Ecuador's higher education landscape, including constant regulatory shifts and challenges to private institutions. Success in such circumstances comes through patience and open communication—especially with those holding different perspectives. No gap may be bridged without establishing and maintaining communication channels.

The fragmentation of traditional orders globally brings new complexities to higher education. Some even suggest the possibility of extinction for traditional universities, while the emergence of artificial intelligence adds further uncertainty.

Amidst these challenges, university leaders must remember our fundamental purpose as knowledge creators and educators. Education is every time less and less about knowledge transmission and ever more about creating environments where students develop durable skills and become lifelong learners capable of adapting to whatever future awaits.

This vision requires several leadership approaches:

First, maintain focus on your institution's mission and values. External pressures may push toward short-term reactions, but mission-aligned decisions prove more sustainable. If we hold fast to our mission, we'll find a way forward even in challenging circumstances.

Second, cultivate strategic patience. Higher education

transformation occurs over years, not months. Maintaining consistent direction while adapting tactics to changing conditions is essential for institutional stability.

Third, build robust communication networks within and beyond your institution. In uncertain times, transparent communication becomes critical, including regular engagement with all stakeholders.

Finally, invest in developing the next generation of academic leaders. Creating pathways for talented faculty and administrators ensures institutional sustainability and brings fresh perspectives to ongoing challenges.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

For those aspiring to university leadership, I offer advice based on both successes and missteps throughout my career. The path to university presidency is rarely linear—few of us envisioned this trajectory when beginning our academic careers.

First, develop a strong foundation in your discipline. Excellence in scholarship and teaching creates credibility and provides analytical frameworks that serve well in leadership.

Second, seek opportunities to lead at various levels within your institution. Whether chairing committees, directing programs, or serving as a department chair, these experiences provide crucial insights into university operations. Each role I've held has provided unique perspectives that inform my work as rector.

Third, cultivate institutional thinking rather than departmental. Leadership requires expanding your perspective to consider how decisions affect the entire university ecosystem, understanding interconnections between academic affairs, student life, finance, and external relations.

Fourth, develop comfort with calculated risk-taking. Leadership often requires making decisions with incomplete information,

balancing innovation with institutional stability.

Fifth, build your emotional intelligence. Technical competence alone is insufficient; the ability to understand perspectives, manage conflict constructively, and inspire collaborative action is fundamental to university leadership.

Sixth, commit to continuous learning about higher education beyond your institution. Engage with national and international organizations to understand broader contexts and distinguish between institution-specific challenges and sector-wide trends.

Finally, remember that presidency is not an achievement but a position of service to an institution's mission. Effective leaders find fulfillment not in the title but in advancing the institution's impact on education, research, and society.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

Two extraordinary women have significantly influenced my understanding of gender equality and approach to inclusive leadership. The first is my mother, whose teenage ambition to become an engineer was thwarted in Ecuador of the early 1950s when engineering was virtually closed to women. She became a high school mathematics teacher in all-girls public schools, sharing at our dinner table stories of prejudices she encountered when encouraging female students to pursue higher education, particularly in STEM fields. Her dedication extended beyond the classroom—she often visited families of promising students to persuade reluctant parents to support their daughters' academic aspirations. Through these experiences, I learned that addressing inequality requires not just awareness but concrete action.

The second influential figure is my wife, who was among the few women to study mathematics at our university, becoming the only woman in her cohort by the end of the first year. Sharing courses

with her, I witnessed the differential treatment she received from predominantly male faculty. Her determination earned respect, and she graduated as the first woman mathematician in Ecuador, later becoming the first woman Dean of Engineering and first woman Provost at her institution.

These examples have fueled my commitment to promoting diversity and advancement in all positions that I have held from the classroom to the rectorate. At UDLA, this materialized when I became Academic Vice Rector through an extensive faculty hiring plan with dual goals: recruiting highest quality academics while achieving gender parity. What initially seemed challenging proved straightforward with unbiased selection processes. Today, UDLA has been recognized by Times Higher Education as the top university in Ecuador for gender equality.

My advocacy extends beyond UDLA through participation in national and international higher education organizations, advocating for systematic changes to make academia more accessible and equitable. University leaders have a special responsibility to model the inclusive excellence we hope to see in society more broadly.

JUAN CAMILO MONTOYA



President, Universidad Autónoma de
Bucaramanga
Colombia

08

TRANSFORMING THROUGH
STRATEGIC RENEWAL.*Introducing My Institution*

The Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga - UNAB, located in the city of Bucaramanga (Colombia), is a private non-profit institution recognized for its academic excellence, innovation, and commitment to regional and national development. It was founded in 1952, initially as a primary and secondary education school, based on the principles of freedom, autonomy, and democracy, at a time when Colombia did not offer educational alternatives that were autonomous and independent from the state or the Catholic Church. That school, Instituto Caldas, grew over time, and in 1969 the institution began offering higher education undergraduate programs, starting with Business Administration and later adding Law, Public Accounting, and Social Communication.

Today, we can affirm that we are an organization that provides high-quality educational services at all levels, from the preschool level at Instituto Caldas all the way through doctoral programs offered by UNAB. In total, we offer 107 higher education programs approved by the Government of Colombia, and UNAB

has held Institutional Accreditation of High Quality since 2012 and is currently valid until 2029.

All of our programs serve nearly 9,000 students in higher education with about 775 professors. Since 1952, Instituto Caldas has grown consistently and today serves around 1.000 students and, in our region, is recognized for its quality and affordability.

In recent years, especially after the pandemic, we undertook an important strategic process that allowed us to build a clear value proposition, make significant adjustments to our organizational structure, and develop clarity and discipline, based on the Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) methodology (Book: “Measure What Matters” - John Doerr).

Our five value attributes are:

1. Institutional Philosophy
2. “Educational Highways”
3. Knowledge Generation for Regional Development with a Global Vision
4. Access Alternatives
5. Unique Higher Education Experience.

After this process we firmly believe that effective action around these attributes, with tangible benefits for our students and other stakeholders, will make UNAB a relevant and distinctive institution with a long-term vocation of positive influence in Colombia.

Our current priorities, related to the aforementioned attributes, are focused on areas such as:

1. Expansion, modernization, and transformation of our academic programs portfolio, striving for greater flexibility for students in terms of emphases (minors), educational modalities, and possibilities for articulation across different levels of education.

2. Offering various financing and access alternatives for our students through short and medium term loans, income contingent loans, and scholarships enabled by our philanthropy efforts and new institutional advancement capabilities.
3. Strengthening academic and research capabilities of our professors through various instruments, aiming to focus research projects on the social, economic, competitive, environmental, and political development priorities of northeastern Colombia.
4. Modernizing our physical and technological infrastructure across all campuses through Technology and Infrastructure Plans that allow us to prioritize new projects and better utilize our current infrastructure.
5. Diversifying income by developing alternative investments in businesses related to higher education, seeking to strengthen our long-term financial sustainability. Likewise, operational growth in primary and secondary education is also of interest to our institution.

Leadership Tenure

I took office in December 2018, after serving on the Board of Directors for six years. My professional background was not in academia but rather in executive leadership (CEO) roles within business associations such as ANDI (Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia) and the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce, as well as companies in industries such as the construction, mining and private equity.

My selection as UNAB Rector by the Board aimed to drive a generational transition at the university, following the Board of Directors and the General Assembly's approval of corporate governance measures that encouraged the retirement of

individuals already receiving pensions and adopted other ethical standards to prevent conflicts of interest. Moreover, at that time there was a need for leadership more strongly focused on the university's competitive strategy and ensuring financial sustainability after the completion of a national government demand-subsidy program, "Ser Pilo Paga". Through this program UNAB, between 2014 and 2018, enrolled about 35% more students than the average. The growth in revenue generated by that program overshadowed the need to strengthen various capabilities and the need for tighter control over the institution's overall spending.

The year 2019 was challenging due to the start of the generational transition in senior leadership positions and the budget deficit we had to tackle beginning in February, resulting from a poor outcome in undergraduate enrollment. In general, the university had grown accustomed to rising demand, which also led to higher spending and an inertia that was not sustainable in this new context.

That fiscal year closed with a deficit that was not as large as it might have been, thanks to austerity measures we managed to adopt in collaboration with the new Administrative and Financial Vice Rector, who had experience in higher education and was selected for the job in July 2019 with the help of a search firm.

In 2020, we began with a significant focus on austerity, basing our annual budget on a stricter approach. The undergraduate enrollment campaign fared better than anticipated, thanks to increased involvement from all the deans and program directors. The entire team had to contribute to this effort, not just the Promotion and Marketing group.

And of course, as it happened worldwide, everything changed in March 2020 with the onset of the Covid pandemic. After a few intense weeks, which resulted in a successful transition to

remote teaching and learning, the university's financial situation called us to make decisions to reduce personnel expenses in both academic and administrative areas. We did so with the support of the Board of Directors and the direct involvement of the deans and heads of administrative departments.

Looking back, I believe that my previous executive experience was crucial at that time for recognizing the need to act immediately and send a clear signal to the entire institution regarding the necessity of operating efficiently and initiating a strategy and transformation process—especially given the university's low cash reserves at that point and the end of public programs supporting demand.

The pandemic, coupled with the gradual return to normal operations during 2021, ultimately strengthened the university's finances, allowing us to begin processes of strategic reflection and action, as well as investments in physical and technological infrastructure. In order to bolster our financial position and create cash reserves for growth projects and be better prepared for future tough times, we created an endowment with very clear guidelines and an Executive Committee of experts to oversee its resources responsibly.

This positive story of strengthening was nonetheless marked by the pain of losing several members of UNAB's academic and leadership team, including the Chairman of the Board of Directors, with whom I had a close personal and professional relationship.

In addition to being painful for everyone, that moment was significant as it did not create a disruption in the university governance. The Board of Directors unanimously appointed as chairman the member who was serving as vice chair, and we were able to continue in a spirit of unity to protect and strengthen the institution for the long term.

Professional Journey

My academic background in business at the undergraduate level (Universidad de los Andes) and graduate level (MBA, American University), along with my professional track record in business associations and CEO in notable regional companies, afforded me a broad perspective on the region, the country, and the world.

An enterprise-focused vision of organizations in general, a clear understanding of the importance of comprehending markets to compete successfully, and my strong interest in regional business development and competitiveness have, in my opinion, been extremely valuable in my role as Rector.

My experience as Executive President of the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce and Regional Manager of ANDI (Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia), as well as CEO of prominent companies in the region, gave me the opportunity to understand regional challenges related to competitiveness, human talent development, and improving local government.

Additionally, in nearly all of my previous leadership positions, I stepped into those roles after they were held for many years by another executive. In that sense, the challenge of initiating a transformation at UNAB and leading a team that needed renewal and alignment with a new strategy was not unfamiliar to me, even though the university's leadership environment itself was new.

At UNAB, I found a Board of Directors deeply committed to the institution, with no internal power struggles, and offering full support for a leadership approach that was bound to be challenging and whose results would take some time to materialize.

My previous experience has also been very helpful in building

a diverse network of contacts that are now useful in my role as Rector.

Finally, the experiences I had leading corporate and competitive strategy processes in those business associations and private companies prepared me to propose the strategic and transformative process we are now undertaking at UNAB.

I am convinced that UNAB needed a shift toward a far more concrete and rigorous strategic process that would clarify for the team the choices to make. Our goal is to remain relevant in the markets in which we compete, without compromising the university's nature, its founding principles, or its active commitment to freedom, autonomy, and democracy.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

So far, my primary focus has been to lead a transformation process for the entire organization, grounded in understanding the capabilities built over recent decades, and developing greater clarity and strategic discipline at both the corporate and competitive levels. Guided by that strategy—seeking to define our differential attributes within a value proposition—we have realigned the organizational structure in critical processes, driven generational renewal, modernized the program portfolio, and launched a capacity-building process for research, creation, and innovation. In summary, I have been in constant pursuit of consistency in decision-making and the development of stronger leadership and management skills among the entire leadership team.

At the same time, we have strengthened the university's finances by improving our promotion and marketing capabilities, controlling expenses, and prioritizing infrastructure investments based on our infrastructure plan. Our financial control measures allowed us to build a healthy cash position and create an

endowment to accumulate reserves, enabling the university to make bigger investments and address unexpected risks.

My focus has been on preparing the organization better to respond to the needs of the regional environment and to establish the capabilities that will allow UNAB to endure sustainably over the long term.

We are a relatively young university that started offering higher education programs in 1969. My predecessors (two rectors over the previous 40 years) focused on growing undergraduate and graduate programs, building campuses, and developing the fundamental academic capacities of a regional university primarily dedicated to undergraduate and graduate professional education.

Between 1995 and 2005, the institution solidified these efforts through its first national quality accreditations for undergraduate programs and later achieved institutional accreditation in 2012. In 1997, the School of Health was founded, substantially increasing the university's size. Significant innovations were also introduced with technical and technological programs and new modalities such as online and dual, the latter based on the German model. These innovative approaches, at the time they were introduced, have greatly influenced our current strategy, which aims for an increasingly flexible program portfolio that integrates multiple levels of education and modalities.

My leadership style has also been based on fostering greater closeness and ongoing communication with our stakeholders. I like open and direct conversations to understand the challenges faced by students, faculty, and staff at UNAB. I also frequently communicate with the entire community about progress, achievements, and challenges we face as an institution. Although being accessible and having open communication with all our stakeholders should not be surprising in a positive leadership

approach, in our case it does represent a contrast with previous rectors whose leadership styles were more traditional and hierarchical.

Effective Leadership Strategies

After six years as Rector, and after several conversations with members of my team, with the following five points I could summarize the main areas of management and leadership I have pursued:

Leadership based on ongoing conversation and approachability, aiming to build shared purposes that guide our reflection, execution, and accountability.

Empowerment of a team that is empathetic, resilient, and supportive, which faced and overcame the pandemic amid painful human losses, thanks to innovation and the effective use of educational and technological capacities already in place within the organization.

Internal strategic clarity, focused on the external environment and the market, enabling us gradually to become a more modern university with a strong organizational culture, a vocation for lasting impact, and the ability to adapt to global educational trends.

A vocation for regional and national service aimed at generating the greatest positive impact. To this end, we have developed deeper relationships with the surrounding community—fostering regional competitiveness, social innovation, and culture through increased research and outreach activities financed with external resources.

Financial strengthening achieved through managing for sustainable growth and a shared responsibility in the efficient use of resources, seeking to reinvest as much as possible to bolster our human talent, modernize and expand infrastructure

(both physical and technological), and save for future challenges and long-term goals.

In many aspects of the strategic process and management, we have relied on the Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) methodology. This approach has allowed us to articulate our aspirations and goals while also defining the specific intermediate actions that will help us achieve them. Its implementation has been a constant learning process and, at times, challenging for many academic leaders who were not familiar with management and tracking tools. Day-to-day operations supported by OKRs and the definition of the university's value proposition have helped many academic leaders develop stronger leadership and management skills.

Additionally, as I mentioned earlier, listening to the community through various forums—such as “Café con Juan Camilo”—has created closer connections and the possibility of open, constructive dialogue between the Rector and the university's diverse stakeholders.

