

University of Sri Jayewardenepura: Towards Meeting National Aspirations

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Beginnings

The Vidyodaya University (presently University of Sri Jayewardenepura) was established in 1959 under the provisions of the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara University Act No 45 of 1958. Prior to the granting of university status the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara *Pirivenas* had gained recognition as traditional centres of higher learning. The Vidyodaya *Pirivena* pioneered by the erudite scholar monk Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala was established as far back as 1873 at Maligakanda in Colombo. The Vidyodaya University commenced operations from these haloed grounds but shifted to its present location in Gangodawila in 1961 where a new Campus had been expeditiously completed thanks to the untiring efforts of the first Vice Chancellor Venerable Weliwitiye Soratha.

The establishment of the two new universities was greatly influenced by the socio-political changes that swept across the country in the mid 1950's culminating in the S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike led Mahajana Eksath Peramuna coalition (with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party as the dominant partner) coming to power at the 1956 General Elections. The elevation of the two centres of traditional learning to university status was in response to the national political revival that took the country by storm at the time. While secondary education had expanded rapidly as a result of the introduction of a system of free education from 1940 onwards, there was no

¹ The writer is Emeritus Professor of Geography and Council Member, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Some of the information provided herein is derived from the author's long association with the university spanning a period of 41 years from 1964 to 2005. The author wishes to thank Dr. N.L.A. Karunaratne, Vice Chancellor and Prof. D.A. Tantirigoda, Chairman, Editorial Board for inviting him to make this contribution to the Jubilee Volume. The intention of this article is to provide a systematic view of the development of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura focussing on the processes than on the actors.

commensurate expansion of tertiary education in the country. University education was confined to a single University-the University of Ceylon- established in 1942. It had earlier functioned as a University College with affiliation to the University of London. Another development which was to have a significant impact on the establishment of the two new universities was the introduction of the mother tongue (Sinhala and Tamil) as the medium of instruction in secondary schools to be in harmony with the growing aspirations of the newly empowered population of the country. This change took place, grade by grade, from 1953 to 1959. By 1959 a monolingual group of students was ready to receive a university education. It is pertinent to note that Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was granted universal franchise in 1931 on the recommendation of the Donoughmore Commission.

In 1957 the new government as a matter of priority directed the University of Ceylon to facilitate the adoption of Sinhala and Tamil as media of instruction in the Departments of the Faculties of Arts and Oriental Studies by the year 1960. The other Faculties were to effect the transition within a reasonable timeframe. Soon there was the realization that the University of Ceylon by itself was not in a position to accommodate the relatively large number of students who would aspire to a university education. Moreover, there was a feeling among the more articulate sections of the intelligentsia that the University of Ceylon had been too elitist and there had to be new universities that were more responsive to the aspirations of the common people. The setting up of the two new universities was also seen as a means of broad basing university education. In fact the Vidyodaya University took the lead in enrolling students for external degrees. It is clear that the aforementioned reasons exerted a synergistic impact on the decision to elevate the two institutions of traditional higher learning to university status.

The expectations that the government had in setting up the two universities finds expression in the address made by Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, the Governor General and Ex-Officio Chancellor at the inauguration of the University on 18th February 1959:²

² Quoted in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura Calendar 1989

This is a historic occasion. Today witness the renaissance of Pirivena education on a broad front (...) Universities in the world set very high standards of learning and by their detached attitude to the dissemination of knowledge for its own sake and by their approach to research, establish traditions which ensure the advancement of knowledge. Each university, however, has to modify its approach to the problems of knowledge according to the requirements of the people. The economic, scientific and cultural problems of a nation should receive the active attention of a university.

It is clear from the foregoing that in establishing the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Universities the government of the day was responding to the aspirations of the people. As such the two new universities had a role to play and a mission to fulfil in a politically resurgent Sri Lanka. However, the setting up of the two universities (*pirivena* universities as some ventured to call them) has not always been seen in this light. De Silva³ opines:

There could be no greater contrast in the manner and pace at which the University of Ceylon on the one hand, and the two pirivena universities on the other, were established. The one had taken several decades of careful consideration, and a great deal of planning: the others were converted overnight into universities with all the attendant defects in such inordinate speed. Far from relieving pressure on the University of Ceylon, the creation of the two new universities might have actually increased it. Had Jennings notion of a second unit in Colombo being pursued, and a metropolitan university established there, the University of Ceylon might have been able to resolve the difficulties it faced in regard to the language of instruction without the complications of simultaneous pressure for increase in student numbers beyond its capacity.

Over the past fifty years the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has steadfastly striven to uphold the vision embodied in the tenet *Vijja Uppatatam Settha* (Among all that rise knowledge is the greatest). As Professor Narada Warnasuriya states in his message to the Cooperate Plan 2006-2010⁴ the University was

³ K.M.de Siva. "The University of Ceylon: 1955-1978" in K.M de Silva and G.H. Peiris (Ed) *The University System in Sri Lanka: Vision and Reality* (1995) ICES.

⁴ Cooperate Plan 2006-2008 (Vision in Action), University of Sri Jayewardenepura (nd), Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

initially led by a succession of erudite monks. They were visionaries who foresaw the need for a national university founded on a strong base in the indigenous culture, endowed with a capacity to expand the horizons as a modern seat of learning. It is this vision that guides and directs the university even at present.

Transition to a Secular University

Although the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Universities were established under an Act of Parliament modeled on the University of Ceylon Ordinance of 1942, special provisions were made in the Act for Bhikkhu Vice Chancellors and non-inclusion of women as internal students. Furthermore, there was a bias towards Buddhist and Oriental Studies. This is evident from the establishment of three Faculties, one each for the teaching of Buddhism, Philosophy and the Languages. In addition there were also the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Ayurveda and Science. The latter Faculty was short lived and the teaching of Science was delegated to a Department of Science. By 1962 steps were taken to set up the Faculty of Science, comprising four Departments namely, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics. The Faculty of Arts included the Department of Archaeology, Economics, English, Geography and History. It may be noted that at the inception of the Vidyodaya University Buddhism and English were made compulsory subjects for undergraduates.

It is evident that the Vidyodaya University in its formative years had retained some elements of its earlier monastic tradition. Nonetheless, the new University was responsive to change and forward looking from the very beginning as could be seen by the inclusion of courses in Business and Public Administration in the teaching curriculum and the creation of the Department of Biology in which was combined the teaching of Botany and Zoology.

