

# ***Mindanao State University: Its Role in the Productivity and Development of the Muslim Region in the Philippines***

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***T***his paper is a discourse on the role of Mindanao State University in the productivity and development of the Muslim region during the last three decades. Specifically, it intends to answer the question: “How far has MSU gone with its mandated goals?”

What is today the “Mindanao State University System” was formerly the University of Mindanao located in Dansalan City (now Marawi City), the heart of Muslimland on Mindanao. It is the first state university on Mindanao, and was purposely created by law for the Muslims on Mindanao, from a bill authored by the committee of Congressman Ahmad Domocao Alonto Sr. in 1955 when he was in the House of Congress, and signed by President Ramon Magsaysay as RA 1387, as amended. The university was formally organized on September 1, 1961 with the induction into office of its founding president, the late Dr. Antonio Isidro, just before then the Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of the Philippines.

Mindanao State University has nine campuses. It is headed by a system president. Each campus is headed by a chancellor. The highest policymaking body of the university is the Board of Regents, now chaired by the Commissioner on Higher Education.

The funding of the university is made directly from the Department of Budget and Management. The main campus alone has an annual budget of almost half a billion pesos (P.5 billion).

### **The University Goal**

Many people, even those earning their living and running MSU, do not understand and, thus, do not gear their activities with the goals of the university. That is one of the reasons why this question has to be asked: "How far has MSU gone to achieve its mandated goals?"

But first the goals. As embodied in its charter, Mindanao State University has two major objectives, namely: (1) to accelerate the integration of the cultural minorities, particularly the Muslims, into the mainstream of the national body politic; and (2) to provide technical and professional manpower for the rapid social and economic development of the Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan region. To achieve these goals, the university has embarked on and established programs and specialized units geared towards quality instruction, research and extension. That is, MSU has units specifically created and purposely instituted in the pursuance of its research and extension functions, aside from instruction. But the manpower of the research and extension offices are not expected to directly engage in research and extension services; it only facilitates or supports said functions. The appropriate people expected to carry out these functions are the faculty themselves of the university. As Magdalena and Saber have said: "more support...has to be delivered to them [that is, the faculty] if only to provide balance in the academe."<sup>1</sup>

It would seem at this time that the different Colleges at MSU have been concentrating their efforts on instruction (which is about 33.3 percent of the university function), and if they have conducted researches or extension programs, such undertakings have by and large been insignificant. The colleges, in other words, appear to have ignored and left behind the other two functions of the university. For this reason, there are these consequent gaps and failures that have resulted in the non-attainment of the goals of the university.

Although the Colleges give priority to instruction, they are equally obliged to understand -- and presumably do not understand -- the necessity of research and extension works, if only to fully serve the mandate of the university charter and to make MSU a true university. They probably agree with Agoncillo, who said that without research a university will be no more than a *glorified high school*.<sup>2</sup>

But these Colleges cannot be blamed entirely for focusing their attention

on instruction. it is a fact on campus that many of their faculty members are more than willing to do research and extension works not only because these are part and parcel of their duties and responsibilities but also because these are avenues where they can express their academic freedom and find ways for their professional growth.<sup>3</sup> They are, however, handicapped by several circumstances, as will be shown later.

### **MSU and the Muslims**

It is worth restating the two main purposes of the university, which are: (1) to integrate the Muslims into the national body politic and (2) to provide technical and professional manpower for the Minsupala region, particularly manpower from among the Muslims. In other words, the university's main purpose, simply put, is "to integrate and to train the Muslims." Has MSU been able to integrate the Muslims into the national body politic? Looking at the present Muslim struggles and the different Muslim groups working for cessation from the Republic, the answer seems very clear. MSU has not helped to integrate the Muslims. Perhaps, one reason, as shown by statistics, may be that greater percentage of those who have been trained at MSU have been non-Muslims. Perhaps one of the reasons for this state of affairs has been the failure of the leadership in the educational system, which, according to Renato Constantino, has failed "to understand the needs of the masses because it is a leadership that can communicate with the masses only in general and vague terms."<sup>4</sup>

Constantino is of the belief that the leadership in the educational system must be given to people who understand the constituents it is supposed to serve. Thus if we follow Constantino's argument, since MSU has been purposely created for the Muslims, qualified Muslims who understand the constituent community in the service area, therefore, must be given the chance to take the leadership of the university. One should not limit the leadership to the presidency of the university, but it should include the vice presidents, chancellors, vice chancellors, and the others. The trouble with MSU seems to be that the leadership is "different" from the constituents it serves.