Personal Identity and Perception

In particular, I would highlight two main aspects: (1) the deep connection between my paternal family and the region, as well as with UNAB; and (2) my professional background, which has combined leading business organizations that promote regional development and competitiveness—always rooted in a professional yet close, straightforward, and open relationship with every collaborator.

Regarding the first aspect, I believe my identity includes a special family trait of strong ties, hard work, and interest in the economic and social development of my region (the State of Santander and the city of Bucaramanga). For decades, my parents and my paternal family have demonstrated this regional

commitment through their work in business, public service, civic, and trade association activities. With respect to UNAB, which is governed by a broad and diverse group of regional citizens and leaders, my paternal family has maintained a close relationship with the university's growth and governance from its founding until its more recent history—first through my grandfather who was part of the founder group, and later through an uncle who served as Rector for 20 years in two separate terms.

As for the second aspect, my knowledge of the local context allows me to have a broad perspective on social and economic development, enabling me to see how UNAB can become more than a traditional university and gradually evolve into a more powerful and influential development agent in areas of interest to the community that fit with our academic capabilities.

In this regard and given that I do not have a background as a professor or researcher, I strive to remain open and respectful on academic matters, which are led by the Provost, the Deans, and our faculty. The combination of (1) a broad perspective on regional development, (2) the need for a modern, focused, and sustainable university, and (3) the high-quality academic and research vision, allows us to maintain an open and balanced dialogue that I believe benefits the institution's long-term future.

As for how my leadership is perceived, I believe people appreciate my friendly, unassuming, and executive style, which seeks solutions and acts swiftly when facing the various challenges we encounter on a daily basis.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

My main tips and recommendations would be the following:

Care for and strengthen the working relationship with the Board of Directors through transparent interactions, focusing on agreeing upon the institution's overarching vision and

transformative initiatives. In that regard, it is essential to avoid scenarios of co-management or Board interference in day-to-day matters, which fall under the responsibility of the Rector and the executive team.

Devote substantial effort to building strategic clarity and helping teams pinpoint their priority actions and maintain execution discipline. In this strategic process, I believe it is essential for the institution's leaders and collaborators to be the main architects of the strategy rather than relying too heavily on "sophisticated", and often costly, consultants. A strategy built and championed by the team itself—though it may appear "basic" or "less sophisticated"—often has a higher likelihood of being executed successfully within the expected timeframe.

While working on strategy, it is equally important to understand the organization's critical cultural traits and lead a process to define the desired culture. Every organization has certain behaviors that need to be discontinued and others that should be adopted. Clear cultural traits, shared by most team members, will be a key enabler of successful performance.

Together with enhanced strategic clarity and a shared vision of the desired organizational culture, it is also important to involve the entire team in the details of annual budgeting in order to have them on board with the purpose of sustainable growth in financial terms. The more rigorous the Rector and Vice Rectors are in setting budget goals and limits, the greater the responsibility and empowerment for the team to use resources in ways that best serve the strategy. This message is especially important in private, non-profit universities that must be profitable in order to reinvest and compete in an increasingly challenging and uncertain market.

Finally, permanent and close communication with key stakeholder groups is crucial to maintaining open dialogue,

sensing the concerns and sentiments of the community, and addressing both small and major needs in a timely manner—needs that, without such channels, the Rector might never learn about. Additionally, this proximity shows all collaborators that the Rector stands with them and is available to talk openly about university affairs and their well-being.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

Get to know the institution's identity. Dedicate time to talking with people who are familiar with the university's history—its origins, challenging moments, governance style, and the main leaders within the university community, among other aspects.

Develop a mental framework for leading the university's strategy, aiming for clarity on distinctive traits, big and ambitious goals, and fundamental transformative projects that require the Rector's constant attention.

Be aware of the pace of changes and be mindful that, even though universities need change and the environment is evolving rapidly, not everything can or should be changed in the short term. True, high-impact transformations happen through steady progress with the involvement of key collaborators and leaders across the university.

Time management. Adopt a structured approach to effectively manage your time, striving to balance the demands from external and internal parties who want the Rector's attention (macro, micro, internal, external, social events, etc.) with moments for focused thought and reflection. Additionally, protecting personal and family time is critical. Rectors must develop and maintain routines for exercise, reading, recreation, and good habits that enable a healthy family life and the energy to be effective in leading the university.

“Be aware of the pace of changes and be mindful that, even though universities need change and the environment is evolving rapidly, not everything can or should be changed in the short term. True, high-impact transformations happen through steady progress with the involvement of key collaborators and leaders across the university.”

Championing Diversity and Advancement

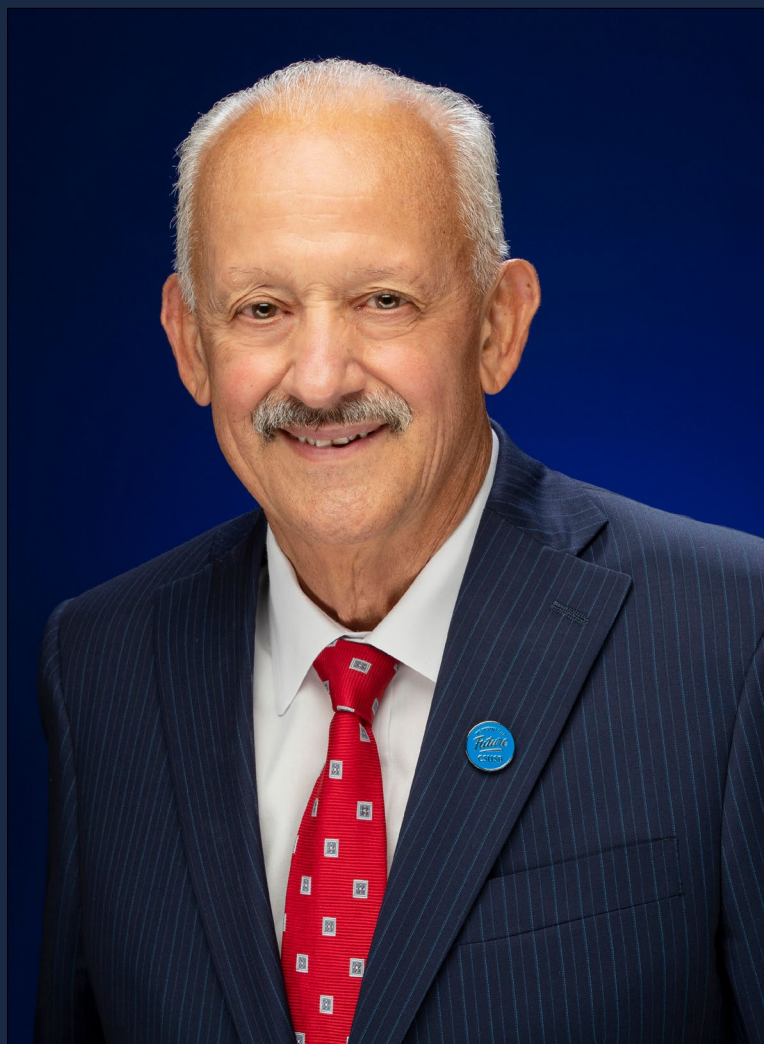
At UNAB, which is an institution grounded in liberal principles and autonomy, we have taken on the responsibility of adopting policies and protocols that promote equal treatment for all members of our community.

Regarding women in leadership positions at UNAB, I can affirm that they have always participated in roles such as deans, Provost, and leaders of various departments and programs. On a personal level, I have always felt very comfortable working with women and place great trust in their judgment and capacity to lead teams and carry out projects rigorously and transparently.

Additionally, concerning the handling of discriminatory situations and violence against women and diverse groups, in 2022 we approved our policy for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Harassment and Violence. This measure was crucial for forming a Gender Committee, which has led the implementation of the protocol that enables us to address cases of gender-based harassment and violence that may occur at UNAB. The Committee has been very proactive, receiving reports and undertaking corresponding investigations, which have in some cases involved employment decisions regarding university officials.

We will continue to expand collective awareness of respecting the rights of all members of our university community and take the necessary actions to apply our regulations.

TOMÁS D. MORALES



President, California State University, San
Bernardino
United States

09

**BUILDING COMMUNITIES,
DRIVING SUCCESS.**

Introducing My Institution

California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) is a preeminent center of intellectual and cultural activity in Inland Southern California. The San Bernardino Campus (SBC) opened in 1965; the Palm Desert Campus (PDC) opened in 1986, with a permanent site granted in 1994. The university serves approximately 18,000 students each year on its two campuses, and graduates approximately 5,000 students annually. CSUSB is one of 23 universities that comprise the public California State University (CSU) system.

CSUSB is an anchor institution in San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Together, these counties geographically make up one of the largest bi-county regions in the United States. Comprised of 27,000 square miles and serving close to five million residents, the “Inland Empire” or “IE” is larger than 10 U.S. states. San Bernardino County itself is the largest county in the lower 48 states. CSUSB is the only member of the CSU system with campuses in both these counties. The region has one of the lowest baccalaureate and graduate degree attainment

rates in the nation. One of CSUSB's goals is to increase these graduation rates.

CSUSB continues to climb in national rankings, both overall and in specific disciplines. For example, it is climbing in the national rankings for social mobility (the Wall Street Journal has CSUSB as 3rd in the U.S. for 2025), has been designated as a Research-2 university by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (raising its status from a "regional university" to a "national university"), and its efforts to serve transfer students have earned the Equity Champion of Higher Education Award in 2021, '22 and '23 by the Campaign for College Opportunity.

The vast majority of CSUSB students are the first in their families to attend college or university. Additionally, CSUSB has been a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) since 1994, and a designated Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) since 2009. In November 2023, CSUSB was recognized by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) with their Excellence and Innovation Award for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership. The university has also earned the prestigious Seal of Excelencia certification for 2024-27 from Excelencia in Education for demonstrating through data, evidence-based practices and leadership the ways in which it is intentionally serving Latino students.

CSUSB's five academic colleges offer more than 70 undergraduate degrees, master's degree programs and a doctoral program, as well as certificates. The four goals of its current strategic plan comprise Student Success; Faculty and Staff Success; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Internationalization.

With CSUSB's goal of student success, which informs everything at the university, the campus seeks not only to increase the college-going rate in Inland Southern California but also

increase the college completion rate. It is necessary to have students arrive on campus as college ready as possible to help them persist in their college careers. Students also need to see college-going as accessible, particularly if they come from families without a history of attending college.

CSUSB utilizes several tools and methods to achieve these goals. For example, it is vital to establish partnerships with organizations and initiatives which promote the importance and the accessibility of college-going with underrepresented communities. Onboarding or “Summer Bridge” programs also help students prepare to transition to undergraduate life the summer before their first term begins.

Once students are enrolled and have begun their course work, as either a first-year or a transfer student, other supports are offered to encourage persistence and, eventually, graduation. They include intrusive advising; financial accessibility to a college education (this is a particular need in the U.S.); and encouragement of student participation in clubs and organizations, education abroad, athletics, theatre and music productions and performances, research opportunities with faculty members, and community engagement. Finally, the university recognizes and celebrates the diversity of its student, faculty and staff populations, ensuring that CSUSB is an inclusive space, that is, all are welcome here and not excluded or bullied because of differences.

What is foundational to CSUSB’s efforts across the board is seeing that all university decisions and actions are data-based. For example, creating a strategic plan intended for actual use means the university has also designed an implementation plan to accompany it. Then, at the end of each year, the campus assesses what it has done. Effectiveness cannot remain theoretical: it needs to be tested and continuously improved based on data.

Leadership Tenure

I was selected as the fourth president of CSUSB in May 2012. Since that time, I am proud to have overseen the following achievements which, I firmly believe, have made our university stronger, more student-centered and have created a sustainable path for the future. Here are some of the highlights from 2012-2025.

- Created a team which works together as the President's Cabinet. We have built a data-based leadership model, which has evolved and spread throughout all areas of the university.
- Presidential commitment to student success has led to various innovative summer bridges and other student and academic support services.
- Successfully completed CSUSB's first major fundraising campaign, raising \$54 million while doubling the university endowment. And, we have currently exceeded the \$200 million goal of our second campaign.
- CSUSB has always taken pride in its diversity. Growing this pride in even more deliberate ways, into a recognition of the need for building diversity, equity and inclusion into the structure of all university operations, has been an ongoing goal of mine. This focus on supporting diversity, reflecting the diverse population of the region CSUSB serves, prompted the development of the institution's unique Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (or DEI) Board.
- Recognized that the best way to support and help lead the success of the region has been achieved through partnerships focusing on education. For example, the university spearheaded the first truly bi-county initiative to improve college attainment, resulting in the founding

- of the 501(c)(3) or non-profit organization, Growing Inland Achievement.
- Applied a comprehensive, all-inclusive and organically directed planning model, the following were created and implemented:
 - Two all-campus strategic plans.
 - Campus master plans for each of the university's two campuses.
 - A re-thinking of the campus' DEI efforts.
 - Converting the university from a quarter to a semester higher education institution; and,
 - Two CSUSB all-university re-accreditations.
 - During my tenure, the following facilities construction were conceived and completed (or being completed):
 - A new building for the College of Extended and Global Education.
 - An extension to the student union.
 - A new dining commons and student housing.
 - An in-process re-purposing of a university building to accommodate a new Master of Science in Physician Assistant (MSPA) program, an initiative to address the urgent need for trained medical professionals in our region.
 - A forthcoming new 500-seat Performing Arts Center (scheduled to open in spring 2025) which will serve both our campus community and the larger community; and
 - A forthcoming new student services building at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus (PDC).
 - Addressed climate change has been another focus, resulting in:
 - The LEED-certified status of new buildings; and
 - Ongoing growth of sustainable energy and green

processes.

- Successfully navigated the shutdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that the university:
 - o Expanded the means of delivering instruction.
 - o Created a wi-fi access program when the campus was closed.
 - o Created a laptop lending program for those without access to these devices in their homes; and
 - o Pivoted practically overnight from on-site to remote, then managed the transition back to in-person instruction and services.
- Examples of some new programs and initiatives during my tenure have included:
 - o The MSPA program (mentioned above), to be implemented in 2025.
 - o Growing Cybersecurity program and options.
 - o Established a School of Entrepreneurship.
 - o Instituted course materials savings programs for students.
 - o Became a member of the State of California's College Corps program, which offers internships for students to provide them with funding, transferable experience and career connections; and
 - o Signed initiatives such as a data-sharing memorandum of understanding which allows CSUSB to ensure more students can gain access to the CalFresh (food) program, particularly important for students with food insecurity.
- Building partnerships has also been a key goal. They have included relationships with our local K-12 public schools; local, municipal, and state government; the local business community; local civic organizations; as well as our regional

community colleges and fellow regional universities. The aim has been to build a robust and sustainable cradle-to-career pipeline as education is truly the conduit to improve individual lives and the lives of families and communities.

Professional Journey

Prior to assuming the CSUSB presidency, I served as president of the College of Staten Island, The City University of New York; served in various capacities at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona including Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs and professor of education; and, served as Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at The City College of New York.

In my over 49 years of working in higher education, I am one of the few higher education administrators in the United States who has held senior administrative positions at the three largest public university systems in the nation: The California State University, The State University of New York and The City University of New York.