The Higher Education Act No 20 of 1966 had a significant impact on the development of the University. An important feature of the Act was the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) charged with the responsibility of regulating the functioning of the Universities. It is observed that the creation of the NCHE resulted in an appreciable reduction in autonomy of the

universities.⁵ However, the NCHE had some success in bringing about “uniformity and consistency in student admissions, recruitment and in the management of staff.”⁶ Changes emanating from this Act saw the amalgamation of the Faculty of Buddhism and the Faculty of Philosophy at the Vidyodaya University to form the Faculty of Buddhist Studies and the abolition of the Department of Languages. The Faculty of Buddhist Studies included the Departments of Buddhist Culture, Mahayana Buddhism, Philosophy and Theravada Buddhism. There was also the creation of several new academic departments namely, Anthropology and Sociology, Archaeology, Education, Business and Public Administration, and Law in the Faculty of Arts.

A far reaching change effected by the Act was the secularization of the University by making the position of Vice Chancellor open to lay persons. Furthermore, the restriction placed on the admission of women as internal students to the University was removed. It is, therefore, asserted that as a result of these changes the Vidyodaya University was able ‘to shed most of its monastic character and lay the foundation proper to a centre of higher learning’⁷. Another significant outcome of the Higher Education Act No. 20 of 1966 was that unlike previously student admissions became the responsibility of the NCHE. According to Pathmanathan,⁸

Thenceforth the Universities were relieved of the responsibility of conducting examinations for selecting students for admission. The selection of students for admission became a responsibility of the Government. It was to be exercised through the NCHE. In fact the number of students to be admitted for each course of study was to be restricted and determined by the Ministry of Education.

⁵ W.M.K. Wijetunga. “Development of University Education in Sri Lanka (1942-1972)” in Bikas C. Sanyalet al (Ed) *University Education and Graduate Employment in Sri Lanka*. 1983. Unesco, Paris/Marga Institute, Colombo

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See *University Calendar 1989*

⁸ S.Pathmanathan.”Development of University Education” in S.Tilakaratna and H.M.Gunasena (Ed) *University Education since Independence (2000)*. University Grants Commission, Colombo.

In spite of the dynamism shown by the nascent Faculty of Science by 1968 the Government was considering the closure of the Faculty or shifting it elsewhere. This move was halted by staff, student and public agitation. Thereafter, a Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Prof Cyril Ponnampereuma to report on the future of the Faculty. The Committee noted the rapid strides made by the Science Faculty and recommended that the Faculty should neither be closed down nor shifted but should be permitted to develop as a Faculty of Applied Science. With the acceptance of this proposal the Faculty was able to accelerate its development efforts, which also meant the launching of an ambitious building programme. Indeed the Faculty was renamed the Faculty of Applied Science in 1974, that is after the introduction of the Universities Act No.1 of 1972.

University in Turmoil

The Universities Act No 1 of 1972 also had a deep impact (in some ways undesirable) on the Vidyodaya University. The Act was introduced in the aftermath of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection of 1971. Impressionistic university students were prominently associated in the uprising against the establishment. This created a feeling at the highest levels of government that the disturbances were in part due to the inability of the universities to impart an education that would enable their products access job markets.

The answer was sought somewhat irrationally in a highly centralized university system whereby a single university was created with several campuses. As a result the hitherto independent universities were relegated to the status of campuses affiliated to the central university. In effect the Vidyodaya University was renamed the Vidyodaya Campus. The Campus was administered by a President. By Act No 1 of 1972 the NCHE was abolished and the monolithic University was administered by the Vice Chancellor assisted by a Board of Governors comprising Presidents of Campuses and several other distinguished persons nominated by the Parliament. Campus administration was overseen by a Board appointed by the Minister of Education.

The restructuring of the university in the wake of the Act No I of 1972 saw the transfer of the Faculty of Buddhist Studies to the Vidyalankara Campus. The same fate befell the Department of Archaeology. The Department of Education was shifted to the Colombo Campus. A somewhat restricted Faculty of Arts comprising the Departments of Economics, Geography, History, and Languages and Cultural Studies was put in place. The Department of English was downsized and made a Sub-Department. The External Degree Programme was taken over by the Senate House, the centre of administration created for the administration of the centralized University. It is claimed that

Rationalization resulted in all Campuses, other than Katubedde, either losing or gaining Faculties and Departments of Study, with Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara being the biggest losers.⁹

The changes introduced by the so called ‘rationalization’ had an adverse impact on the growth of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Vidyodaya Campus. It prevented the orderly development of many disciplines that came within the purview of the Social Sciences and Humanities. Instead the traditional academic departments were required to run the job oriented courses in Development Studies.

The Departments in the Faculty of Arts other than Economics and Geography did not find it easy to adjust to the demands placed by the more applied and ‘job oriented’ focus of the programme. In many instances there was no link between the disciplinary interest of a particular Department and the ‘job ranges’ assigned to it. Thus the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies was given the responsibility for the two job ranges ‘Urban and Rural Community Development’, and ‘Social Work and Social Administration’. Among the job ranges assigned to the Department of History was the one on ‘Public and Industrial Relations’. The new focus also did not allow any space for the teaching of traditional academic disciplines within the Faculty of Arts. There was also an overdependence on visiting staff in conducting the programme which raised issues of quality assurance and management. To make matters worse the authorities did not in any manner indicate preparedness to provide employment to graduates with a job oriented training.

⁹ W.M.K. Wijetunga op.cit.

The programme had to be implemented in an environment which did not provide any firm indication as to the future manpower requirements of the country. However, it speaks much for the resilience shown by the Vidyodaya Campus that there was institutional commitment to give content and meaning to the Development Studies Programme.¹⁰

In view of the weaknesses noted above there was once again a change in policy and official blessing was granted in 1975 to reintroduce traditional academic courses in the several departments of the Faculty of Arts. However, the Department of Economics introduced a more academic and inter-disciplinary oriented Development Studies Programme to run parallel with the Special Degree Programme in Economics, where students could specialize in Agricultural Economics, Statistics or Demography.

A positive impact of the reorganization carried out in 1972 was the granting of Faculty Status to the Department of Management Studies. The new Faculty was designated the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce (FMSC). This Faculty truly ranks as the pioneer in management education in Sri Lanka and over the years has evolved as the centre of excellence for management studies in Sri Lanka. The UGC statistics reveal that 99% of best students in the Commerce stream at the GCE 'A' Level Examination demand the FMSC as their first choice.¹¹

It is important to mention that the two year period 1971 to 1973 was a particularly bleak one for the University. In addition to been relegated to the status of a Campus it had to put up with numerous difficulties in conducting its academic affairs. This is because by a political decision which was, to say the least, ill conceived the Campus was converted to a camp to house detainees of the 1971 insurrection. There was dislocation of academic activities and the staff and students had to face untold hardship. The Campus was administered from a building in Thurstan Road while lectures were conducted in several locations, usually in the afternoons and evenings.