In addition to constantino, Dioscoro Rabor (then Dean od Research at MSU) wrote:

I have come to the conclusion that most people, the Christian graduates, do not stay long in MSU even to justify the scholarship aid given them by MSU. Most of the time they only accepted the job offered in our university mainly because of high salaries. . . With the first offers of much

higher paying jobs outside of Marawi City they immediately grab them.<sup>5</sup>

In a memorandum made way back in 1975, Rabor tried to justify a proposal that the Muslim graduates in MSU be trained in the field of research, extension, teaching and in running the affairs of the university, since these people would be staying in Lanao more or less permanently. He further wrote:

We cannot deny that at present [1975] most of the upper-echelon Christian employees of MSU, including those in both the academic and the administrative units, commute between Iligan City and Marawi City almost everyday. This set-up has resulted in a very much reduced efficiency... in the performance of duty. . . *Most of these employees arrive on campus already past eight o'clock every morning, and some arrive even past nine o'clock and leave early in the afternoon.*<sup>6</sup>

At the present time, this 1975 reported practice on the MSU Main Campus is still going on. In fact, today no less than the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Dr. Jose T. de Luna) commutes from MSU Campus to Iligan City and these commuters often arrive past eight in the morning and leave for home before 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Furthermore, since the assumption of Dr. de Luna, *the five day-a-week classes have been reduced to four days a week.* This has reduced the frequency of reporting for work in the university. Perhaps this is a violation of the Civil Service work time and days? That remains to be found out.

Again, as one of its charter objectives, the university has been created in the heart of the Muslim land in order *integrate the Muslims into the national body politic.* Like the American policy, which was "to educate the Filipinos under the American system of education so that they would think and act like little Americans," the Muslims are supposed to be educated under the Philippine educational system so that they would think and act like the rest of the Filipinos. Furthermore, the American policy has provided that "the educated Filipinos would be appointed to different positions so that the Americans would not need to oversee them." After some time under the Americans, Filipinos had been appointed in different educational positions to oversee their Filipino colleagues. This procedure, however, was not followed in the case of the Muslims and MSU. At MSU, non-Muslims have been competing with Muslims for the different positions in the University and, in fact, MSU is by and large still dominated by non-Muslims even on the main campus. In the academe, for instance, only few Muslims are taken in with the faculty.

Because the majority are still non-Muslims, whenever there are occasions in which prayers are necessary at the opening program, non-Muslim prayers are made. The least that happens is that there are two prayers, one Muslims and one non-Muslim. This system only augments the social distance between Muslims and non-Muslims.

### **MSU and Its Academic Instruction**

There are indications that Mindanao State University is known for its academic excellence. In board and bar examinations, MSU graduates demonstrate their competence. MSU graduates do not only incur 100 percent passing in most national examinations, but they also tend to be on the top scores. This is perhaps the reason why many of its graduates have been occupying responsible positions both in private and government institutions.

However, it is sad to say that no MSU alumnus has yet reached the MSU presidency, although it is quite likely that an MSU alumnus would be more loyal to MSU than an outsider. Furthermore, there are people who believe that the academic standard of the University has been going down in quality lately. If this is true, it would not be an isolated case, as it is believed to be a nationwide phenomenon among all universities. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there is the ongoing Commission on Higher Education (CHED) program, called "Quality Education for Philippines 2000" on the accreditation of colleges and universities. The phrase "quality education for Philippines 2000," seems to suggest that today there is no quality education in the country, which has to strive for it by the year 2000.

In the special case of MSU, however, the former Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Macavaris attributed this decreased quality phenomenon to the peace and order situation on Mindanao; the attraction and retention problem of qualified academic personnel; the inadequate funding of programs; continuous institutional improvements, and the trend towards mediocrity.<sup>7</sup>

#### **1. Peace and order problem**

Many MSU outsiders believe that there is no stable peace and order condition in the region, especially in the Muslim communities. They may right or wrong. But what seems certain is that because of this bad impression about peace and order in the region, the university has been the recipient of the following problems:

(a) Difficulty in attracting highly qualified personnel. Even those who are already in the university may leave in the face of brighter and more peaceful

opportunities elsewhere; and

(b) Lack of interested international and local agencies that would engage in joint ventures with the university.