I am a proud product of U.S. public education, from elementary all the way through doctoral. I have also spent my career at U.S. public universities within the three public university systems I mention above.

Equally important to my own educational journey and work history is the fact that I am a first-generation college student (first in my family to attend college) who gained admission through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). This is an initiative which both opens doors and supports students who might have never believed they could attend college. I have this in common with so many of the students who matriculate at the universities where I have worked and held leadership positions.

I am grateful to all my mentors who provided me with the advice and encouragement to keep me moving forward in meeting my academic and career goals.

I am also incredibly proud to share that my own mother, after her youngest son went off to college, resumed her education. She completed her GED or high school equivalency credential, associate's degree, baccalaureate degree and her master's degree in social work. She spent much of her professional career serving families in the South Bronx of New York City, one of the poorest congressional districts in the U.S. Hers is an example I keep close to my heart, and which continues to inspire me.

I have therefore committed my higher education career to giving back by serving as a champion for student success, on whichever campus I found myself serving.

I truly believe in the students I have worked hard to support over the years as they have made their way towards a degree. I believe today in CSUSB's students here in the Inland Empire—I see their potential. And I continue to see that the way forward to their achieving this potential is through access to higher education. But I also know that higher education in our region cannot do it alone. Rather, it is through the partnerships we build which will secure a cradle-to-career pipeline to transform lives and the communities of San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

The first four presidents of CSUSB have all been very different individuals. My immediate predecessor was also a first-generation college student and a product of the public schools of New York City for his K-12. However, I am the first Latino president of CSUSB. That fact, along with my EOP background, means I have a great deal in common with many of our students. I have

been where many of them have been and I therefore hope I can demonstrate to them that: (1) higher education is one of the best ways I know to build a pathway to a fulfilling and successful career and life; and (2) that the door is also open for them, that a higher education degree is possible.

Ultimately, however, I am the president for all the students at CSUSB. It means initiatives such as DEI are intrinsic to—they truly cannot be removed from—my focus on student success. And it is why student success has been a throughline to my approach as an educator and administrator in higher education from the start of my career.

In my view, the answer to enhancing the promise of economic mobility across the U.S. is education. Education is how we better the lives of those who enroll as our students. This is how CSUSB can have an appreciable economic impact on our region and lives/families of these students.

My experience and background make me aware of and sensitive to the lived experiences of first-generation students, or any student who is forging a path for themselves, their family and community.

Effective Leadership Strategies

I have learned, over the years, that effective leadership requires trust. To work together effectively, people need to have trust in one another. The foundation of that trust is ethics. Administrators, faculty and staff also serve as role models and mentors. Leading with ethics sends a message to students on how they should act and behave while they are students and then post-degree.

While the cliché is true that, as president, “the buck stops with me,” major campus initiatives need to involve the whole campus as discussions are held and recommendations made.

The organic, all-university approach to major initiatives at CSUSB has resulted in two practical and implementable strategic plans, master plans for each campus, two re-accreditations, transitioning the campus from a quarter to a semester institution, and leading the university through a thorough review of its DEI practices while ensuring these principles are structurally and systemically embedded across all university operations, from classrooms to building maintenance.

I have hired, as my Cabinet, individuals I believe to be outstanding in their respective areas. This means I respect their expertise. I should not need to do their job for them, even though I am ultimately the person responsible for decisions made during my presidential tenure. The way forward is by building a team that both understands your perspectives and vision, as president or chancellor, while offering a diverse set of ideas as feedback to clarify and strengthen the ultimate decisions that I must make as the university's leader.

Another foundational item for me in leadership is the role of data. I believe we must utilize data as the source of decision-making. CSUSB follows a path of continuous improvement, which includes examining the metrics and qualitative feedback from initiatives and adjusting them so that what is provided (for one example) in terms of recruitment and support throughout a student's academic journey continues to be aligned with student needs.

It is important to ensure that the make-up of the student body, faculty, staff and administrators reflects the make-up of the community where the institution is embedded (if it is a diverse one). And, if that local community should not be very diverse, consciously building (through recruitment and hiring) a healthy diverse campus population. It also means including access to international opportunities and exposure, both on

campus and through study abroad or faculty exchanges. I truly believe that students have the richest educational experiences by exposure to individuals and cultures which are different from those in which they were raised.

Finally, keep student success at the heart of all you do as a university president. Know what the best high impact practices are and work to bring them to your campus initiatives and programs. That will help guide you throughout your presidency.

Personal Identity and Perception

My personal identity, first and foremost, comes from my parents and my siblings. What they taught me was that to move ahead, to make a difference in bettering our own lives, was going to take hard work and persistence. I began taking on part-time jobs when I was still in school, and that persistence and focus has helped to build my career.

I drive myself hard, and I expect the same of those who work with and for me—we have a responsibility to our students and to our university to do the best we possibly can do and succeed as much as we possibly can. When we make errors, actual lives are impacted. So, I know I can come across as demanding to my staff and my Cabinet. However, they can also see that these are the same demands I am making on myself.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

To my fellow leaders, I greatly respect your success and hard work that has brought you to your leadership position. Therefore, any advice I give is likely redundant or, to be honest, is shaped by the conditions of managing a mid-sized public university in the U.S. in the 21st century.

Nevertheless, my advice includes:

Build a strong leadership team.

Build partnerships with your local, regional, and larger state/district community. When everyone tries to go it on their own, you end up with a lot of people all repeating themselves and re-inventing the wheel. That is not necessary with a partnership. You share what you have learned, you build on that knowledge, it allows you to move forward more quickly and effectively and, I would argue, on a sounder footing.

Ensure the decisions you make are data-based.

Remember that it starts and ends with the students: How do you build student success? What are high impact practices that have been proven effective with students in your own countries?

Ensure students take ownership of their own educational journey. The university can provide support, but the will and motivation need to come from each student's own commitment.

Ensure students are thoroughly ready to begin their college career on day one and, if not, identify their deficits and how they should be addressed.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

If becoming a university president or chancellor one day is your goal, I would strongly advise you to reach out. Build connections. Build a community. And look for the helpers. There are always people out there who are available to mentor you, but sometimes you need to be the one to ask. Don't be afraid to ask for help—put out your hand and introduce yourself. (I also recognize that this is a very American perspective and approach; other cultures may have different best practices.)

Join professional organizations in your field. As you advance in administrative positions, learn what the top professional organizations are and get involved with them. Run for their

“If becoming a university president or chancellor one day is your goal, I would strongly advise you to reach out. Build connections. Build a community. And look for the helpers.”

boards. Build a network. That way, you increase the number of people who know who you are; they may support you with letters of recommendation or nominations for future positions.

Take the opportunity to gain additional leadership training through programs. For example, here in the U.S., Stanford and Harvard Universities have special leadership programs and an organization like AASCU has its own Millennium Leadership Initiative.

It is also important to know that serving as a university president or chancellor can be very isolating and lonely. You will always need colleagues. So be generous with your collegiality. Reach out to your counterparts at nearby institutions when they are hired or promoted or depart for other opportunities. These friends and colleagues will protect your confidence, will be honest with you and will be there to support you without judgment.

Don't be afraid to build partnerships where possible. Build relationships and programs with your local and regional K-12 schools, with two-year schools, with fellow universities, with local and regional governments, with state or district governments, with the business community, with civic leaders and leaders of non-profit organizations. To build economic success, you need education. And, to build an effective cradle-to-career pipeline, it takes all sectors of the community to come together, share data, keep each entity from wasting time and resources if they are re-inventing the wheel by sharing best practices.

At CSUSB, we view ourselves as an anchor institution here in Inland Southern California. Students come from the region where we are located, and this is the region we are dedicated to supporting. To build students' success—the number one aim at CSUSB—means we need to partner with local organizations and consortia to help build that success.

This includes not only transmitting to students and faculty

the region's needs and ways in which they may serve, but also to let the institutional partners and the general public know who the students are and the rich resources they are bringing to the IE's future.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

I firmly believe that a more diverse institution is a stronger institution. I realize I am speaking from the perspective of a U.S. citizen in the 21st century, a nation which is on track for achieving a level of racial, ethnic and gender diversity that the 18th century drafters of the U.S. Constitution could not even have imagined. And it is, naturally, causing fear and backlash—change is always difficult. But I truly believe this is the best path forward for U.S. higher education and the country.

I have supported aspiring women leaders in the university to attend women-focused higher education leadership workshops or participate in the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Leadership Institute's development program, for example. I supported the creation of a women's annual leadership event on the CSUSB San Bernardino Campus, and it has continued to grow and develop since its inception, bringing new leaders to the fore with each new cycle and cohort.

DEI is always foremost in my mind in the area of hiring. Not, as some continue to argue, by employing someone above their skillset because they check a particular box on gender, ethnicity or race. Rather asking: have we identified all the potential candidates for this search? How do we hire the top candidates for a position in whom our diverse student body might also see themselves? I have created the positions of Co-Chief Diversity Officers, who provide training and oversight on both the staff- and the faculty-hiring sides among their other responsibilities.

A male-only Cabinet/campus leadership would send a message

to female students, faculty or staff that there is a ceiling they cannot breach. If I look around and see that my Cabinet is becoming all-male, I know that I am not doing my job as a 21st century academic leader.

I have supported projects such as CSUSB's James R. Watson and Judy Rodriguez Watson College of Education's Project Impact. This initiative encourages men from underrepresented populations to go into public K-12 classrooms to assist young males of color, so they do not drop out of school and that they continue to attend and complete college. There is a growing gender divide in higher education in the United States, and that is even greater with students from underrepresented populations. Having living examples interacting with them while they are still in school sends an important message to these young men that education has value and is an accessible pathway to their futures.

Here at Cal State San Bernardino, all our students are valued, regardless of where they were originally born or where their parents were originally born. We believe that access to education should be valued and treated as a right guaranteed to all, as education is the best way forward to building a better life for oneself, one's family and one's community. We need to hold onto the truth, in this moment, that we are all fellow human beings and therefore deserving of the human and civil rights that should be afforded to all.

Our DEI efforts can best be effective if we have access to reliable and current data about those studying, teaching and supporting our educational mission. With that foundational understanding in mind, last year, for example, CSUSB partnered with the University of California Los Angeles's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) to gather strategic plan baseline and climate data for staff and faculty. HERI conducted this

survey during the 2023-24 Academic Year (AY). Staff and faculty participated in separate surveys with different sets of questions tailored to each group. This survey will be repeated in Strategic Plan Years 3 (AY2025-26) and 5 (AY2027-28). In the meantime, results have been provided to the university's Office of Institutional Research for staff and faculty.

This all goes to say, DEI is not a phrase or string of words that I parrot to check off a box. It is intrinsic to who I am as an educator and an educational leader. I remain committed to it as I continue serving as president of California State University, San Bernardino.

LETLHOKWA MPEDI



Vice-Chancellor & Principal, University of
Johannesburg
South Africa

10

**LEADING WITH PERSEVERANCE
AND CONVICTION.**

Introducing My Institution

In 2005, the then minister Minister of Education Professor Kader Asmal established the University of Johannesburg (UJ) as a single higher education institution providing both Technikon and university programmes through the merger of the Rand Afrikaans University, Technikon Witwatersrand, and, the East Rand and Soweto Campuses of Vista University. This merger was more than just a structural change, it was a bold step toward bridging educational divides and ensuring that quality tertiary education was accessible to all.

The commitment of these three founding institutions laid the groundwork for a university that not only fosters excellence but also contributes meaningfully to addressing pressing societal challenges. We began as the new kids on the block as we forged a new identity steeped in transformation. In the decade following the merger, we built an identity around our collective expectations and pan-Africanism. The next period produced a university aligned with global excellence and stature as we carved a meaningful space for ourselves in the 4IR and began

to imagine what a truly African university represented. We have built on that legacy now with a commitment to societal impact and sustainability. Last year, we launched our new strategic plan to take us to 2035.

If we consider sustainable approaches to be a resounding clarion call for our generation and the generations to come, then we are tasked with the responsibility to respond accordingly. Though often thought of through a narrow lens, universities have an expanded role. We must lead in addressing ethical, moral, political, and social questions. I call this societal impact: the tangible effects of our research and work in the broader world.

This shift takes us beyond academic boundaries to engage directly with economic, social, and cultural spheres. Our purpose is not only to share knowledge but to inspire individuals to make meaningful contributions to society. UJ has long embraced the need to innovate boldly while grounding our actions in core values that promote continuity, inclusivity, and humanity.

We understand that alongside our commitment to academic excellence, we have a responsibility to ensure our approaches reflect purposeful progress. We have a duty to equip others not only with knowledge and skills but also with a commitment to ethical leadership and social responsibility. The core theme and outcome of this strategy is ‘societal impact and sustainability’, ensuring that all UJ activities, including research, teaching, learning, and collaboration, contribute to bettering society and promoting sustainability.

Our mandate is simple: UJ provides a holistic, world-class education that goes beyond formal instruction to prepare students as resilient, critical thinkers who make a positive societal impact. We aspire to lead international research from an African and global south perspective.

Our research, driven by values of impact, innovation, inclusivity,

and integrity, utilises advanced technologies to promote sustainable living in a digital age. Our values guide transparent communication and accountability, while our organisational agility enables us to collaborate effectively with communities, supporting a sustainable future and positive societal change.

Leadership Tenure

I became the vice-chancellor and principal of UJ in March 2023. The launch of our new strategic plan has been an incredible highlight. Its development was an intensive and iterative process that included contributions and feedback from various corners of the University.

What has emerged is a document I am really proud of. In fact, in a recent chapter in an edited volume on Higher Education Transformation in Africa, senior managers at UJ both past and present outline how strong leadership at UJ has balanced efficiency with social justice and thus expanded access while advancing knowledge production.

Clear communication and branding have secured institutional buy-in and embedded our focus while rigorous assessment ensures strategic alignment across all levels, while a collaborative, solutions-driven culture reinforces these efforts. This structured approach has enabled UJ to thrive in a competitive higher education landscape. This is the strong basis we built on to establish our new strategy.

Professional Journey

Throughout my childhood, my father encouraged me to be a lawyer while my mother instilled a strong sense of discipline in me and sparked my love for education. For many years, I wanted to be the best criminal lawyer in the country until I began to develop a fascination with academia and the power

education wields. Like many of our students at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), I am a first-generation graduate.

It is my very beginnings at Vista University and later the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) that have led me here. My passion for labour law and social security formed within those very walls. At the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Social Law, I began to understand the value of approaching education through the gaze of societal impact. And so it is the encouragement of my parents, opportunities that I never considered even a possibility and a passion for academia and the law that informed my journey.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

A focus on doing good. Importantly, this was built on the legacy of my predecessors and this is an important point to make. Here, I must make note of Professor Tshilidzi Marwala's focus on our shifting context and goal for UJ to emerge as dynamic and active participants in the 4IR.

This is a legacy that took root in Professor Ihron Rensburg's commitment to transformation, equity, access and Pan-Africanism. It is in their perspectives that the idea of societal impact emerged. We now need to ensure that we continue on this trajectory with greater attention paid to sustainability and development.

We have made some strides in these areas already – the goal, however, is to ensure that our future-centric stance stresses the importance of humans and their needs. This is the very idea our new strategic plan is rooted in.