¹⁰ See for example Marcus Karunanayake, "Development Studies at the Vidyodaya Campus" Proceedings of the WUS Asian Regional Conference on Non-Formal Education (1976) University of Sri Lanka, Colombo. For a more general assessment of the Development Studies Programme see Bertram Bastiampillai. "The 'Job Oriented' Courses of Study in the Universities in Sri Lanka" In Bikas C. Anwal et al (1983). op.cit

¹¹ See Sampath Amaratunga. "Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce" Golden Jubilee Souvenir-Sri Jayewardenepura University (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

Library use was severely curtailed. The Science Faculty had to conduct practical classes in improvised laboratories. The ambitious building plans of the Faculty of Science were derailed. University buildings were subject to damage and equipment (that had been left behind in view of the urgency of evacuation) was found missing. It was in 1974 that the Campus premises were back again in the hands of the university authorities, although a part of it was handed over to the Campus in 1973.

Growth and Consolidation

Once again major changes accompanied the introduction of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978. The most significant development was the setting-up of the University Grants Commission and the restoration of independent status to the Campuses of the University of Sri Lanka established by Act No.1 of 1972.¹² The Vidyodaya Campus was renamed University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Over the past three decades the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the other Universities have been governed by the provisions of Act No. 16 of 1978 and the amendments made to it in 1985 and thereafter. This period has been characterized by stability and growth in the university system which is reflected in the changes that have taken place in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura as well. The observation of Pathmanathan¹³ is pertinent in this regard:

The reversion of the old University Campuses to their original status of Universities, the elevation of the new Campuses established in the period 1972-1977 to the status of new universities; the establishment of the University Grants Commission and the University Services Appeals Board are among the principal changes introduced by this enactment (...) The demise of the system of governance through the Senate House had no mourners, and the system that came into operation in 1978 provided continuity and stability while facilitating expansion and the development of mechanisms for regulating expansion.

¹² At the time of enactment the Act was called the University of Ceylon Act No 1 of 1972.

¹³ S. Pathmanathan 2000 op.cit

However, it is evident that there was greater development and growth within Universities in the period after 1990 than during the period 1978 to 1990. There are several reasons for this. At the outset the UGC did not perform too well the task of coordinating University education as it was preoccupied with the more mundane affairs of university governance.¹⁴ Because of financial difficulties faced by the Government, the UGC could not negotiate triennial budgets as intended. Indeed university planning had to be done within the framework of annual budgets and this practice has persisted. The second youth uprising of the late 1980's was another destabilizing factor. All such developments had a telling effect on the University of Sri Jayewardenepura as well. This does not mean that things were smooth going in the period after 1990. At the University of Sri Jayewardenepura student unrest showed violent manifestations from time to time and from 1983 to 1984 a Competent Authority was appointed by the government to administer the University. Yet the University was resilient enough to overcome these upheavals and keep its course. The development that characterises the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in the 1990s and after have been influenced by the widespread reform movement that has been associated with universities the world over¹⁵. The recommendations of the Presidential Task Force of 1998 on Higher Education which are under implementation now appears to have had a positive impact on the more recent developments at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. With this background in mind we may now look at the various developments that have taken place at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in the period subsequent to the enactment of Universities Act No 16 of 1978.

Establishment of New Departments in Existing Faculties

The period from 1978 to the present has seen the establishment of new Departments from time to time in the existing Faculties of the University. In some instances this involved the bifurcation of existing Departments. The new Departments instituted in the Faculty of Applied Science have been Botany, Zoology, Forestry and Environmental Science, Statistics and Computer Science, and Food Science and Technology. In the Faculty of Arts the new Departments include Pali and Buddhist

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ W.D. Lakshman. "Introduction" In: W. D. Lakshman (Ed) Evaluation of University Teaching. CVCD / University of Colombo, Colombo.

Studies, Social Statistics, Sociology and Anthropology.¹⁶ The Department of English was re-established in 1996. A Department of Political Science has just been established (2009). The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce has seen the institution of the Department of Estate Management and Valuation, Human Resource Management, Commerce, Marketing Management, Business Economics, Accountancy, Finance, and Information Technology and Decision Science. At present the total number of Departments in the Faculties of Arts, Applied Science, and Management Studies, is 09, 08 and 10 respectively. The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce is to establish a new Department of Business Entrepreneurship in the near future.

Establishment of the Faculty of Medical Sciences

It was in July 1992 that the establishment of a Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura received government approval¹⁷. The first batch of students was registered in March 1993. At the start the Faculty did not have any buildings of its own and had to be housed in several borrowed locations on the Campus. Initially the Faculty was structured around a few Departments (e.g. Human Biology, Para Clinical Sciences and Clinical Sciences) with a cluster of Divisions in each. In 1996 the Departmentalization of the Divisions of the Faculty commenced paving the way to establish the very necessary link with the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine at the University of Colombo and to get representation on the Board of Studies related to the Departments of the Faculty. Today the Faculty of Medical Sciences has emerged as a fully fledged Faculty with 16 Departments of Study and a building complex of its own, the final stage of which is yet to be completed. The Faculty has been innovative from the very beginning and offers several other Degrees in addition to the MBBS Degree. The Family Practice Centre established in 1997 provides a service to the people in the villages around the University.

¹⁶ See Piyadasa Athukorala. "Faculty of Arts" Golden Jubilee Souvenir-Sri Jayewardenepura University (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion see Jayantha Jayawardana "The Faculty of Medical Sciences: 1993-2008: To be a Centre of Academic and Professional Excellence" Golden Jubilee Souvenir-University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

Development of Teaching Facilities in Faculties and Departments

Improving infrastructure facilities within Faculties and Departments has shown rapid progress. The Faculty of Applied Science has well equipped laboratories including field laboratories and other facilities.¹⁸ Most of the lecture theatres are equipped with multimedia facilities. Departments of Mathematics, Physics, and Statistics and Computer Science have mini-computer laboratories and internet facilities for staff and students. The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce has set up an Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) equipped with 213 computers. The Department of Accountancy has a well equipped Accounting Resource Centre (ARC). As compared to other Faculties the Faculty of Arts has not been able to make much progress in regard to the development of teaching facilities and infrastructure. However, the Department of Economics has acquired a well equipped auditorium. The Department of Geography has set up a state of the art Geographic Information System (GIS) Facility and teaching laboratory for graduate students with financial support from the competitive Sida/SAREC research award. The use of the GIS teaching laboratory is open to undergraduate students of the Department as well. Skill Development Centres have been set up in the Faculties Applied Science, Management Studies and Commerce, and the Medical Sciences with assistance from Improving the Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education (IRQUE) Project. In the Medical Faculty this has taken the form of a Resource Centre comprising a Computer, Language and Clinical Skills Laboratory. A Skill Development Centre is being planned for the Faculty of Arts.