## 2. Attraction and retention problem

In addition to the peace and order problem, Macawaris gave the following reasons why MSU is less attractive to and has the problem of retaining its competent and qualified academicians:<sup>8</sup>

(a) The relative isolation of the university from national, social and intellectual life;

(b) Excessive teaching load and the inadequacy of opportunities to do research and attend seminars and conferences;

(c) The chronic delay of promotions that dampens morale and interest in the work; and

(d) Inadequate library and laboratory facilities or school supplies.

In addition to the factors identified by Dr. macawaris, the academic standard of the university is "going down" because the teaching competence, efficiency and effectiveness of the faculty members are affected by the following:

1. They are overloaded in their teaching assignments (15 units regular load) because of the university's difficulty in hiring new faculty. Constantino identifies this problem as a major factor that causes the lowering of the standard of our educational institutions in the Philippines;<sup>9</sup>

2. They have slim opportunity to attend seminars, conferences, symposia and the like, where they can be updated on the recent development in their respective fields;

3. Overpopulated classrooms. There re classes with more than forty (4) students despite the very limited capacity of MSU classrooms in terms of chairs, space and others and this problem is not alleviated because no additional classroom and faculty buildings are being built. According to Prof. Randolf David, in a paper read at the PNC years ago, then a school cannot have additional teachers or cannot raise tuition fees, the administration has to pack courses with more than the usual number of students, or scrimp on laboratory equipment. Obviously, the same professor continues, there cannot be much opportunity for penetrating discussion and exchange of ideas in such a condition.<sup>10</sup>

4. Faculty members crowd in their respective departments, as

though they are fish vendors in the market, or at least like administrative personnel processing papers. Buildings to accommodate the faculty are obviously needed.

### **MSU and its Research and Extension Functions**

Earlier Agoncillo has been cited to have said that a university which does not engage in research is nothing but a glorified high school. Related to this concept, Magdalena and Saber<sup>11</sup> pointed out that any evaluation of the gains and losses of the university must start from the chartered mission of the university, which (aside from instruction) is to undertake research on Filipino native culture, arts, sciences, philosophy, and literature (RA 1893, as amended), especially those that are relevant to the integration of the Muslims into the national body politic. Now, it may be asked: "What has MSU done to accomplish its research and extension functions?" or "Is MSU no better than a glorified high school?" One should not say that MSU is no better than a glorified high school. However, in looking at its research and extension functions, one may like to present the question of former Secretary of Education Lourdes Quisumbing who, in her speech at the MSU Silver Jubilee Celebration in 1986, asked: "Is MSU faithful to its original mission?"<sup>12</sup> This question could not have been asked if MSU had tangible accomplishments relevant to its missions. In addition, Magdalena and Saber, although they did not categorically mention that MSU had not fully served its mandated missions, seemed to imply in their work that it was so.<sup>13</sup>

If there is failure, it could be explained by just one variable. For instance, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (the biggest college), although some of its faculty have undertaken researches, has, to a large extent, left behind the other two main functions of research and extension despite the fact that it has the most competent and appropriate manpower to perform such functions.<sup>14</sup> The failure to serve out these two other functions, however, cannot be solely attributed to the faculty of the Colleges. The faculty members are more than willing to do research or extension work for professional growth and other purposes.<sup>15</sup> They, however, are handicapped by the following factors:

1. They are preoccupied with teaching assignments, often carrying overload units;
2. MSU has limited funds for research. Magdalena and Saber said that in the past 15 years, MSU has allotted only 1.05 millions for research and publication, and in the past six years the average annual budget was P350,000.00.<sup>16</sup> This does not even represent one percent of the MSU budget.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the bureaucratic procedures in obtaining and spending funds are too discouraging.<sup>18</sup>

3. The college administration and the MSU for that matter focuses on instruction without motivating and encouraging the faculty to do research or extension work. For instance, policies and guidelines do not reflect the importance of research and publications. What is given importance is classroom teaching.