Effective Leadership Strategies

Firstly, understanding that universities do not operate in isolation has been an important strategy. It has been valuable for me to stay informed about global trends in education,

technology, and policy. Furthermore, understanding economic, political, and societal shifts has allowed me and my team to anticipate challenges and ensure that UJ remains relevant and forward-thinking.

Secondly, higher education leadership is evolving and it is apparent that traditional top-down models are giving way to more collaborative and adaptive approaches. I have been open to unconventional solutions to help create a dynamic and resilient institution. Leaders who encourage experimentation and adaptability position their universities for long-term success.

Lastly, I have prioritised investing in mentorship programs across the institution to help cultivate leadership at all levels. In addition to this, fostering a culture of trust and inclusivity has ensured that emerging leaders feel valued and engaged. In this vein, regularly engaging with stakeholders including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the broader community has ensured alignment and shared vision.

Personal Identity and Perception

My life took a dramatic turn when I came across Kyokushin karate, which has informed much of my leadership journey. We were trained to fully appreciate the fact that the martial arts skills we possessed came with great responsibility. We had to exercise self-control to really master the art of this style of karate. A key lesson from this process was the act of mentorship.

We learnt a set of principles that include training the body and heart for an unshakable spirit, pursuing the true meaning of the martial way, and cultivating a spirit of self-denial; modesty, ambition and serenity or the concept of keeping your head low, eyes high, and mouth shut; respecting your superiors and observe the rules of courtesy; the discipline of practicing all of your knowledge and not comparing yourself to others;

perseverance and having the strength to surpass obstacles without changing your mind; and finally, the true spirit of a karateka comes from applying karate in real life.

As I spent years honing my karate skills, I learnt a great deal about discipline. Karate places a strong emphasis on discipline as a fundamental aspect of training. It provides a structured environment and a set of principles and practices that foster discipline. Karate training begins and ends with a series of rituals and etiquette, such as bowing to the instructor and fellow students.

These practices instill a sense of respect for oneself, the instructors, and fellow practitioners. Respect for authority and others is a core component of discipline. Karate dojos often have a code of conduct that outlines expectations for behaviour and attitude with a focus on values like perseverance, self-control, and humility. Practitioners are expected to adhere to these principles, reinforcing discipline in their actions and interactions. Karate training follows a structured curriculum with a progressive system of belts or ranks. Advancing through the ranks requires dedication, consistent effort, and discipline.

The techniques learnt must be executed with precision, and students must pay attention to details like body alignment, timing, and breathing. Through focused practice, students learn to control their minds and develop concentration skills, which are essential components of discipline. It was in the dojo that I found ways to manage my emotions, impulses, and reactions during training and sparring and by virtue, in life.

These are tenets that I have carefully applied to my leadership approach. In particular, there are three interlinked concepts: perseverance, trying and not giving up. These ideas are reflected in my approach to my role and thus adequately outline perceptions of me. Furthermore, as I have alluded to, my background and

the parallels with the students of UJ have been an important factor in my leadership style. It is about understanding the significance of a degree for many from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

We have to lead with conviction. In this position, our vision must be clear and unwavering. Whether it's driving academic excellence, fostering inclusivity, or advancing research, we need to believe in our mission and communicate it effectively. A strong sense of purpose will not only inspire others but also help you stay grounded in the face of challenges.

Moreover, we have to remember who our constituency is: the students. We must listen to them and incorporate them in decision-making structures. For instance, structures such as the Student Representative Council (SRC) are imperative in bridging leadership gaps.

Our student leadership is a critical partner in tackling the enduring challenges pervading the sector. It is through the support of the SRC that we have been able to pivot tangible and lasting solutions for the student body. We have to remember that students are the heart of any institution. Their needs and challenges evolve and staying attuned to them is crucial. It is imperative to create open channels for dialogue. Being present and accessible fosters trust and ensures your leadership remains student-centered. Finally, I would encourage leaders to learn from their predecessor's.

Past leaders have invaluable insights on the institution's history, culture, strengths and of course, challenges. Learning from their successes and their struggles is an important tool for navigating obstacles more effectively. While we all bring our own vision to the table, understanding past decisions can

“Every decision you make will have a ripple effect on students, faculty, research, and the broader community.

It is important to approach this role with humility, integrity, and a commitment to the long-term success of the institution.”

provide context and prevent repeating mistakes.

Similarly, your executive team, faculty, administrative staff, and advisors are there to support and guide you. Trust their expertise, empower them to lead in their respective areas and cultivate a culture of collaboration. Great leadership is not about having all the answers. Rather, it is about knowing who to turn to when you need them.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

At UJ, we have a unique approach to the transition and handover process. In the months after the announcement of my appointment as Vice-Chancellor in 2022, I stepped into the role of Vice-Chancellor Designate and spent a great deal of time learning from Professor Marwala.

During this time, I began to get a real sense of the foundations and structures that make up the institution. Studies have found that leadership mentoring improves retention rates and job satisfaction.

Throughout my career, I have learnt a great deal from mentors, and this has informed my leadership approach. With the collective support of my mentors, I was able to develop into the person, academic, and leader I am today. I am truly grateful for their mentorship as I wouldn't have achieved what I have without them. To me this is an important reminder that leaders do not emerge alone. I would encourage aspiring vice-chancellors to learn from those around them. This role is more than just a title. It carries the weight of shaping lives and even societies.

Every decision you make will have a ripple effect on students, faculty, research, and the broader community. It is important to approach this role with humility, integrity, and a commitment to the long-term success of the institution.

Finally, from my own experience, to leave a lasting mark,

you must think beyond day-to-day administration. Advocate for policies that improve education accessibility, speak to sustainability, drive innovation, and strengthen the institution's legacy. Measure success not just in rankings but in how well your leadership uplifts individuals and communities.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

Since our inception, we have prioritised transformation as a strategic objective, leading to increased representation in leadership positions across academic and support divisions. The black and female academic and research staff component respectively has increased to around 50%.

To further institutionalise these efforts, we established a Gender Equity Unit in 2019 tasked with designing programs, providing professional support and training, implementing case management systems, and conducting research to monitor and evaluate gender-related initiatives.

The unit also addresses issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring a comprehensive approach to gender equity. In 2020, we launched the Research Leadership Programme (RLP) to bolster the leadership skills of black female researchers, accelerating their advancement toward becoming renowned scholars. The RLP offers mentorship and support.

Building on these initiatives, UJ unveiled the Women's Leadership Development Programme (WLDP) dedicated to empowering senior women in academia and support functions. This program addresses persistent gender disparities, such as the gender pay gap, by equipping women with the necessary skills and support to excel in leadership roles. In conceptualising this programme, we knew all too well that part of our duty as an institution was to right these societal imbalances.

Importantly, this is a shift we need to be seeing in other

facets of our society. We also knew that change could not be confined to corners of our institution but had to move the very structures and systems that allow for inequality to persist. Other initiatives aimed at transformation include the Accelerated Academic Mentorship Programme (AAMP), which was designed to provide mentorship, support, development opportunities and focused advice to a nominated group of permanent academic staff, thereby creating the conditions for these candidates to advance their academic career trajectories.

Similarly, the Future Professors Programme spearheaded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and run at UJ is aimed at developing the qualities of academic excellence and leadership in university scholarship. Both these programmes were conceptualised to be transformative for black and women academics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey of the University of Johannesburg embodies a commitment to educational excellence, societal impact, and sustainability. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, UJ remains dedicated to fostering a culture of innovation and inclusivity, ensuring that our graduates are not only equipped with knowledge but also inspired to effect positive changes in their communities.

Our collective vision for the future is rooted in ethical leadership and a deep understanding of our responsibilities to society, paving the way for a brighter, more equitable world for generations to come.

THANDWA MTHEMBU



Vice-Chancellor & Principal, Durban
University of Technology
South Africa

11

TURNING VISION INTO
EXECUTION.*Introducing My Institution*

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) is located on the warm east coast of South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). It sprawls over seven (7) campuses that serve approximately 33 000 students. Two of these are in the spectacular KZN Midlands, Pietermaritzburg, an agricultural and tourism area well-known for its green undulating hills, which unfurl coastwards and eastwards from the Drakensberg Mountains nearby. Five of these are in tropical and picturesque Durban, which sits ensconced beside the Valley of a Thousand Hills as it tapers off into the Indian ocean.

DUT's establishment stems from a 2002-2004 voluntary merger between the erstwhile ML Sultan Technikon and Natal Technikon. While the two stood and still stand in proximity in Durban, South Africa, only separated by a road, they operated independently. Apartheid's (il)logic dictated that, though proximate, the former, historically catering for Indians, had to remain operationally distant from the latter, catering for whites. That this merger, the first among public universities in South

Africa, was voluntary post-1994 South Africa is self-evident given the proximity and the illogic. The merger also involved the incorporation of the erstwhile Indumiso College of Education based in Pietermaritzburg, about 80 km north-west of Durban; hence the KZN Midlands campuses.

Technikons¹ offered rigid, work-focused and vocational qualifications, tailored to narrowly defined jobs that emerged then from the job market. At their enrollment peak in the 1980s and 1990s they were very popular, largely because of the nature of the qualifications that often led to immediate jobs just before and on completion. As the job market changed in the 21st century, new job types emerged. Essentially, Technikons could not keep up with the pace of change. Their qualifications had become rather hackneyed and thus failed to translate into adaptable knowledge and skills the new 21st century jobs, in a state of flux, required.

Even though mergers of South African public universities were not necessarily aimed at responding to the changing job environment, they provided an opportunity for universities of technology (UoTs) to think differently about the education they offered. From the predecessor institutions being rigid and vocationally focused, the first transition from Technikons to UoTs involved the latter continuing to fashion themselves as higher education institutions ‘*educating and training for the workplace*’ despite tectonic shifts in the workplace that had already ensued. Meanwhile, the disjuncture continued to widen

1. *Technikon*: Pre-2002, a technikon was a post-secondary institution in South Africa – equivalent to a polytechnic in other parts of the world – offering career-focused vocational training. Between 2002 and 2004, technikons that were not merged with traditional universities became universities of technology. There were 15 of them, reduced to only 6 after the mergers, and renamed Universities of Technology.

with the 21st century job market expecting more versatility, agility and adaptability.

It is this disjuncture that motivated DUT to innovate in 2019, leading to its 10-year values- and principles-based, and outcomes- and impact-oriented, one-pager strategy map, à la Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard². One of our staff members called it ENVISION2030, which we adopted. Like many balanced scorecards, it has four 4S-Perspectives: *Stewardship, Systems and Processes, Sustainability and Society*. Each of these 4S-Perspectives has three (3) Strategic Objectives (SOs), and thus a total of twelve (12) of these. As noted above, it is outcomes- and impact-oriented, eschewing orientation towards inputs and outputs. It is also very much research and data informed, having employed many research outcomes from many sources beyond Kaplan and Norton, some of which are revealed below.

The *Stewardship Perspective* has as its SOs: *Lived Values, Institutional Culture and Creativity*. These three SOs are predicated on a unique DUT DNA whose two strands are 'people-centred and engaged' and 'innovative and entrepreneurial'. The 'base pairs' which connect the two strands consist of five (5) values, namely transparency, honesty, respect, integrity and accountability, and

2. *Balanced Scorecard: It was formally developed by Robert S. Kaplan and David P Norton in 1992. It is a strategic planning and management system, used to communicate an organisation's intent and translate its strategy into action. In the private and industrial sector, it normally consists of four (4) financial and non-financial Perspectives, namely Financial, Customer, Internal process, and Learning and Growth. At DUT, we innovated and tailor-made our Perspectives to fit the university environment, leading to our 4S-Perspectives. We presented our balanced scorecard as a strategy map, which is just a visual representation of the strategy showing all the inter-connections among our strategic objectives.*

five (5) principles, namely *fairness, professionalism, commitment, compassion and excellence*.

Stewardship is the bedrock of the first two ‘*enabling and effecting*’ Perspectives; the second one being Systems. The next two ‘*influencing and impacting*’ Perspectives are, namely Sustainability and Society. While it would take many pages to delve into the rest of the Perspectives that focus on the nexus of teaching-learning, research-innovation and engagement, ultimately, what DUT wishes to achieve is to ‘contribute towards improving the lives and livelihoods of our broader society’. Through creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, we are focused on transforming our society and its economy. As a university, we will achieve this through our new DUT Philosophy of Education statement that goes:

**“OUR CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION SHAPES ADAPTIVE GRADUATES
WHO TRANSFORM SOCIETY”**

The three (3) underlined word-pairs will catapult the education DUT offers to one that will produce ‘*adaptive graduates*’ who will have ‘the acumen to influence, initiate and/or respond to changes in the world’. No longer shall DUT be educating and training for a workplace that is in flux and ephemeral, but it will produce agile, versatile and adaptive graduates who will transform society and its economy. In short, this philosophy is constructivist, creative and innovative, and is outcomes- and impact-oriented.

I hasten to point out that monitoring and evaluating outcomes and impact is a hard slog. Neither do our staff, stakeholders, governing bodies and structures we report to fully understand and appreciate this approach. We could not either when we started, and we are still learning. Our national and institutional

systems also do not have appropriate KPIs, measures and targets, several of which we had to devise from scratch. They are still stuck in the inputs-outputs paradigm. As a simple example, it is much easier to count research outputs in high impact journals than to assess their impact locally and regionally.

Leadership Tenure

The year 2025 being my nineteenth (19) year in the position of Vice-Chancellor & Principal (Rector or President in other jurisdictions), I am one of the longest serving Vice-Chancellors in a South African public university. I started out in January 2007 at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) and in October 2016 moved to DUT.

At both CUT and DUT I was able to develop 10-year strategies organically, which I began to implement doggedly, with very little room to brook prevarication and dissent. At CUT it was Vision2020 and at DUT it is *ENVISION2030*. South Africa's management system tends to encourage 5-year strategies, missions and visions. We bucked this trend and expectation by producing a *ENVISION2030* strategy with a 10-year horizon, and which has a statement of intent only, Perspectives and Strategic Objectives and a logical statement interweaving everything to what we promise to society.

At CUT and to some extent at DUT, too, so many stakeholders and structures of governance bought into the strategy and began to assist in the implementation processes. At CUT, even unions fully understood and advocated for the strategy and its implications, even influencing what they would demand from management. Sometimes, the unionists' rhetoric on advocating the strategy would sound much better than some of our executives. This is the extent to which the 'use case model' I introduce on p.6 below could entrench ownership.

At DUT, there remains serious inertia, most probably because of its pre-1994 apartheid moorings that are difficult to shake. However, many staff, students and alumni remain excited about what DUT has achieved over the last 5 years since *ENVISION2030* was adopted and ushered in. Several new recruits claim to have been drawn to DUT by this vision. Granted, some often get disappointed by the inertia they experience, which seeks to keep DUT stagnant, if not retrogressive. This is our new challenge.

Professional Journey

It helped a lot that I come from a family where excellence in general was taken for granted. Education and doing well in it was non-negotiable. No wonder, we have three (3) PhDs in our family of five (5) siblings, with two more PhDs in the generation after us. My wife and her sister also have PhDs.