Restructuring and Development of Undergraduate Teaching Programmes

The Faculty of Applied Science had offered courses with an applied orientation from its inception. The transition to the teaching of science in Sinhala took place in the mid 1960s in a pioneering capacity. It is observed that:

¹⁸ A.M. Abeysekera, J. Jinadasa and H.G. Nandadasa. "Faculty of Applied Science." Golden Jubilee Souvenir-University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

A diverse array of applied sciences such as fisheries biology, food science, forestry, plant pathology, polymer chemistry, pharmaceutical chemistry, applied statistics, electronics and computer programming, were introduced into the relevant undergraduate programmes (...) A new culture of hiring expert scientists from outside institutions as visiting lecturers to teach short courses in applications of sciences in the university teaching programs was begun and nurtured. One prominent feature built into the biology curriculum was to mobilize students, as much as possible, to field studies outside the university premises and thereby to appreciate the natural environment of Sri Lanka and to engage in research guided by their own skills and innovation.¹⁹

The Faculty of Applied Science has continued to introduce new courses in keeping with national demands. For example recent additions to the Faculty curricula include Biotechnology, Environmental Science, and Aquatic Science. The last was introduced in 2006 providing students an alternative to Zoology. Another innovative feature has been the introduction of Management Science to the curriculum in the Physical Sciences providing the students with a more rounded education to fit them better into the world of work and industry.

The Faculty of Medical Sciences offers five undergraduate teaching programmes, namely, the MBBS, Human Biology (General and Special), Pharmacy (BSc Special), Nursing (BSc Special), and Medical Laboratory Science (BSc Special).²⁰ Although the Faculty had adopted a more traditional compartmentalized subject based curriculum at the beginning, since 2007 this has given way to an integrated curriculum which is more student centred. Novel teaching methods have been incorporated in the program such as problem based learning, problem solving, patients' simulation, role playing and bedside clinical training. It also has a community based learning component incorporated in the teaching curriculum of the Department of Community Medicine. Clinical training is provided by the five clinical Departments at the Colombo South Teaching Hospital while clinical training in Family medicine is carried out in the University Family Practice Centre and in clinics of General Practitioners. Students are exposed to non professorial clinical training at the Colombo South Teaching Hospital and the Sri Jayewardenepura Teaching Hospital.

¹⁹ A.M. Abeysekera et al (Forthcoming) *ibid*

²⁰ See Jayantha Jayawardana *op.cit.*

The teaching programmes in the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce have undergone rapid transformation as a corollary to its restructuring. At present it offers no less than ten degree programmes of an innovative nature to meet the management needs of a transforming developing economy²¹. There is a heavy bias on practical training and students in all degree programmes are required to obtain practical training or carry out an industry project in fulfilment of Bachelor's degree requirements. Moreover the degrees offered by the FMSC have a heavy professional bias which has resulted in close collaboration with professional institutes in the areas of curriculum development, research and internship.

What of the Social Sciences and Humanities? In referring to academic standards in Universities in Sri Lanka Tilakaratna²² observed that:

Along with this expansion in quantitative terms there has not been a corresponding attempt made to ensure maintenance of the quality of education imparted. All indications seem to point towards deterioration of standards in some disciplines, particularly in the Social Sciences and Arts based courses...

However, a purposeful effort has been made by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura to attune its teaching programmes to respond to national needs.²³ A few examples may suffice to illustrate this point. Soon after its establishment the Department of Sociology and Anthropology took the initiative to introduce a course in Criminology and Criminal Justice with the assistance of University of Carbondale USA, which has evolved and continued up to the present. The Department of Geography now teaches a basic course on GIS for final year students in addition to courses on Hydrology and Water Resource Studies, and Contemporary Geographical Issues. In the Department of History and Archaeology the Special Degree Programme in Archaeology includes courses on Heritage

²¹ The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce does not offer a General Degree Programme. For a detailed account of the restructuring of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce see Sampath Amaratunga. op.cit .

²² S. Tilakaratana. "Challenges Facing the Universities" in W.D.Lakshman (Ed) (1997) op.cit.

²³ For a discussion on Social Science Education in Universities in Sri Lanka see S.T. Hettige and Marcus Karunanayake. "Development of Social Science Education" In S.Tilakaratna and H.P.M. Gunasena (Ed) (2000) op.cit

Management in Archaeology, Methodologies in Conservation of Monuments, and Planning, Implementation and Monitoring of Archaeological Projects. Most teaching programmes in the Faculty of Arts now incorporate field teaching components. It is also pertinent to note that the Faculty of Arts shifted to a course unit system in 1999-2000 which has seen the transition from a teacher-centred approach to a student centred learning approach.²⁴

Another far reaching change at the University has been the switch over to English in conducting Special Degree Programmes. This has been done with a view to make the students who pass out of the university more competitive nationally and internationally. The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce conducts all its internal undergraduate programmes in English but some courses are conducted in both English and Sinhala in the first two years for the benefit of students who are weak in English. The Faculty has made special arrangements with the ELTU to assist such students advance their knowledge of English. In the Faculty of Applied Science the medium of instruction in most general degree programmes is both Sinhala and English. All Special Degree Programmes are conducted in English. ELTU assists in the enhancement of English Language skills of the Faculty students. The Faculty of Medical Sciences conducts all its teaching programmes in English. All incoming students are given a six-week English language training course during orientation with the help of the ELTU. An English Language laboratory has been set up to improve the language skills of students on an on-going basis. Hitherto in the Faculty of Arts the medium of instruction in all degree programmes (other than English) has been Sinhala. However English Language skills have been imparted to students in both semesters of the first two years with the help of ELTU. A gradual transition to English is contemplated in the coming years and a beginning will be made this academic year (2009/2010).

There is a commitment in all Faculties to ensure the quality of their academic programmes. Already the Departments of Geography, Economics, and Sociology have been evaluated by the *Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC)*²⁵ of the UGC and awarded a Certificate of Confidence. All academic

²⁴ Piyadasa Athukorala. (Forthcoming) op.cit.