4. Faculty members in the college do not have places where they can read and write. Their departments are too small to accommodate them; and finally,

5. The colleges have no publication where the research output of its faculty can be published. Worse, the *Mindanao Journal* (the main official university journal) has been screaming in pain for lack of funds or the inability to get funding obligations.

### **Conclusion**

Achieving the goals of the university depends, to a large extent, upon the leadership of the University, the support of the national government and the cooperation of the people in the service area. The university is like a ship whose direction is determined by its Captain. That is why the leadership (meaning, the officials of the university like the president, vice presidents, chancellors, vice chancellors, etc.) must be given to people who understand the masses the university is serving and who are not allied with any political powers. Let me quote again Constantino, when he described the wrong kind of leadership in a university: “[it] is a leadership that fails to understand the needs of the masses because it is a leadership that can communicate with the masses only in general and vague terms.”

I would like to suggest that there be an *office in the CHED whose main task is to monitor, evaluate and assess the direction of the university, if it is still within its chartered mandate*. This office must also look into the needs of the university, and make possible recommendations to the President of the Republic or to any concerned office like the DBM. The national government must give more support to the university, like giving more budget for the construction of additional buildings, purchase of new facilities and equipment, and for research and publications.

Since the university is purposely created to provide training and professional manpower for the development of the Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan region, particularly of the Muslim region, and to integrate the Muslims into the national body politic, the Muslims must be motivated, given all possible support and priority by which they can avail of the services of the University to the fullest extent. Extensive developmental research must be done on and for the Muslims in consonance with its integration goal. Furthermore, the University must not neglect

the importance of research and must be given a substantial amount in the budget for that purpose. Whenever policies or schemes are to be promulgated (i.e., scheme for the deanship, study grant, promotion and others), the importance of research must be considered. That is, research and publication must be given proper consideration in promotion, study grants, etc., not just teaching efficiency. It is time that MSU must be not only a center of instructional excellence but also a center of excellence in research and publication.

Lastly, the University must also give priority to extension work among the people the university is supposed to serve. Formal and non-formal education must be conducted by the university. Doing extension and research works, especially those directly beneficial to the Muslims, will relieve the university of external threats from the community.

With that the university would be fully going towards attaining its goals.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Federico Magdalena and Mamtua Saber, "Twenty Five Years of Research and Development at MSU: Problems, Prospects, and Research Agenda," *Mindanao Journal*, XVII/3-4 (January-June 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Teodoro Agoncillo, *Scholarship and the University*, Monograph No. 33 (Professorial Lecture), University of the Philippines Press, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Magdalena and Saber, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> See Renato Constantino, *The Filipino in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Malaya Book, Inc., 1966) p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Dioscoro Rabor, 8-page, single space, Memorandum of the Officer-In-Charge of the Mindanao State University, October 8, 1975, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> Rabor, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Ali G. Macawaris, "The Filipino Muslim and Higher Education," *Mindanao Journal*, XVII/1-2 (July-December, 1990), 12-14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Constantino, writing almost three decades ago, has identified overloading of

teachers as a cause of the lowering of academic standard in the Philippines. See Renato Constantino. *The Filipino in the Philippines* (Quezon city, Philippines: malaya Books, Incorporated, 1966), pp. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> Randolph David. "The Social Context of Philippine Education." Lecture delivered in a seminar workshop on "Contemporary Philippine Education: Options and Perspectives," Philippine Normal college, Manila, April 26, 1980, pp. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Magdalena and Saber, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Lourdes Quisumbing (Secretary, Department of Education and Culture), Speech at the MSU Silver Jubilee Celebration, September 1, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> See magdalena and Saber, pp. 47-65.

<sup>14</sup> This is reported by the MSU Committee on Accreditation last September 17, 1997 Conference held at MSU Lecture Hall.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>16</sup> This is reflected in the 1996 MSU Marawi Campus Internal Operating Budget, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> Magdalena and Saber said that research fund has been low with only P1.05 million for a period of 15 years. For the last six years the average budget was P350,000.00 which does not even represent one percent of the MSU budget. Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Esmail R. Disoma, "Negligence and Motivation in Research," unpublished.