Both my mother and father were stern teachers who taught me formally in two of my primary school classes. As I moved from primary to secondary school, my father's former student happened to be our mathematics and science teacher and principal. I had no choice but to excel in mathematics and science.

Completing my thesis in mathematics – weighted polynomial approximation theory - at the age of 27 years and graduating a year later gave me a great advantage in our sector. Many people still think if you are a mathematician, you are a genius and can do just about anything. So, I found myself entrusted with many leadership tasks and roles, including non-mathematical and non-academic ones.

In 1994, South Africa ushered in a new democracy, which came with lots of opportunities and challenges, too. Not only did I take advantage of opportunities in a new democracy to grow in academic leadership, but some of the challenges I was foolhardy enough to tackle also catapulted my career. In

my early thirties about 6 years after earning my PhD I became an associate professor and head of department of a small mathematics department in a small university campus.

In non-academic and broader institutional transformative matters, I got deeply involved in the leadership of the then Broad Transformation Forums (BTFs), which were multi-stakeholder forums focusing on change and transformation in all facets of university life as the new democracy took shape. Many ideas were needed to re-imagine and re-shape the university both academically and administratively. While I may not have been popular with higher education executives of the time because of my activism and was branded persona non-grata at some stage, it appears many people appreciated the transformative roles I had been playing.

With soaring academic and non-academic influence, I got entrusted with even more serious leadership functions, which further enhanced my professional journey. By the age of 37 years of age, I had become a Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the erstwhile University of Durban-Westville, now part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Two years later, in 2002, I was back at Wits in my second Deputy Vice-Chancellorship.

I have a little anecdote about my return to Wits. On graduating with a PhD about 11 years earlier, I had told some friends and colleagues that I would return and occupy a senior level position. This is exactly what happened. One of my older friends, fellow villager and security officer at Wits, the late Mr. Enock Zulu, kept on asking me where I had got my magic wand from!

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

My predecessors did a lot to transform and extricate DUT from an overwhelmingly 'technikon' culture and practice. Such was not much different from one at a glorified high school.

But, with great effort, DUT soon changed making it befit the name: university. Given how difficult it is to change institutional culture, this continues to be work in progress even today. None other than Peter Drucker says, and I paraphrase, “culture eats strategy for breakfast” through inertia and other sub-cultural ills. This has been my experience at DUT and continues to be a great challenge.

Our unique approach to change and transformation has several aspects I deem important not only for DUT but for any university anywhere in the world.

- **Visioning:** Producing a values- and principles-based, outcomes- and impact-oriented strategy, *ENVISION2030* was a great milestone. *ENVISION2030* focuses on our broader society, moving away from silo-ed, input- and output-based approaches that are largely narcissistic for a university.
- **Impact:** Focusing more on not just producing a novel strategy, but identifying new impact-oriented KPIs, measures and targets for implementing it, and doing so doggedly despite inertia from some quarters hell-bent to return to a past long gone.
- **Visible change:** Physically, academically and substantively, no one can miss that DUT is Different, Upending and Transforming, the latter three (3) words being a creative play on the initialism, DUT. While our physical infrastructure had remained dilapidated for years, a new look DUT both in Durban and Pietermaritzburg has already emerged.
- **Rankings:** While, personally, I am not a fan of rankings, circumstances at DUT and beyond led us to them or rather we found ourselves in them, unavoidably. In international rankings, DUT has improved its position remarkably. Nationally, it is placed 1st amongst all UoTs based on

several outputs and impacts.

- **A brand-new education:** DUT is the first among UoTs not only to craft a unique DUT Philosophy of Education, but to begin to implement it using Project-Based Learning (PBL), Design Thinking and many other constructivist approaches. Yes, other universities may well be employing these learning strategies, but without necessarily jettisoning the old and hackneyed approaches.
- **Transformation:** Even though we have not reached that milestone yet, our academic structure will transform, aligning with our new DUT Philosophy of Education. Very few universities in our country have had a thorough review of their institutional arrangements and curricula other than just aligning to requirements by accrediting bodies.

I believe there are more tangential contributions I have made to the sector, which arose naturally during my tenure and from which a variety of lessons could be learned.

- **Stay academic:** Once an academic system and its subsystems have been put in place, the university must be run accordingly. Of course, there will be necessary refinements, reviews and changes along the way. But, based on an existing system, facts and evidence, reason and debate must reign supreme and must also be seen to be reigning supreme. Pretence to politics – petty and/or hard expediency and opportunism, including attempts at celebrity status are inimical to being academic or being an academic manager.
- **Keep copious records that will acquit you:** In 2012/13 and now recently in 2023/24, I found myself being accused falsely by my detractors to a point that the allegations were without merit and my dismissal was moot on both occasions. I have been, undoubtedly, the ‘come-back

kid' twice. The first incident was at the level of the then Minister, which was roundly defeated at the relevant High Court via a 1000+ page affidavit I wrote based on facts and evidence I had collated and collected over the years. The latest one was at the level of our governing body we call Council. Our Council had become divided and fraught, with some of the members frustrated at not getting financial benefits in university tenders. They had wrongly assumed I would support these undeserved and corrupt benefits. They seemed to have forgotten that the system they put in place does not allow that. An urgent application at the High Court in September 2024, stopped them dead in their tracks, with personal costs to them.

- **Winnow the many stories:** Many people, internal and external, will either tell true stories or make them up for some benefit. Some of those may date back to many years and may have been argued away definitively. But, as a new person in the job, some will think they could make their cases winnable with you. Do not take anything at face value. Take no prisoners in pursuit of your values and principles. Winnow and wind-tunnel every detail against facts and evidence, reason and debate, and the overall system in place.
- **When days are dark friends are few:** This just above is the title of a song by the late Sipho Gumede, a South African bass guitarist and contemporary jazz maestro. Those very close to me know it very well. What a surprise to know that some of those who confess and appear to be close to you have their own agendas including those that could bump you out. At CUT, when someone I had been grooming for many years and another one who had not been wanted by anyone, (but I had managed to convince

Council to accept), chose to align with my detractors in the 2012/13 debacle, I was dumb founded, to say the least. At DUT, several internal people, including some I could never have imagined, fueled the latest debacle out of their own misguided suspicions. During these debacles, not even a handful of my colleagues in the sector ever called to empathize with me until they learned I had won.

- **It is cold and lonely at the top:** Sometimes, being at the top makes some think they are self-sufficient and beyond education and advice. There are many who have walked your path and could advise and turn your adversity into success.
- **Ability and aptitude vs character and attitude:** It is none other than the late John Wooden, an American basketball coach who says: 'Ability may take you to the top, but character keeps you there'. I was rather rebellious and cantankerous during the earlier stages of my professional life. As I said earlier, I was at some stage persona non grata in the university sector. It is my alma mater, Wits, that saved me, giving me space to reflect and build a different character. Professors Norma Reid and Loyiso Nongxa, two successive Vice-Chancellors there between 2002 and 2007, made this possible. I was pleasantly surprised when after assuming the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor there in 2002, I was described as thoughtful, calm and a keen listener.

Effective Leadership Strategies

There is obviously not one working strategy for effective leadership. My inspiration has been drawn from erudite friends and family, and most importantly, several management gurus and authors like Peter Drucker, Jim Collins and others, too

many to mention. Below are a few leadership strategies I have gleaned from all these coveted authors and have employed successfully.

- **Inspiration and motivation:** I mention Peter Drucker and Jim Collins specifically because there are many of their gems, I employ to motivate our people. For example, Jim Collins' book *'Good to Great'* allowed me to argue that being good makes one rest on one's laurels. Meanwhile, your competition would be honing its skills to beat you at your game, becoming great while you remain good; hence, *'good is the enemy of great'*. We have also branded the DUT people who are enthusiastic about our strategy: the *'right people'*, occupying *'the right seats'*, *'performing their functions right'*, and ultimately, *'doing the right things'* and *'doing them right'*. Of course, in this sentence I also innovated between the two authors. The latter part of the sentence is obviously inspired by one of Peter Drucker's most famous quotes, which goes:

"MANAGEMENT IS DOING THINGS RIGHT; LEADERSHIP IS DOING THE RIGHT THINGS".

- **Viable Systems Model (VSM):** This world is a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world requiring agility, versatility and adaptiveness, amongst many values and principles. VSM is simply a model that helps one to think of, and operate in, an organisation as if it were an interdependent network of autonomous systems, like a neural network. At the outset, I must acknowledge my brother, Ntokozo Mthembu, PhD, who introduced me to VSM, cybernetics in particular, more than 20 years ago when he did his PhD in it. Many readings of Stafford

Beer, its founder, and other authors in cybernetics have helped to grow my interest and knowledge in this field, without being an expert in it. Since then, I have used this theoretical approach as a broad conceptual framework for my work. Of course, that I am a mathematician by training – a field that forces order, structure, generalisation and deconstruction - does help.

- **Research-informed, creative and innovative:** Whatever one conceptualizes, designs, plans and executes as a manager, especially in a university environment where research is part of the core business, s/he must be research-informed. This is demonstrated by our liberal employment of many concepts from several authors in *ENVISION2030*. What is all the existing research in management for if it is not applicable and useful in a university setting? This approach also allows for innovation by the reader, as demonstrated in the first bullet just above.
- **Use case Model:** No chief executive officer (in our case, a Vice-Chancellor) could lead only based on the depth of their knowledge and skills. There is, unfortunately, an inverse relationship between higher levels of knowledge and experience on the one hand, and the ‘deficit-based’³ model on the other hand. Organically, we often employ the ‘use case model’⁴ in lots of what we have achieved. It provides much better ownership especially when tough aspects of a strategy must be implemented. While this model is preferred, there may be situations that require

3 . Deficit-based model is a model that attributes perceived failures in solving a particular problem as a lack of knowledge, skills, achievement and learning. It related more to a top-down approach in the assumption that people at lower levels have very little to offer.

4 . Use case model is a constructivist model allowing different types of people for whom something is being conceived or created to be part of devising a solution for it.

“Once a strategy has been crafted, it cannot just be put on the shelves [...] So, we must be both good leaders and good managers, too.”

a 'deficit-based model'. The right choices must be made carefully when each one is employed.

- **The 'surrogate', 'midwife' and 'nanny' leader/manager:** About two years ago, I had a discussion with my direct reports on my leadership style. The childbearing and child-caring analogy just came out organically. One of the executives said I am like a surrogate mother, carrying 'babies' of projects for other executives when they have been employed and are well-paid to carry them to full term. Another one said, he thinks I am a 'midwife' in that I am the one conceiving ideas in all sorts of fields where there are executives who could do so on their own, just if they focused. I had, so far, thought I had only been a 'nanny', taking care of my executives' projects and when there would be challenges, finding myself suggesting solutions.
- **Focus on strategy, but more so, on implementation:** Once a strategy has been crafted, it cannot just be put on the shelves. One thing people say South African managers and leaders are good at is devising strategies and policies. After all that, very few implement anything, often being stuck in ideology and general inaction. We made sure we would not be one of those, by putting implementation systems in place. So, we must be both good leaders and good managers, too. Once we have done the right things, we must do them right. Just a short anecdote to share about relentless implementation. After almost 10 years of filibustering by our unions since 2008, in 2018 we introduced our Performance Management System (PerMS). As of 2023, an electronically-run, e-PerMS, is in place, warts and all, with over 80% of our staff participating in it. Part of this system consists of a 360° behavioural

evaluation designed to assess whether people live our values and principles we introduced here earlier.

- **Incremental progress as in ‘Atomic Habits’:** James Clear’s book, *Atomic Habits*, suggests small habitual steps could eventually lead to a complete cultural change. While detractors may criticise a strategic focus amid some nagging dysfunction at some lower levels, nothing beats focusing and inspiring one’s people strategically, systemically and systematically. It is the surest way of making progress despite whatever inertia. Ultimately, VSM is about building systems and subsystems, and getting them networked. While so many irritations in our systems and processes could be pointed to, a Different, Upending and Transforming DUT cannot be gainsaid. Just one anecdote in this regard. With much resistance from unions as alluded to earlier, the PerMS I refer to above was introduced incrementally over the last 5 years. Warts and all, many see it as helping them to focus on their primary work and its impact.

Personal Identity and Perception

When I became aware of my existence as a human being, I found myself out in the field looking after my extended family’s stock – cattle and sheep. Only two boys had been born in the extended family in the 1960s. Our birth a few months apart had brought so much joy to our older cousins, so they revealed later. They would soon be excused from this chore. In fact, I had already been enrolled for my very first year of school when a debate ensued in my extended family about who would look after the family stock while I was attending school. That was the end of my school sojourn. It took my nuclear family’s move elsewhere far away from my extended family compound for me to start school the following year.

As noted above, I was raised by very stern teacher parents. My father was a strict and pedantic primary school principal. I learned a lot from him, and I understand that I exhibit some of his leadership traits.

There are just two anecdotes on self-agency and self-bureaucracy on the one hand and integrity on the other, from which I took lifetime lessons from my parents. I must have been about 12 years of age when one weekend they left home on a Saturday for some function somewhere. For us, their absence was a field day of fun. They returned in the late afternoon. Lo and behold, my father asked me to give an account of what I had accomplished that day. When I started to argue that he had not given me any specific instruction, I got a big hiding for having been loitering and aimless the entire day. My mother just nodded affirmatively, providing no solace. According to them, amid so many glaring chores in the homestead, I did not have to be reminded what it is I could have done without being told to do. I had been old enough and well accustomed to what could possibly be done. In retrospect, that episode left indelible lessons on self-agency and self-bureaucracy.

My father would also prepare some financial statements on charts to display at a school governing body or a parents' meeting. Our job was to transcribe these statements and notes from some exercise book he had written them on. The handwriting had to be meticulous, mimicking his. He also taught us calligraphic writing, which we used to embellish the writing on the charts. During registration time, fees for which were nominal, he would count every cent the parents had paid. And, if any cent had been missing, it would be war on us until it would be found. His sense of integrity by safeguarding the school funds and taking his reports-back so seriously, remain indelible in my whole being.

I also come from a deeply Christian family, which is not flaunted. About 130 years ago in 1894, my family produced the first black Anglican Church priest in Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal, in Revd. Titus Mthembu, our great-grand uncle. My grandfather, Revd. Gideon Mthembu, qualified as a priest in 1921. My father, Thokoza Mthembu completed his training in priesthood in 1967 amid his teaching career. My elder brother, Dr Delani Mthembu, is a practising priest. It is just unfortunate that many Christians have low regard for the unassailable power of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus left with us to guide our lives and use to tap into God's Kingdom.

Educationally, I have also been influenced by a family of teachers that my parents and aunts were. With many of my uncles having earned BSc degrees in the 1950's at the University of Fort Hare, I could not have grown to be anything other than a mathematician or a scientist, and through the same university. My mind works scientifically and/or mathematically, while I also have an artistic bent, being my family's lay historian and praise-singer. Unlike many who may see a distinction between science and Christianity, I do not.

Studying for a master's degree at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, Nashville, U.S. and doing some summer courses at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in the late 1980s, provided me with lessons on self-directed learning and the enormity of brain capacity. A thick textbook would be imbibed in a flash, largely with one's own self-agency! Studying and working at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, during my PhD days, gave me a perspective to academic excellence that has since remained with me. I will use an anecdote to illustrate this.