²⁵ QAAC has been set up to ensure quality, continuous development and efficient performance of Sri Lankan higher education institutions, and to gain the confidence of the community in their graduates in accordance with internationally recognized evaluation mechanism.

departments will be subject to such reviews in the future. The need for Faculty based effective curriculum and evaluation committees has been recognized.²⁶ The University is also supported by *Improving the Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education (IRQUE)* Project.²⁷ This Project funded by the World Bank has provided 07 Institutional Block Grants (IBGs) and 02 Quality Enhancement Fund (QEF) grants to the value of Rs. 45.8 million and Rs. 161.8 million respectively. The beneficiaries of the two competitive QEF grants have been the Department of Accountancy (Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce) and the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

Re-establishment of the External Degree Programme

As mentioned at the outset the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (then Vidyodaya) was the first national university to register students for the External Degree Programme. But no facilities were provided for the external students other than enrolment and conducting of examinations. However, there were recognized affiliated institutions that conducted external degree courses. With the enactment of Universities Act No. 1 of 1972 the Senate House (administrative seat of the single University) took over the External Degree Programme. The University of Sri Jayewardenepura recommenced the External Degree Programme after regaining independent university status. An External Examinations Unit was formed at the University to administer the Programme. At present the University offers a three year General Degree Programme for external students through the Faculties of Arts and Management Studies and Commerce. In addition to providing refresher courses twice a year the Arts Faculty also conducts seminars for external students with support of the National Youth Services Council (NYSC). The Faculty of

²⁶ See Corporate Plan 2006-2010

²⁷ IRQUE funds degree programmes in the universities on a competitive basis through the QEF to overcome their identified weaknesses. IBG has four components aimed at the development of Information Technology, Social Harmony, English, and Student Learning Skills.

Management Studies and Commerce conducts a refresher course every year. The Faculty of Arts enrolls students for the General Degree Programme while the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce enrolls students for the BSc (General) Business Administration, BSc (General) Public Management, and BSc (General) Commerce. The BSc (General) Business Administration Programme attracts most students. The Academic Staff of the two Faculties has to bear a heavy work load on account of the External Degree Programme. Table 1 shows the total number of external students in the two Faculties.

Establishment of the Faculty of Graduate Studies

The Faculty of Graduate Studies was established in January 1996 under the provisions of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Ordinance No. 3 of 1987²⁸. Until then graduate studies at the University had been under the purview of the already established Faculties. The establishment of the Graduate Faculty resulted in all postgraduate studies at the University, including non-clinical graduate studies in the Medical Sciences being brought under its purview. However, the Faculty of Graduate Studies works through the academic departments in the other Faculties in implementing its teaching and research programmes. The Faculty operates through several Boards of Study. At the higher level there is the Board of Graduate Studies which in turn reports to the University Senate. Each Board of Study has a Chairman appointed by the Board of Graduate Studies from its membership of senior scholars. At present the Faculty has six Boards of Study- Humanities, Life Sciences, Management Studies and Commerce, Medical Sciences, Physical Sciences, and the Social Sciences. In addition to offering research degrees leading to MPhil and PhD Degrees, the Faculty offers an array of taught Postgraduate Diplomas and Masters Programmes in areas that are of critical importance for national development. In 2006 the total number of students enrolled in the Graduate Faculty was 3683 (Table 1).

Establishment of the Post Graduate Institute of Management

The Postgraduate Institute of Management was established in 1986 by Ordinance under the Universities Act of 1978. It functions as a semi-autonomous body affiliated

²⁸ M.M. Karunanayake “Postgraduate Studies at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura” In H.P.M. Gunasena (Ed) *Postgraduate Education in Sri Lanka: Challenges for the Next Millenium*” (2000) University Grants Commission, Colombo.

to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. At the outset it was located within the Campus but later moved to a location in Colombo 6 from where it was relocated in 1996 in its own premises in Colombo 8. The Institute is committed to promote advanced education and professionalism in management through postgraduate instruction, training, and facilities for research in the various branches of management and administrative studies. It promotes interdisciplinary studies and research in the field of management with a focus on cross-cultural management and communication. PIM gives high priority to networking with educational institutions both in Sri Lanka and abroad. In addition to providing MBA and PhD programmes the PIM offers a number of executive programmes. Furthermore, over 2500 of its alumni hold leading managerial positions in the Public and the Private sector. Since 1998 PIM is self-financed²⁹. To-day PIM has gained a reputation as the premier Institution for Postgraduate Studies in Management in Sri Lanka.

Student and Staff Numbers

In 1959 the University had commenced with an internal student population of 463. Within ten years the number had exceeded 1000³⁰. By 2006 the internal undergraduate population stood at 7436. In 2006 the University had an overall student population of 76862 (Table 1) including external students.

²⁹ Uditha Liyanage. "PIM and its Way Forward" Golden Jubilee Souvenir-University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

³⁰ W.M.K. Wijetunga op.cit

Table 1 : Total Number of Students by Faculty and Programmes (2006)

Faculty	Undergraduate Programmes		Postgraduate Programmes	Diplomas/ Certificate Courses	Total
	Internal	External			
Arts	1987	32518	-	280	34785
Management Studies and Commerce	3172	32438	-	285	35895
Applied Sciences	1084		-	140	1224
Medical Sciences	1193		-	82	1275
Graduate Studies	-	-	3683	-	3683
Total	7436	64956	3683	787	76862

Source: Student Statistics for Academic Year 2006 quoted in Corporate Plan 2006-2010

By 2007 the University had an academic staff numbering 456. The distribution of staff by Faculty and Position is shown in Table 2.

Progress in Academic Staff Research and Research Training

In the past two decades there has been increasing involvement of the academic staff in research. However, the research output varies by Faculty and by Department. In some Faculties and Departments involvement in research is curtailed by heavy teaching loads that have been aggravated by unfavourable staff-student ratios. Number of published research papers by Faculty for the year 2007 is shown in Table 3.

Table 2 : Academic Staff Numbers by Faculty and Position

	Arts	Applied Sciences	Management Studies and Commerce	Medical Science	Total
Senior Professor	03	06	00	02	11
Professor	05	07	03	13	28
Associate Professor	03	02	00	00	05
Senior Lecturer I	28	27	41	12	108
Senior Lecturer II	41	19	48	40	148
Lecturer	01	03	04	15	23
Probationary Lecturer	44	18	39	32	133
Total	125	82	135	114	456

Source: Annual Report 2007

University research is funded in many ways. There are the University research grants disbursed by the Research Committee of the University. While these grants are useful the amount of funds available is limited and would only support small projects. Another important source of funding is international grants. University researchers have benefited from grants given by, for example, the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), Norwegian Aid for Research and Development (NORAD), Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency (Sida), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the World Bank. Most funds from these sources have been channelled through government ministries, departments or institutes. However, it is evident that the number of foreign grants attracted by the University is relatively small as compared to some of the other national universities.³¹

³¹ See for example Upali Samarajeewa. Research and Research Training in Sri Lanka 1991-2000. University Grants Commission (2003) Colombo.

Among the principal national agencies involved in funding University research is the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Research Council (NRC). Some national agencies fund research through commissioned studies e.g. Central Environment Authority (CEA), National Aquatic Resources Agency (NARA) and the Mahaweli Development Authority (MDA).

Collaborative research has also been a way of funding research. One of the earliest research collaborations of the Faculty of Applied Science was in 1981 between the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Pharmacognacy of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Similarly a collaborative research project was established between the Department of Botany and the Department of Life Sciences, Ben Gurion University, Israel from 1988-1990. In the Faculty of Arts the Department of Geography has managed to generate funds for its research and development from external sources including Sida/SAREC.

While there has been considerable progress in research particularly in the last two decades the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has not been able to instil in its academic community a research culture. This failure is evident in the University system as well. This is an area that should receive the urgent attention of the university academic community.³²

The research training of the academic staff has progressed apace particularly in the last two decades. At the outset the facilities available to the university staff were meagre. Scholarships and Fellowships were hard to come by. Overseas leave was undertaken on salaried leave with no external funding. In most cases this was insufficient to meet expenses abroad compelling scholars to endure considerable hardship. Happily things are different now with a large number of scholarships, fellowships and other schemes available to fund research training. The Commonwealth Academic Staff Awards, Fulbright-Hays Awards, Mombusho Awards (offered by the Japanese government) and many other country awards have been supportive of research training at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. The Department of Geography (Faculty of Arts) and the Department of Community Medicine (Faculty of Medical Sciences) have benefitted by being the recipients of

³² M.M. Karunanayake. "Building a Research Culture" Discussion Paper I (Forthcoming) Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda.

two competitive Sida/SAREC research cooperation grants.³³ The funds have been provided for research training leading to higher degrees (PhD and MPhil) as well as the development of research infrastructure. In addition to producing several PhDs and an MPhil the Department of Geography has acquired a state of the art GIS facility through the project. An important aspect of these two projects has been the research collaboration that it has fostered between the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and Uppsala University and several other Swedish universities. We may also note that the PhD programmes were conducted on a split arrangement with doctoral students dividing time between the home University and Uppsala University, Sweden. Another positive factor that has helped research training is the opening up of local opportunities for higher degrees. Such facilities are now available in most national universities including the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

It is found that unlike in the past when university scholars were keen to seek enrolment in either British or American Universities this is no longer the case. Universities in many other countries have become destinations for overseas study thus widening opportunities for research training and exposing the researchers to alternative research traditions and methodologies. A negative development has been the high turnover of academic staff in all Faculties in search of greener pastures abroad.

Table 3 : Number of Papers Published by Academic Staff in 2007 by Faculty

Arts	Applied Sciences	Management Studies and Commerce	Medical Science	Total
35	56	26	66	183

Source: Extracted from Annual Report 2007

³³ The two projects are due to wind up in mid 2010.

Developments in the Services Sector

Vast strides have been made by the University in the services sector. The *University Library* which was housed in a part of the Sri Sumangala Building since 1961 was shifted to the aesthetically designed new building in 1988³⁴ The library consists of several divisions-Management Studies, Social Sciences, Humanities, Applied Sciences, Medical Sciences, Periodicals, and Information Technology. The Sri Lanka Collection at the library is a depository for books, publications and documents pertaining to the country's socio-economic development, culture and the arts. At present the library collection exceeds 195,000 volumes including the bound periodicals. The library subscribes to approximately 250 foreign and local journals.

Online access to e-journals in the various disciplines is provided through Ebscohost; Wiley InterScience, Emerald, Ingenta and other sources. Among the services provided by the library are the inter library loan facility, access to online public access (OPAC), remote access to comprehensive data bases, decentralized facilities through branch libraries in the Applied Sciences and Medical Faculties, and microfilm reading facilities on request. Since 2003 the library provides a service to visually handicapped students through its Visually Handicapped Service Unit. The library is planning to expand its e-resources base (e-books and CD-ROM data bases) and generate automation in all aspects of library service. Plans are also underway to expand the seating capacity which at present is 1100. The library is responsible for the publishing of the Vidyodaya Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Vidyodaya Journal of Applied Science.

The *Main Computer Centre* (MCC) was established in 1984. It plays a vital role in improving the computer literacy and skills of the university community while also providing IT related technical support to the University. The Centre also plays an important role in the development of software to meet the administrative requirements of the university. It is also responsible for maintaining the Local Area Network (LAN) and the university website. However, the MCC needs further expansion of physical and human resources to effectively meet the

³⁴ P. Vidanapathirana. "The Library" Golden Jubilee Volume -University of Sri Jayewardenepura. (Forthcoming) USJP, Nugegoda.

emerging ICT planning and implementation requirements of the university.

Another important service provided by the university is career guidance. The *Career Guidance Unit* (CGU) was formed in 1988 to introduce university students to the world of work. Its main objectives are:

- To provide a service in career education, career guidance and career management
- To support students in the area of employability and skills development
- To help graduating students in their job search and career prospects
- To help prospective employees to identify the right applicants to match their requirements
- To be a partner in the broader preparation for life and work of undergraduates

The CGU maintains a database of recent graduates and provides multimedia based career related skills development relating to career development, self development, and entrepreneurship. The students are also provided access to training videos, electronic news letters and information on businesses and companies.

The *Staff Development Centre* (SDC) of the University was set up in 2002 for the purpose of providing induction training to academic staff as well as on the job training to academic, administrative and other non-academic staff. Over the past few years the Centre has offered a training programme on “Educational Technology for Teaching” which had benefited probationary lecturers in the Faculties of Arts, Applied Science and the Medical Sciences. However, it is observed that the infrastructure facilities (both physical and human) available to the SDC are minimal as compared to the Centres at the Universities of Colombo, Kelaniya and Peradeniya. There also seems to be some ambiguity in the policy relating to Staff Development Centres at the UGC level.

The *English Language Training Unit* (ELTU) as found today was set up in the early 1980s on a UGC decision to centralize and make more efficient the services rendered to the Universities in the teaching of English. Accordingly Universities had to set up ELTUs and a special Committee comprising the Chairman UGC and Heads of ELTUs was formed to coordinate English teaching activities in all

Universities. Even though this Committee has ceased to function the ELTU at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has continued to perform its service function to the Faculties of Arts, Management Studies and Commerce, and the Medical Sciences. The ELTU employs novel and exciting ways of teaching English which also helps students to work independently and creatively as demonstrated in student project presentations. In 2008 an English Language Teaching Laboratory was established to improve the English Speaking skills of undergraduates with funds provided by the IRQUE Project. The University in its Corporate Plan for 2006-2010 recognizes the need for a purpose-built ELTU with permanent staff and modern equipment.