Between the two semesters in an academic year, there is a three week break in June/July in the southern academic calendar.

In my first year of teaching at Wits, I was quite excited to visit my village of Nkandla during this break. On my return, my fellow post-graduate student, now-retired Professor Kathy Driver, welcomed me to some stunning results she had produced during the break on hypergeometric functions. Embarrassingly, I had absolutely no research results to report. That was the last time I took an academic break for a social break!

Leadership style and perceptions of it

I am confident that perceptions of my management and leadership styles emanate from a complex mix of influences, most provided above. Not least from my social and religious backgrounds, my stern parents, my school principal father, but also from my scientific/mathematical training at the University of Fort Hare, in the U.S. and at Wits, and my leadership experiences over the rest of my professional career.

I could be a little jollier and exuberant in personality, I admit. But I am my rather demure, pensive and inscrutable parent's son. Notwithstanding, I believe my leadership is open and predictable because my values and principles are transparent and consistent. I believe I am so transparent that anyone who approaches me for a decision or an opinion should know what the answer is going to be. Admittedly, this could certainly make those around me feel I am overly pedantic and rigid when some political malleability could be appropriate sometimes. Well, my view is that one is only an academic; it is difficult to become a petty politician in a university environment.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

There is nothing as useful and as progressive as putting the university's resources and positions where your mouth is. During most of my first term at DUT (2016 – 2021), two of my three

Deputy Vice-Chancellors were female, including the Registrar. Later between 2020 and 2024, our CFO was also female. In their unique ways, they certainly brought different perspectives to the table, which made my work easier. Being male with lots of natural blind spots on matters female, I had several females providing advice and driving transformation in several areas.

At DUT, though, we have a different challenge regarding diversity. DUT's challenge, rather, is with respect to representation and equity among Indians, 'Coloured' and Africans, as our racial classifications go. These classifications have remained long after the apartheid system disappeared, ostensibly and ironically to even them out. It remains that the Africans who were the most politically, socially and economically oppressed during apartheid are the ones who remain less represented.

Indians constitute only about 3% in the country, but about 7% in KwaZulu-Natal where most of them are located. However, at DUT, according to KZN's Economically Active Population (EAP), Indians constitute about 3 times their share while Africans constitute about half of the level of their representation.

With over 90% of our students and staff being African, they are not a minority, but an overwhelming majority. Over the years, we have seen enrolments of white students declining drastically. Of course, at about 7% of the entire South African population being white people, we could not expect high numbers of white students at DUT. However, if we are to be true to equity, we must now strive to address the dismally low enrolment of our white young people.

Since the two constituent Technikons were white and Indian, for some reason, Indians preponderated. So, we have a perfect black cappuccino situation – a sprinkle of Africans at the top, Indians in the middle and Africans at the bottom, the latter finding it difficult to see themselves represented in the middle.

For some strange reason, even those being empowered in our transformation journey do not seem to appreciate it.

Advice to Fellow Leaders – current and aspiring

The sections above, especially two of them on effective leadership strategies and contributions to leadership at DUT and beyond, provide more than adequate advice to my fellow leaders and managers.

EDWARD PECK



President, Nottingham Trent University
United Kingdom

12

FROM VISION TO COLLECTIVE ACTION.

Introducing My Institution

Granted University status in 1992, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) traces its origins to 1843 with the creation of the Nottingham Government School of Design. This makes it one of the longest established institutions in England providing education to adults and where its key purposes – driving innovation and developing skills – are deeply embedded in its past, its present and its future.

Alongside this original close connection with business have grown two other areas of focus: to enable people to change their life opportunities through education; and, to partner with local civic organisations to strengthen local communities and the services on which they depend.

NTU is among the ten largest universities in the UK with almost 4500 staff, over 37,000 students, and an annual income of approximately £400m. NTU has five campuses across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire and one in London, each distinguished by its subject mix and distinctive student population.

NTU has been given numerous awards: The Times and The

Sunday Times Modern University of the Year 2023 and 2018; University of the Year in the Whatuni Student Choice Awards 2023; University of the Year 2019 in the Guardian University Awards; and University of the Year 2017 in Times Higher Education Awards. It has ascended the major international league tables and has been placed second on a global sustainability ranking for several years in succession.

It has received Gold – the highest – level recognition in the Teaching Excellence Framework on both occasions that the UK Office for Students has conducted a national review of student experience and outcomes, most recently in 2024. In 2021, it was the most improved institution in the Research Excellence Framework, the UK's peer assessment of the quality of research outputs, environment, and impact.

The current University strategy – University, reimagined – expresses in six word pairs – twelve words – our shared ambitions: creating opportunity; valuing ideas; enriching society; embracing sustainability; connecting globally; and empowering people. NTU has also adopted three key principles that guide the decision making of colleagues across the institution: we change lives; we are bold; and we do the right thing.

Our current priority is to undertake the next strategic process in the context of five key factors we think will shape universities over the next decade, all of which are in flux: the influence of AI; the expectations of students; the concerns of society; the nature of graduate work; and the changing demographic of students. These issues are also influencing Government policy in England addressing higher education; the next institutional strategy will also need to respond to the UK Government's position on immigration up to 2030. Finally, the financial context for NTU – whilst still positive in comparison to the most other higher education providers in the UK and, indeed, those around the

world – may constrain some of the options available or, at least, the extent to which they can be developed and implemented.

Leadership Tenure

I joined NTU as Vice-Chancellor and President in 2014. It was a good institution, with some outstanding infrastructure, but it had lost touch with what it was trying to achieve. Twenty years on from being granted university status, this lack of clear purpose had undermined its ability to create a sense of confidence and pride.

As a result, developing the first strategy on my watch – Creating the University of the Future 2015-2020 – became an exercise in addressing what I believe to be the one of the foundational truths of organisational life: ‘where there is no vision, the people perish’ (Proverbs, 29:18). This required an inclusive and engaging strategy process which generated the two areas of focus and the six word pairs that articulate our shared ambitions that are noted above. This approach was repeated in our more recent strategy development process which resulted in University, reimagined 2020-2025.

At the same time, in my view there is another foundational truth. To misquote slightly the English painter and poet William Blake: ‘they who would do good, must do so in small particulars’. It is in the everyday actions of colleagues across NTU that strategy is enacted. One of my own aphorisms, with which those who work at NTU will be perhaps over familiar, asserts that ‘strategy is what people do, not what other people write down’.

Looking back, mobilising the energy of colleagues in support of a vision that drove demonstrable change and that we had shaped and owned together was the defining moment of my tenure. It was then that I felt that my presence as the leader of NTU was a good fit for both the institution and for me.

I will be stepping down from the role this summer as part of a long-standing succession plan. This chapter is thus a timely opportunity to reflect on my eleven years at the helm.

Professional Journey

My first degree was in philosophy and in my subsequent studies I moved towards organisational sociology. Before I ceased to be an active academic, I was researching, writing, teaching and consulting in organisational development and institutional leadership. Becoming Vice-Chancellor was an opportunity for me to apply some of my theoretical ideas in practice. I shall return to this topic in the next section.

However, my first career was in the UK National Health Service (NHS). I joined as a National Management Graduate Trainee, an equivalent scheme to the fast-track route into the UK Civil Service. As a public servant then – and now – I see my role as being to prioritise the interests of those who use our services, whether these be patients or students. These interests should wherever possible take precedence over those of the institutions through which they may at present be delivered.

I spent twenty years working as a manager and consultant in and around health and social care. This means that I was a senior manager before I was a senior academic; most Vice-Chancellors and Presidents have a professional journey that unfolds the other way round. When I took my first academic role I was appointed simultaneously as a head of an academic department, so even then I was viewing my contribution, at least in part, through a managerial lens.

I had a lot to learn about the culture and structure of higher education as well as its policy and practice. It took me twelve years from that first role – through further promotions – before I was appointed Vice-Chancellor at NTU.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

It was perhaps inevitable that my unusual combination of practical experiences and academic insights has made my contributions distinctive, and, in some respects, unique, in contemporary UK higher education. I will articulate just a few connected examples.

I noted above my perspective on the purpose of strategy: to mobilise the commitment of colleagues to deliver practical actions that will achieve our shared ambitions. At the same time, there is little benefit in mobilizing the commitment of colleagues who are not good at what the institution requires them to do. As a result, NTU has implemented what I believe to be the most rigorous appraisal system in the sector, complete with individual performance ratings. These carry financial consequences, mostly positive, through bonuses, but not always, for example, if objectives are not met.

There is much written in the organisational literature about the importance of culture and strategy with which I agree, as reflected above. However, there is less focus on structure, by which I mean in this context the crucial role that accountability exercised through line management plays. The setting and monitoring of objectives for individuals sends a clear message about what is valued – in one sense quite literally – by NTU. The benefit of this approach can be seen in the results from the annual National Student Survey. In most years, NTU scores well above the average across all categories of questions and, more relevant to this point, does so with remarkable consistency across subjects, departments, and sites.

In parallel with this appraisal approach, NTU made the decision to leave national collective pay bargaining, in which all but a small handful of UK universities participate. One of

the major benefits from this decision is that it allows NTU to align all elements of its reward package during negotiations with our Trade Unions: pay increase, progression up the pay spine, annual leave allowance, one-off payments etc.. In part as a consequence, NTU has not had any disruption due to strikes or other forms of industrial action since I joined; this record is genuinely unique in UK higher education.

Effective Leadership Strategies

I hope my leadership strategy is becoming clear: agree on our vision, articulate our ambitions, mobilise our colleagues' commitment, set our broad objectives, and review our individual and collective performance.

Once this approach was embedded, and it took three years to do so, even I was surprised at the growth in confidence and pride that ensued; this was both enhanced and exemplified by our first UK University of the Year award in 2017. Many more colleagues now take the initiative to innovate within their areas without feeling the need to seek permission. The best recent example is the introduction of relaxed graduation ceremonies, where neurodiverse graduates can choose to design a personalised approach that will meet their particular individual needs; again, these were the first of their kind in the country.

Personal Identity and Perception

I have written books about my perspective of leadership as performance so I will not repeat the full argument here. However, I want to be clear from the outset: whilst there are overlaps, performing a role in an organisation is most definitely not the same as performing a role in a play.

Most of all, this view of leadership calls for discipline. The greatest potential strength of organisational leaders is everything

that is done or said will be interpreted through the eyes of colleagues. At the same time, the greatest potential weakness of organisational leaders is everything that is done or said will be interpreted through the eyes of colleagues.

It is incumbent upon us to judge in each situation the most constructive intervention that is in our repertoire, and to work to extend this repertoire as we grow more experienced. Contrary to what some managerial gurus claim, being yourself is not enough; what may be enough is being the most effective version of yourself that you can conjure in the circumstances you find yourself in. There are normally two challenges to this view.

The first is that we all possess an essential self that is consistent, regardless of context. Well, I am not sure I see one revealed across my various roles as parent, grandparent, hockey umpire, charity trustee, hobby farmer, football supporter and so on; rather, I draw upon my repertoire as seems most fitting to the activity, albeit on occasions with less discipline than I hope I show as Vice-Chancellor.

The second is that my approach will not make people feel that I am behaving with authenticity or integrity. My response is most virtues attributed to a leader are just that: attributional; like beauty, they are in the eyes of the beholder. My argument is that colleagues see authenticity and integrity in my typically calm and measured approach as I seek to do the best for them and those we serve.

Advice for Fellow Leaders

I would offer humbly two suggestions to address the major challenges that faced me when I became Vice-Chancellor.

The first is the challenge of leading at a distance. The number of colleagues who are looking to you for leadership will multiply, in most cases many times, when you take up this role. You can

only have the opportunity to create a personal relationship with a small sub-set. What I have learned is that colleagues want to have a feeling of affiliation, to find something that you share, which can form the basis of a conversation when you do meet. As I did in this chapter earlier, I have introduced into the NTU community facts about myself that I hope create some connection with all of my colleagues: I have two daughters and two young grandchildren; I support Everton Football Club; I keep sheep ... you will see the point.

The second is the challenge of understanding the much bigger landscape that opens up to you suddenly after your appointment, some of which you might not at first realise is either there or that it matters. It took me a while – and several conversations with a wide range of my own University colleagues and governors as well as external partners - to become aware of the major gaps in my repertoire that I needed to overcome.

In my case, these areas were the most effective method of promoting NTU through effective public affairs and the best routes into the networks of influential people across our region. To deal with the first, the University appointed a specialist consultant who over the next seven years enabled me to transform the profile and influence of NTU with national politicians, policy makers, and media; he is himself now a governor at NTU. For the second, we identified a new Chancellor who was affiliated already with NTU alongside being one of the most widely respected and well-connected individuals in our part of the UK.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

My main piece of advice for aspiring leaders is to curate your Curriculum Vitae: what got you here will not get you there. Talk to people who shape the perceptions of who is ready to be promoted to more senior roles in universities - in the UK

“My main piece of advice for aspiring leaders is to curate your Curriculum Vitae: what got you here will not get you there.”

this is a small number of recruitment consultancies - about the strengths and weaknesses in your experience and expertise to date. Where possible, access people who have a reputation in the sector for being good at those things where you need to learn. This may mean working for them or asking them to be your mentor.

In my case, the weakness in my Curriculum Vitae was my lack of insight into the policy and practice of higher education and the cultural assumptions that shaped them. I was fortunate that I spent six years working for a Vice-Chancellor who was steeped in these issues and shared this broader wisdom during discussion on many topics that were considered by the senior team.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

This has to be one of the top priorities for every senior leader. We must demonstrate the importance that we attach to championing equality, diversity, and inclusion not just by what we say but by what we do.

Within our EDI (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) NTU Action Plan are three initiatives for which I take personal responsibility. The first is offering to be a mentor to academics from black and ethnic minority backgrounds who are considering applying for promotion to professor. The second is exploring in depth at local plans and recent progress – including looking at key metrics – in my annual reviews of every professional service department and academic school.

Thirdly – and I believe this to be unique in the UK – for the last four years I have chaired the University Shadow Executive Team (USET). This group consists of around 20 individuals with a range of protected characteristics under UK law who are drawn from the areas of responsibility of members of the

Extended University Executive Team (EUET). USET receives the same papers and briefings as EUET and brings a powerful set of voices and perspectives to the leadership and management of NTU that would otherwise not be heard so clearly and loudly.

Conclusion

As I prepare to leave my full-time career, I feel privileged to have worked for the National Health Service – the British institution of which the British public are most proud – and UK higher education, which I would contend is the aspect of the UK of which people around the world are most envious. The reputation of both is well founded in their achievements over many decades.

However, the impact over the next ten years of the five factors that I identified in the first section may well be profound. The response of universities has to be proportionate to this challenge. The responsibility of leaders may be to design and deliver significant change in a situation where the best guide to the future may not be the past. It will require them to question long-held practices and beliefs within institutions to an extent that may appear unreasonable. Then again, as I have heard said and taken to saying: if you want something to change, get someone unreasonable to do it.