The *Medical Centre* was formally opened in 1969. Initially the facilities available were rudimentary. In fact, the Medical Centre was housed in a small room adjacent to the Department of English. The present Medical Centre was opened in 1980 to cater to the needs of students, staff and family members of university staff. However, it was not until 1985 that the Centre was provided with a Dental Unit. In 1995 the Medical Centre was provided with an ambulance, thereby strengthening its capacity to respond to emergencies. In addition to conducting regular clinics the Centre also runs a referral system whereby specific ailments may be referred for specialised treatment at government hospitals and followed up in the Medical Centre. The Centre also provides a student counselling service. From the late 1970's the Medical Centre set up a Sanitation Unit which is responsible for environmental sanitation within the Campus and hostel premises outside it. The sanitation unit is overseen by a Public Health Inspector under the direction of the Chief Medical Officer. The Medical Centre is in need of more space, laboratory services and a larger Dental Surgery to cater to increased demand for its services.

The *Physical Education Division* was formally established in 1966. However, there were no proper facilities for indoor sports activities. This limitation was overcome to some extent when space was provided in the Student Centre for the Physical Education Division and also for some indoor sports activities- wrestling, table-tennis, weight-lifting and badminton. There are two playgrounds of which one has a 400 metre running track. Courts are available within the Campus for volleyball, netball and basket ball. Facilities have been provided outside the university precincts for some sports activities e.g. rugby and swimming. A Sports

Advisory Committee is responsible for sports promotion and development. However, there is not much formal commitment of students to sports activity even though some students have successfully taken part in inter-university meets locally and internationally. The University is yet to acquire a gymnasium and a swimming pool. The absence of properly planned grounds for athletics and the non-availability of accommodation facilities for visiting teams are other limiting factors.

By and large *Physical Infrastructure* development has kept pace with the expansion of Departments and Faculties, and Service Units at the University. These developments have been particularly rapid since the mid 1980s. This period is marked by the construction of the Library Building, Administration Building, Forestry and Environmental Science Building, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce Building, Faculty of Medical Sciences Building (first three stages) and the Faculty of Applied Science Auditorium. The Faculty of Graduate Studies Building is just being completed. Extensions to some of the existing buildings have been undertaken. An auditorium, a building for the External Examinations Unit and a well equipped playground with stadium are being planned. Physical infrastructure development is overseen by a Planning and Development Committee. The setting up of an Infrastructure Development Committee to support the activities of the Planning and Development Committee has received Council approval. The Planning and Development Committee is facing the challenge of making optimal use of existing space while conserving the green environment of the University.

Meeting National Aspirations

Retrospect

The creation of the University was firmly tied to the political process that brought the Bandaranaike government (MEP coalition) to power in 1956. The expectations generated by the national resurgence were not lost on the Vidyodaya University. Hence from its very inception the University was committed to serving national interests. The University made a significant contribution to give effect to the government policy of teaching in *Swabasha* in the Universities and higher educational institutions at a time when there was resistance to this move among some sections of the academic community of the already well established University of Ceylon. There is no doubt that this had far reaching implications for broad

basing university education in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the Vidyodaya University took the lead in enrolling external students thus providing an opportunity to many deserving students to obtain a University qualification. However, the External Degree was offered only in the disciplinary areas falling within the ambit of the Social Sciences and Humanities.

The University from the very beginning had adopted a forward looking attitude to the development of undergraduate academic programmes. The introduction of a course in Business Studies was a totally new development at the time and had culminated in the establishment of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce and later the Postgraduate Institute of Management to train management professionals needed by the country. Today the Faculty of Management and Commerce has branched off into many subject areas in providing training to the management professionals of the future. The Faculty of Arts has been fully conscious of its responsibilities to advance national development. Hence the introduction of many socially relevant courses as exemplified by Social Statistics, and Criminology and Criminal Justice. New inputs have been incorporated in traditional disciplines to enhance their social relevance. The teaching of Sinhala has been enriched by the introduction of Creative Writing as one of its components and Buddhist Philosophy by the incorporation of a course in Buddhism and Social Problems.³⁵ The Department of Geography had commenced field teaching of Applied Geography long before this became the practice in the other Universities. It had also pioneered the teaching of Social and Rural Geography. Similar developments have been characteristic of the Applied Sciences and the Medical Sciences. In fact the Faculty of Applied Science demonstrated its applied orientation before it was designated the Faculty of Applied Science. The innovative approach adopted by the Faculty of Applied Science to meet the development needs of the country has already been referred to. The Faculty of Medical Sciences has covered new ground in that it imparts training not only in the Medical field but also in several ancillary areas e.g. Nursing, Pharmacy and Human Biology. Furthermore, Community Health which was initially introduced as a Pre-medical course by the Division of Community Health has been continued into the MBBS course. Since 2007 the Faculty has introduced a more student centred curriculum. The developments

³⁵ It is important to note that these courses have undergone further transformation in more recent times.

that have taken place in the different Faculties in relation to undergraduate courses are a clear indication of the University's commitment to meet national needs and aspirations.

The University in its fifty year old history has also made a significant contribution to post graduate teaching and research. Today it provides opportunities for research leading to higher degrees (MPhil and PhD) in most disciplines. The Faculty of Management and Commerce will soon initiate a doctoral programme. The University has introduced taught Postgraduate Diploma and MA/MSc Programmes in many fields to meet the country's manpower requirements in specific applied/development oriented fields. The development of postgraduate research and training programmes has received an impetus by the setting up of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. In a far reaching change all postgraduate training undertaken in the several Faculties, including non-clinical medical research, is administered by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. The Faculty Boards of Study have the potential to promote interdisciplinary research of national and international significance.

The research involvements of the academic staff in the diverse fields of learning have immeasurably contributed to enhance the university's worth in the global knowledge society. In this regard the forte of the university has primarily been applied research. At the same time the many PhD and MPhil theses that have been successfully completed by graduate students have made a positive contribution to expand knowledge relating to the country's planning and development needs.

The University of Sri Jayewardenepura has also shown its commitment to provide extension courses for the benefit of those who do not have a formal university education. The target group has been frontline/middle rung development workers, officials, media and technical personnel in the Public, Private and the NGO/INGO sectors. In fact it was as far back as 1968 that the Department of Physics commenced a Certificate Course in Optometry. The Department of Sinhala and Mass Communication provides a Diploma Course in Writership and Mass Communication. The Department of Sociology offers a Diploma in Criminology and Criminal Justice. Certificate Courses in Insurance, and Rural Development had been provided by the Departments of Economics and Geography respectively³⁶.

³⁶ These two courses and the Optometry course have been discontinued. However, plans are afoot to introduce a Diploma Course in Rural Development.

The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce offers a Certificate Course in Entrepreneurship and the Faculty of Medical Sciences a Diploma in Counselling.

The University academics have contributed their skills and expertise to national endeavours in no uncertain terms. Most members of the academic staff are actively involved in academic and professional organisations. They also serve as advisors and consultants to both the Public (Government Ministries, Departments and Institutes) and the Private Sector (Industrial and Business organizations). University staff has served (and continue to serve) with distinction as Chairmen of Corporations and Boards. Eminent university academics have also been co-opted as members of Committees and Panels serving national interests.

Over the years the University has created for itself a very visible international image. This has been facilitated in particular by University scholars undertaking post doctoral research in universities abroad. The University Departments have also created many research links and networks that have in particular led to North-South research partnerships. The international visibility has also been helped by University scholars making their presence felt at international seminars and conferences. Both the Department of Forestry and Environmental Science as well as the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce in their individual capacity conduct an international conference annually. The process of image building has also been helped by the publication of two Journals by the University, namely, the Vidyodaya Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Vidyodaya Journal of Applied Science.

Prospect

While much has been achieved by the University over a period of fifty years there is need for firmer commitment to transform itself to a 'development university'³⁷. This is all the more pressing because the University is now called upon to face new challenges in a rapidly transforming socio-political and cultural milieu. Sri Lanka has to contend with the economic, social and technological impacts of globalization. Issues of social iniquities and social justice have come to the fore. Urbanization has

³⁷ Judith Sutz. University Role in Knowledge Production (2005) www.scidev.net/en/science-and-innovation-policy/...retrieved on 19 October 2009.

grown rapidly and transforms both the urban and rural landscape in the process. While important positive developments have taken place in overcoming 'human poverty', 'income poverty' is yet a serious problem affecting the majority of the Sri Lankan population. Regional disparities in growth are still in evidence and some regions, particularly the North and the East, have been adversely affected by the thirty-year internal war that plagued the country³⁸. Large scale internal displacement of people and issues of devolution and power sharing have become highly contentious political issues. Managing the environment has also become a primary development concern of the government. A greater need for public-private partnership has been recognized. Hence, the University has to play a more dynamic role in knowledge building in helping the country face these developmental challenges. It is asserted that:

*The debate about the role of universities in developing countries is important for two reasons. First, knowledge is a crucial tool for overcoming underdevelopment (...) Second, knowledge is not a commodity that can be bought and put to work with little additional effort. To achieve this successfully, a strong local knowledge base needs to be created and nurtured. Without it, the world's information riches are out of reach, and therefore become meaningless and of little value.*³⁹

Hence, it is reassuring to find that the University of Sri Jayewardanapura has shown sensitivity to this challenge in its Corporate Plan for 2006-2010. The Plan identifies six corporate level long term goals:

- Contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation through production of appropriate human resources
- Increase access to higher education with due concern for social justice
- Enhance the indigenous contribution to the pool of human knowledge with due regard to our social and cultural identity
- Develop institutional and other infrastructure for high quality teaching, learning and research
- Strengthen institutional capacity for community services and resource generation with a view to long term sustainability and global competitiveness

³⁸ M.M.Karunanayake and Anders Narman. Regional Development in Sri Lanka: Resetting the Agenda. (2005) Sida/SAREC Research Cooperation Project, USJP, Nugegoda

³⁹ Judith Sutz. op.cit

- Provide a non-threatening, stimulating and attractive internal environment which promotes creativity.

In the writer's opinion the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has to engage in several other ways to meet with national aspirations. A primary area for action is to set up a University Think-Tank comprising experts drawn from the different Faculties to study policy related issues and engage in advocacy in areas such as political economy, social policy, science, technology and culture for the social betterment of the Sri Lankan population. While the Think-Tank could initiate action on some or most areas of advocacy it could also advice the government on specific advocacy issues when called upon to do so. The Think-Tank could among its actions evaluate the way policy is administered, participate in the agenda setting as they raise significant issues, propose policy solutions and open-up space for public argumentation.⁴⁰ This would also lead to closer interaction between the University and civil society.

Another area that awaits university engagement is to set up a Consultancy Unit for National Development. The consultancy unit will be a link between specialist academics and government (and other) institutions and ministries, and international agencies. The primary aim of the Unit will be to support the national development effort by providing advisory and consultancy services. The consultancy unit should as a matter of priority, document expertise available within the University by areas of interest and specialization and be dynamic and competitive in its approach. The Consultancy Unit could also be a means of attracting funds by the University for its own development purposes.

It is also time that the University of Sri Jayewardenepura reclaimed the high ground for Humanities. A primary requirement in achieving this would be the creation of a Faculty of Humanities with specific development timelines. There is no doubt that progress in the Humanities with a focus on Buddhist Studies and Philosophy was an ideal that was cherished by the pioneers who were instrumental in establishing the University. The relegation of Humanities to the backwoods was based on the false premise that employment opportunities for those qualifying in Humanities were limited. Yet a society's development rests not only on science, technology, medicine, management, and the social sciences but also on Humanities which

⁴⁰ See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank.

ultimately is concerned with 'what it is to be human'. As stated by Mona C. Fredrick⁴¹

In today's ever increasingly technological and fast-paced world, the study of what it is to be human takes on heightened importance. Questions regarding cloning, genetics and artificial intelligence, to name but a few, are issues that involve much more than technical skill. These are questions that force our society, and indeed our world, to explore closely issues related to human history, human nature and our future as a global community.

In claiming the high ground for the Humanities the University should strive to provide imaginative courses that are linked to career pathways and explore means of cross cultural understanding. It is only thus that the University of Sri Jayewardenepura could well and truly evolve into a centre of excellence in the Humanities and contribute to the creation of an inclusive society in Sri Lanka that is given to equality and social justice.

As we look forward to the next fifty years it behoves the university community to re-dedicate itself to work for the fulfilment of national aspirations true to the spirit of the university mission committed to:

the pursuit and transmission of knowledge through teaching, scholarship and research and active service to the community in an environment which values creativity, freedom of intellectual thought and expression, equal opportunity, fairness and professional growth. The University's endeavour is to contribute to national development by providing a balanced education, which blends the finest in theory and practice, and by forging interaction between the University and the wider polity.

⁴¹ www.vanderbilt.edu/News/register/April02_01/story5.html retrieved 23Oct 2009