KAKHA SHENGELIA



President, Caucasus University
Georgia

13

**A VISIONARY APPROACH
TO INSTITUTIONAL
TRANSFORMATION**

Introducing My Institution

Caucasus University (CU) is more than just an educational institution—it is a transformative force in the Caucasus region and beyond. Founded in 1998 with the support of the U.S. State Department and in collaboration with Georgia State University, CU has grown into a globally recognized hub of academic excellence and innovation. Its mission, “Knowledge is a foundation for freedom,” encapsulates its commitment to preparing highly qualified, ethically grounded professionals who are equipped to thrive in both local and international markets. By promoting critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and personal responsibility, CU fosters an environment where students are empowered to become independent, thoughtful leaders in their fields. Through research-oriented teaching and learning, CU also fosters democratic ideals and meets society’s evolving educational needs.

What sets CU apart is its unique blend of tradition and modernity. The university’s historical roots are deeply intertwined with its global outlook. With campuses in Tbilisi, the capital

of Georgia, and Batumi, on the Black Sea coast, as well as international partnerships spanning Europe and the U.S., CU offers students a truly global education. For almost 15 years, CU has been designated as an off-site campus of Grenoble Ecole de Management, running one of the top-ranked Executive MBA programs for Georgian and international students, currently ranked 47th globally by the Financial Times. Additionally, CU has established its European campus in France, on the premises of Rennes School of Business, and an international training center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

CU has also brought the Basque Culinary Center to Georgia and is in the process of establishing a top-tier Culinary Academy in Gurjaani, located in Georgia's renowned wine region. This academy not only focuses on traditional culinary techniques but also emphasizes innovation and sustainability, preparing students to excel in the global food industry. This collaboration, along with others, reflects CU's commitment to providing students with unparalleled access to world-class business and specialized education—without leaving the region.

CU's commitment to excellence is further evidenced by its prestigious accreditations and rankings. The university holds the UNWTO TedQual accreditation for its Tourism programs, RIBA accreditation from the UK for its Architecture program, and CU is the only university in the Caucasus region in the final stages of achieving AACSB accreditation, the gold standard for business schools worldwide. These accreditations and rankings are not just badges of honor; they are a testament to CU's rigorous academic standards, innovative teaching methods, and commitment to student success.

With over 57 Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programs spanning disciplines such as Business, Law, Media, Technology, Architecture, Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences,

Tourism, Medicine, Economics, and Education, CU is a hub of intellectual diversity. Its emphasis on research and innovation is evident in groundbreaking projects in cybersecurity, healthcare management, and social sciences, supported by international donors such as the European Commission (EC), the United Nations (UN), and USAID. These research initiatives not only contribute to global knowledge but also provide students with opportunities to engage in cutting-edge projects that address real-world challenges.

CU's outstanding achievements include a 98% employment rate among graduates, partnerships with over 300 international universities, 12 double-degree programs with top universities in the U.S. and Europe, 100 exchange agreements worldwide, the highest number of funded mobilities under the Erasmus+ program, and 25% of the student body consisting of international students from 51 different countries. These accomplishments underscore CU's role as a gateway to global opportunities for its students. CU graduates are highly sought after by employers, thanks to the university's emphasis on practical skills, critical thinking, and global awareness.

Leadership Tenure: Dr. Kakha Shengelia's Transformative Vision

My journey at Caucasus University began in 2000 when I became the Dean of the Caucasus School of Business, and my visionary leadership ultimately led me to become the owner and president of the university in 2004. Over the course of my tenure, I guided the institution through a period of unprecedented growth and innovation, transforming the school from a small business-focused academy into a fully-fledged, independent university offering a diverse range of academic and co-curricular programs across 11 faculties.

When I first joined the university, the Caucasus School of

Business was a collaborative entity operating under the auspices of three state-run universities in Georgia. Under my guidance, it transitioned into an autonomous institution, expanding its educational offerings from solely business programs to include a broad spectrum of disciplines at three levels of education—Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral. My strategic vision was not just to expand the institution in size but also to build a comprehensive educational ecosystem that would serve the diverse needs of students in Georgia and beyond, offering a wide range of academic programs.

Starting with just 10 students in the business school, I rapidly expanded the institution's enrollment, which now exceeds 10,000 students. My leadership came at a time when Georgia's educational system was still recovering from its Soviet-era influences. Despite these challenges, under my direction, Caucasus University became the first institution in Georgia to introduce international exchange programs and double-degree opportunities, a revolutionary step that placed CU at the forefront of higher education internationalization in the country. The partnership with Georgia State University played a critical role in bringing a Western-style education to the country of Georgia, setting CU apart as a model for modern education in the region.

Beyond the development of academic programs, my vision also extended to the physical and infrastructural growth of the university. A pivotal moment during his leadership was the decision to move from a rented facility to a historic campus in the heart of Tbilisi, symbolizing the university's growth and ambition. The subsequent development of a state-of-the-art modern campus and the establishment of a dynamic new campus in Batumi were further milestones, providing students with world-class learning environments. These campuses not only

enhanced the student experience but also significantly raised CU's profile on the global stage, positioning it as a leading institution in the region.

In addition to transforming CU's physical infrastructure, I have played a crucial role in expanding the university's international presence. Under my leadership, CU established numerous global partnerships and became a member of several prestigious international academic networks, creating unprecedented opportunities for both students and faculty. These collaborations have helped CU attract top-tier international faculty, enabled student mobility programs, and expanded CU's reputation as a hub for academic excellence and innovation.

My leadership is characterized by a commitment to academic excellence, strategic growth, and internationalization. My efforts have not only shaped CU into one of the region's most prestigious universities but has also made it a beacon of progress in higher education, setting the stage for future generations of students and academics to thrive.

Professional Journey

My professional journey spans multiple sectors, with leadership roles in both academia and public service. As President of Caucasus University, I have been instrumental in transforming the institution into a globally recognized center of academic excellence, offering students a dynamic and internationally respected education.

My influence on global higher education is particularly notable through my tenure as President of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) from 2017 to 2021. During this time, I led efforts to foster international collaborations, enhance educational standards, and expand the global reach of higher education institutions. I continued my leadership role

as Chairman of the IAUP Board of Directors from 2021 to 2024, solidifying my reputation as a thought leader in the sector.

My leadership extended to my role as Vice Mayor of Tbilisi, where I was responsible for overseeing social affairs. My initiatives focused on improving the city's social welfare systems, addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, and reducing inequality. My work in social policy contributed to enhancing the quality of life for Tbilisi's residents, creating a more inclusive environment.

In public service, I have made significant contributions as a Member of Parliament in Georgia (2004-2008), where I played a key role in shaping national policies related to education, science, culture, and foreign affairs. As Deputy Chairman of the Education, Science, Sport, and Culture Committee, and the Foreign Affairs Committee, my efforts were pivotal in advancing reforms aimed at improving Georgia's education system and strengthening international relations. I was also instrumental in modernizing educational frameworks and promoting global partnerships.

In addition to my administrative and academic leadership, I have dedicated part of my career to teaching, offering courses on Management Concepts and the History of Georgia. My passion for education and mentorship is central to my personal mission of shaping future leaders and professionals equipped to succeed in a globalized world. My book, "History of Georgia," has been translated into several languages and is available to international students and scholars worldwide. The book offers a comprehensive exploration of Georgia's rich history, spanning from ancient times to the modern era, highlighting its cultural heritage, political evolution, and significant historical events. It serves as a valuable resource for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Georgia's role in regional and global history.

My extensive contributions to both academia and public service have earned numerous prestigious awards. I have been honored with the Presidential Order of Excellence by the President of Georgia, as well as the Ring of Honor from the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria. I have received honorary doctorates from esteemed institutions, including Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia), the University of Guadalajara (Mexico), and J. F. Oberlin University (Japan). My highest honor came from the University of Johannesburg at the proposal of Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Honorary Doctor of Caucasus University and current President of the United Nations University.

I hold key positions on the Board of Directors of the World University Consortium (WUC) and the European Public Law Organization (EPLO). I am also a member of the Council of Representatives of the European Law and Governance School (ELGS) and a Fellow of the World Academy of Art & Science, where I continue to contribute to global discussions on education, governance, and public policy.

A Legacy of Innovation and Inclusion

My leadership at Caucasus University (CU) has been defined by my unique role as the institution's founding figure. Unlike typical university presidents, my journey as the Dean of the Caucasus School of Business played a pivotal role in the university's early development. In its infancy, CU was shaped by my vision, determination, and unwavering commitment to educational excellence, setting the foundation for what would eventually become a renowned institution. I quite literally built CU from scratch, shaping every aspect of the university's identity, values, and structure.

My visionary leadership introduced Western-style academic

integrity, transparency, and global engagement to the post-Soviet educational landscape, creating a distinctive space for CU in a region transitioning from Soviet-era education systems. By blending Eastern European traditions with Western academic standards, I made CU a trailblazer in higher education. My approach was grounded in the understanding that a truly modern, competitive university must embrace international standards while staying firmly rooted in its local context.

My leadership strategy is centered on collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity. As the university grew, my management style fostered an environment where faculty, students, and administration worked hand-in-hand to shape CU's trajectory. Through regular weekly board meetings, corporate retreats, and cultural engagement activities, I created a dynamic and cohesive community focused on shared goals. My open-door policy allowed constant communication between all levels of the institution, ensuring that feedback, ideas, and concerns were always heard and addressed. This transparency nurtured a culture of trust and mutual respect, enabling innovation to flourish.

A key aspect of my leadership has been my commitment to gender equality and diversity in higher education. From the outset, I ensured that women played a significant role in CU's leadership, faculty, and student body. My efforts to empower women in academia and business have been particularly evident through the Female Leadership Training Program, which has transformed the careers of women seeking to excel in traditionally male-dominated fields. Looking ahead, CU is set to launch the Executive Leadership Training Program for Women in 2025, further underscoring Dr. Shengelia's dedication to creating an equitable environment for all students, regardless of gender.

Through my leadership, CU has become a model of innovation

and inclusion, building a strong reputation not only in Georgia but across the globe. My legacy is one of collaboration, transparency, and empowerment, qualities that continue to define CU's identity and its trajectory in the world of higher education.

Distinct Contributions to Leadership

My tenure as the founding leader of Caucasus University (CU) has been marked by transformative contributions that have shaped the institution into one of the most respected universities in the Caucasus region. Unlike traditional university presidents, I did not step into an established institution but had the unique opportunity to shape CU's identity from the ground up. My visionary leadership laid the foundation for a university that bridges Eastern European traditions with Western academic standards, creating an educational environment built on integrity, transparency, and global engagement.

My decision to introduce Western-style academic integrity and global engagement to the post-Soviet educational landscape was a bold and pioneering move. At a time when higher education in Georgia was still recovering from its Soviet legacy, CU became a model of modernization. My leadership was instrumental in developing a university that not only embraced international academic standards but also prepared students to thrive in an interconnected global environment.

My ability to lead the university from its humble beginnings as a small business school into a full-fledged institution offering 11 faculties, serving over 10,000 students, and establishing partnerships with prestigious universities across the globe speaks volumes about my vision and commitment to innovation.

Effective Leadership Strategies and Championing Diversity and Advancement

My leadership at Caucasus University (CU) is defined by my visionary approach, commitment to innovation, inclusivity, sustainability, and exceptional risk-taking ability. My leadership strategies have not only positioned CU as a dynamic and globally recognized institution but also reinforced my dedication to fostering a forward-thinking academic environment where collaboration, new ideas, and global engagement thrive.

A hallmark of my leadership is my bold and strategic decision-making, often in the face of uncertainty. My willingness to take calculated risks has been instrumental in CU's success, allowing the university to pioneer initiatives that were initially met with skepticism but ultimately proved transformative. My ability to anticipate future trends and act decisively, even when support was lacking, has been a key factor in CU's growth. Whether it was establishing international partnerships during Georgia's post-Soviet transition or implementing progressive educational reforms, my foresight has consistently propelled CU forward.

My approach to internationalization exemplifies this forward-thinking mindset. At a time when Georgian higher education was still rooted in Soviet-era practices, I championed the integration of global academic standards and partnerships. CU became the first Georgian university to offer international exchange opportunities and double-degree programs, positioning itself as a leader in higher education reform. These pioneering efforts allowed CU to align with Western academic norms while maintaining a strong connection to the region's cultural heritage.

My leadership also strongly focuses on empowering women and promoting gender equality. Under my guidance, CU has not only advanced gender equality within its governance and

academic structures but has also taken significant steps to support female entrepreneurship. CU's acceleration programs have become key players in promoting female-led startups by offering mentorship, resources, and funding opportunities specifically tailored to support women entrepreneurs. These programs aim to create a thriving ecosystem for female business leaders, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among young women. CU also strives to raise awareness about the importance of gender-inclusive entrepreneurship by hosting events and workshops that highlight the challenges and successes of women in the business world. This is in line with CU's broader goal of creating a gender-equitable environment where leadership opportunities are available to all, regardless of gender.

Another defining aspect of my leadership is my emphasis on open communication and collaboration at all levels of the university. Recognizing that effective leadership requires transparency and active engagement from all stakeholders, I introduced weekly board meetings and corporate retreats. These sessions foster open dialogue, ensuring alignment among faculty, administrators, and students while reinforcing a shared vision for CU's future.

I also understand the power of cultural engagement in building a strong academic community. By strategically integrating cultural events and collaborative activities into university life, I have cultivated an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives. This commitment to inclusivity is further reflected in CU's policies, which promote gender equality and leadership opportunities for women. Under my guidance, CU became a signatory of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), reinforcing its commitment to fostering female leadership. Among CU's 25 board members, 19 are women; of its five

vice presidents, three are female; and of its 11 deans, eight are women. One of the most notable initiatives in this area is the Female Leadership Training Program, which empowers women to excel in leadership roles across academia and business.

My leadership is also distinguished by my commitment to sustainability. I have made it a priority to integrate sustainable practices into CU's operations and academic programs, ensuring that students are not only equipped with professional knowledge but also with a strong sense of social and environmental responsibility. His efforts to align CU's strategic framework with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have led to the development of programs and partnerships that promote green technologies, sustainable business models, and socially responsible initiatives.

Further, I have established international expert councils to embed interdisciplinary and global perspectives into CU's leadership. These councils, composed of thought leaders from around the world, provide valuable insights that guide CU's strategic direction, ensuring that the university remains globally competitive while addressing local challenges. By integrating diverse viewpoints, I have successfully positioned CU as a leader in higher education, capable of adapting to the evolving demands of an interconnected world.

My leadership exemplifies the power of vision, risk-taking, and resilience. My ability to make bold decisions, even in the face of uncertainty, has been instrumental in CU's rise as a premier institution in the region. By fostering innovation, inclusivity, sustainability, and global engagement, I have created a university that not only prepares students for the future but actively shapes it.

Personal Identity and Leadership

My leadership is deeply rooted in my personal identity and diverse experiences, which have shaped the way I lead and interact with others. My background as both an academic and an active participant in Georgia's public life plays a significant role in shaping my leadership style. My extensive career has imbued me with a unique blend of practical governance skills, cultural sensitivity, and a deep commitment to shaping educational excellence in Georgia and beyond.

My personal identity is influenced by my strong connection to Georgian heritage, a keen understanding of international academic standards, and a firm belief in the importance of academic integrity and global engagement. Raised in a country that transitioned from Soviet control to independence, I experienced firsthand the challenges of rebuilding and redefining national identity and institutions. This formative period has greatly influenced my view of leadership, emphasizing the need to adapt and evolve in a rapidly changing global landscape.

My leadership style reflects my multicultural experiences and multilingual abilities, which have allowed me to effectively communicate with diverse groups around the world. Fluent in Georgian, English, French, Russian, and Turkish, I have navigated a variety of cultural and professional settings, making me highly adaptable. This adaptability is evident in my leadership at CU, where I have successfully built a university that is inclusive, forward-thinking, and internationally oriented. My ability to integrate local values with global perspectives has been instrumental in creating a unique academic environment at CU that bridges Eastern European and Western traditions.

I am widely respected for my integrity, accessibility, and visionary leadership. Colleagues, students, and partners frequently

highlight my open-door policy, my active engagement with faculty, and my commitment to social and academic responsibility. My approachability and willingness to listen to diverse viewpoints have made me not only a leader but also a mentor to many within the CU community. I am seen as a symbol of transparency and a commitment to positive change—qualities that inspire those around me to actively contribute to the university's growth and direction.

Advice for Aspiring Leaders

Based on my extensive experience in leadership roles, both in academia and government, I offer valuable advice to fellow presidents, rectors, and chancellors aiming to succeed in their leadership positions:

- **Prioritize Open Communication and Collaboration**

“One of the most important aspects of leadership is creating an environment where communication is transparent, and collaboration is encouraged. As leaders, we must ensure that everyone feels heard and valued. Implementing regular opportunities for open dialogue, like weekly meetings or feedback sessions, helps align the institution's efforts and build trust within the community.”

- **Lead by Example**

“Leadership is not about issuing directives from above. It's about leading by example. Demonstrating the values you wish to instill in your institution – such as integrity, transparency, and inclusivity – through your actions is key to gaining the respect of your colleagues, students, and staff.”

- **Embrace Change and Innovation**

“Higher education is evolving at a rapid pace, and as leaders, we must be at the forefront of innovation. Embrace change, explore new educational models, and keep pushing the boundaries of

what's possible. It's crucial to stay adaptable and open-minded, especially in times of crisis or transformation."

- **Empower Your Team**

"A strong leader surrounds themselves with capable individuals and empowers them to take ownership of their work. Delegating responsibility and fostering a culture of trust can drive innovation and increase productivity. Your team should be an extension of your vision, not just people carrying out your orders."

- **Foster Inclusivity**

"Leadership should be inclusive and diverse. I strongly believe in creating environments where everyone feels respected, regardless of their background. Diversity is not just a moral imperative; it's a strength that brings creativity, innovation, and new perspectives."

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

For individuals aspiring to become presidents, rectors, or chancellors, Dr. Shengelia shares the following guidance based on his personal journey and leadership experiences:

- **Develop a Deep Understanding of Your Institution**

"Before assuming a leadership role, invest time in understanding your institution's history, culture, and unique challenges. This will give you the insights needed to lead with purpose and integrity. Leadership is not about imposing a personal agenda; it's about guiding the institution toward its goals in a way that respects its traditions while preparing it for the future."

- **Cultivate Emotional Intelligence**

"The ability to understand and manage your emotions, and the emotions of others, is essential for effective leadership. Emotional intelligence helps you navigate difficult conversations, resolve conflicts, and connect with individuals on a personal level. As a leader, your ability to empathize and build rapport

is just as important as your ability to make strategic decisions.”

- **Prepare for Challenges and Failure**

“No leadership journey is without its challenges. There will be setbacks and obstacles. The key is to learn from them and remain resilient. Failure is often the best teacher, as it pushes you to rethink strategies and grow. Don’t shy away from difficult situations – face them head-on and use them as opportunities for improvement.”

- **Build a Global Network**

“In today’s interconnected world, it’s important to build relationships with colleagues, alumni, and institutions across the globe. Engaging with alumni—both from your own institution and others—offers valuable insights, mentorship opportunities, and professional connections. These relationships not only foster academic partnerships but also provide a broader understanding of different educational systems and leadership models.”

- **Be Authentic and True to Your Values**

“Leadership requires authenticity. It’s important to stay true to your values, especially when faced with pressure or opposition. Your authenticity will resonate with others and inspire them to trust in your leadership. Stay grounded in your principles and don’t be afraid to take a stand for what’s right.”

- **Never Stop Learning**

“Leadership is a continuous journey of self-improvement. Never stop learning from others, whether they are peers, mentors, or those you lead. Stay curious, seek feedback, and strive to improve your skills. The best leaders are those who are constantly evolving.”

- **Leverage the Power of Alumni Networks**

“Alumni are a vital part of any institution’s global community, serving as ambassadors, mentors, and collaborators. By staying connected with alumni, you gain access to a wealth of experience,

industry insights, and career opportunities. Engaging with alumni networks can facilitate knowledge sharing, create pathways for professional growth, and strengthen institutional ties across borders.”

Conclusion

My reflections on my own leadership journey highlight the importance of integrity, inclusivity, collaboration, and adaptability. My success as a leader is attributed to my ability to embrace change, foster open communication, and stay grounded in my values. I emphasize that effective leadership is not about commanding from the top but about empowering others and creating an environment where everyone can contribute to the collective success of the institution.

For aspiring leaders, my advice focuses on building strong relationships, cultivating emotional intelligence, and staying authentic to one’s values. By following these principles, leaders can pave the way for long-lasting success, growth, and positive impact within their institutions.

ICHIRO TANIOKA



President, Osaka University of Commerce
Japan

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ROOTED IN LEGACY, GUIDED BY WISDOM.

Japan is a country that is known to have no single strong leader in any organization or entity, and decisions are usually made by consensus or following the majority. Naturally, reaching any decision is very time-consuming and it is hardly able to achieve drastic reform if it is contradictory to traditional routines and/or values. So, please do not expect much from my words, since I'm just a president of a small private university in Japan. I should also apologize to Devorah (the editor) that I'm not a strong leader. Anyhow, thank you very much for letting me write this chapter.

Currently, there are 817 Universities in Japan. Among these 817 universities, 86 are National, 113 are Public (State or Municipally owned), and the remaining 618 Universities are private. Most of those private institutions are small sized, fewer than 5000 students enrolled.

Let me start by introducing my institution.

Introducing My Institution

Tanioka Gakuen Educational Foundation (hereafter, "TGE-F") is a private, not-for-profit entity to manage several educational

institutions. TGE-F was established in 1928, and currently includes two Universities, 3 high-schools, and 1 kindergarten in OSAKA and HYOGO Prefecture, Japan. I am the chancellor of TGE-F.

Osaka University of Commerce (hereafter “OUC”), where I serve as the president in addition to the chancellor, has three undergraduate departments: “Economics”, “Management”, and “Public Administration”. OUC offers two master’s degrees and one doctoral degree.

Kobe Design University (hereafter “KDU”) is another university located in Kobe, the capital of HYOGO Prefecture. KDU focuses on Environmental Design (architecture & landscape), Manufacturing (products & crafts), Visual Design, and Media arts (filmmaking, manga/animation, graphics, and other arts), established in 1989.

There are also three high-schools in TGE-F, and one is in proximity to OUC while the other two are in other cities within the same Osaka prefecture. All of them are co-education and renowned for their athletic programs. Another kindergarten is under the umbrella of TGE-F.

The mission statement of TGE-F is, “Fostering students who can perform important roles of the society”, which is a kind of broad and ambiguous mission, you may think. Therefore, I have created four concrete pillars as a modern interpretation of the mission. They are, 1) kindness and courtesy, 2) fundamental and practical learning, 3) ability to think flexibly, and 4) positive and enjoyable life.

Leadership Tenure

I have served as a president of OUC for the last 28 years. Because TGE-F is a private entity, the board of directors appoints the presidents and principals of each school. My father was the chair of the board when I was appointed. Prior to me, the

president of OUC was my father. And before my father, it was my grandfather. Yes, it's a family business.

The most defining moment of my tenure was the time when I created a new department in OUC (Dept. of Public Administration). Many said it would be a big failure. However, it has proven to be successful. A mark of success is that many other universities followed the trend of creating departments in public administration and copied our curriculum.

Professional Journey

As mentioned before, I'm the third generation of TGE-F. I am the first son of the first son (my father) of the first son (grandpa), and naturally in Japanese tradition/culture, I have been expected to be a chair of the TGE-F someday in the future, unless there were reasons that I should not be.

My family was educationally oriented, and naturally, I was well educated so that I can also take some roles in the academic world (if possible) as well as managing TGE-F.

Fortunately, I am a type of person who is fond of reading books and engaging in different academic fields. I have researched many different subjects (and I feel I could do well in some of them). Although I earned my Ph.D. in Sociology (more specifically, criminology), I have published books in fields of: Mathematics, Geography, Puzzles, Law, Science Fiction, History of Games, World History of Calendars, Gambling Studies, Research Methods, Sports Betting, and several Criminology publications. I have either contributed or written to more than 70 books and at least 40 of them are my personal publications.

Effective Leadership Strategies

As a leader, I should behave as if I am capable and confident to make important decisions. To do so, there are several customs

(practices) which I usually keep in mind when I make a speech in front of other people, usually in front of professors/faculties, staff, or students.

First, the speech must be “short and condensed”. A true leader should know things to do, how to do them, and why. I am not sure if I am a capable decision maker, but at least I am a confident leader. By believing in what to do, how to do it, and why we should do it.

Second, to make a speech, I do not prepare a script. The contents which I shall say in the speech are always in my head. Because I do not read any script, I can look at faces in the audience and/or even ask questions to individuals. Occasionally I take a pause, if necessary, so that the listeners can concentrate more. Moreover, I sometimes even change the contents while I'm speaking, according to the response and attitudes of listeners.

In summary, to maintain my leadership, I seek to appear as a strong and confident leader through my words and through my presentation. So far, it looks like it's working.

Personal Identity and Perception

Even for an average size University (for Japan), there are more than 100 professors and faculties in OUC. To be a leader of them, one should be respected by them. Though I am not conscious about how my leadership style is perceived, I tried to become one who is respected.

Max Weber stated that there are three sources of power for leadership: namely, “tradition”, “charisma”, and “legitimacy”. As I mentioned before, I was born into a family who possessed traditional power because my grandfather was the founder. I felt the obligation to be a legitimate leader understanding that charismatic power would come later if I were qualified.

I try to teach as many classes as possible and I studied many

subjects in addition to my primary discipline. I also tried to write influential books and papers, undertake many roles both internally and externally, so that I can increase my scope of influence.

Outside, for my institution, I have been appointed to many positions. For example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has appointed me to three influential committee positions that envisions and recommends the direction of Japan's national higher educational policies. Several public entities also appointed me as a board member/committee member aligned with MEXT's mission. It means I receive important policy information before it is released. Having access early and often to this information helps me lead and add value to TGE-F.

Advice for fellow Leaders

For matriculation and/or commencement ceremonies for all schools of TGE-F, I address the students. In these cases, I talk not only to students, but also to their parents, and more importantly, to all the faculties and staff. For students, I seek to share and remind them of the mission and purpose of TGE-F.

Naturally, faculties and staff hear the same notion of the mission and purpose several times. That is not bad at all, since an important part of my job as a leader is to show the direction we are heading. The direction should be clearly identified and offer a common message for everyone.

A very important aspect in Japanese culture is that the leader repeatedly says the same or similar concepts without variation. To do so, one must hold a firm and concrete philosophy in one's own mind. If one has a clear philosophy of how to live, how the society should be, how the world should be harmonized, etc., there already should be an answer to the questions of "how

education should be” and “how should one act as a leader in the educational world”.

Given this leadership philosophy, my advice is: “your role as a leader is to let people go in the same direction,” and for that purpose, “you must have a firm and concrete philosophy within yourself”. When you speak, try not to deviate from that.

Guidance for Aspiring Leaders

We ought to know leaders are lonely in nature. Of course, one leader may have a family, friends, and many followers who admire the leader. What I mean by “lonely” is about decision making and taking responsibility for the result.

I believe there are three important attributes that every good leader must have. There are (namely), “knowledge and wisdom”, “decision making”, and “characteristics that are humane”. Let me explain briefly.

As a leader, especially inside any academic circle, you must be knowledgeable of many issues. There is no short-cut to being a knowledgeable person; so, I must repeat that you should keep reading, keep writing, keep listening, and keep studying, every day in your life. Knowledge that can be researched and achieved through books (dictionary), smart phones, and internet environment (AI) are fine and important, but the application of varying knowledge is more important. This application ability can be called “wisdom,” and is a key aspect for a leader.

Even if you know the right direction which the organization should go, the leader must “decide” and let others move toward the right direction. This is the decision-making part of leadership. It’s sad to see someone full of knowledge and new ideas, cannot decide and/or cannot declare and persuade others. That type of person can be a good staff officer or adviser to a leader, but not a leader by him/herself.

“I believe there are three important attributes that every good leader must have. There are (namely), ‘knowledge and wisdom’, ‘decision making’, and ‘characteristics that are humane’.”

The leader must make a final decision by oneself. Before that, the person may research/check the experience and/or seek advice from others. But the final decision must be made by oneself. In that sense, a leader is very isolated and lonely.

The last attribution “characteristic and humanity” is the most important of all three. Even if you are knowledgeable, a good decision-maker, and able to direct the faculty and staff, if you are not respected and loved by them, the organization will not be highly successful. Leaders make a countless number of decisions, and the leader may still fail. If you are respected and loved, say if you are good at the aspect of humanity, your failure may not be so harshly judged or those failures may be taken as just unlucky. But, if you are arrogant in nature, not such a soft landing will be the result. The organization is weak in nature under such a fragile leader.

These are my notions of the three necessary attributes for successful leadership. You do not have to follow all, but you should have your own concrete notion instead. Otherwise, one may not be a true leader.

Championing Diversity and Advancement

I do not think it's a problem, personally, that some groups are underrepresented if opportunities are given equally. OUC, for which I am in charge, does not adopt any affirmative action for admissions nor any other special treatment because we believe any artificial implementation of this distribution would not be the final resolution for society. Of course, any discrimination should not be allowed.

The result of attributable distribution, I admit, may not be equal. Further, in society today, people are classified (diversified) across many sub- or sub-sub- groups for complex reasons. Women are just one of those subgroups.

Traditions and cultures dare not be evaluated by one standard only which originates from one value. For instance, Japanese housewives/house husbands usually deal with the financial matters of the family. Men/Women who work get their allowance only.

I must admit Japanese women are underrepresented in many important positions. The biggest reason for this is the persistent social pressure that women do not have to compete with men. Even the female student's mother says, "you are a woman, you do not have to compete with others so hard". For example, women are underrepresented in an assembly and at the same time women are most of the voting population. This means that many women do not vote for the candidates from the same gender. This view should be changed in certain ways, but I believe artificial correction is not an answer. The answer should be the contents of education, but not the enrollment impacting the educational system. Anyone coming from any demographic or background can break the glass ceiling if only by one's effort and ability. Hoping such a day will come in the near future; am I dreaming?



International Association of University Presidents