

Speech for the Intellectual Property Workshop, 23rd – 24th June 2009

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and good morning to all.

The representative of His Excellency the Ambassador of the USA in Brunei

Dato Paduka Timothy Ong, Acting Chairman of BEDB

Mr Vincent Cheong, CEO of BEDB

Dr Manaf Haji Metussin, Deputy CEO of BEDB

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted and honoured to be here for today's workshop on Intellectual Property. As you know, the university, as an organisational form, is one of the most enduring of human organisations. Universities have been around for almost two thousand years. However, the role and mission of universities have changed tremendously, and especially so in the last 40 to 50 years. Historically, one can view universities as places of seclusion, where professors and students, left alone in their ivory towers, can debate the issues of human nature, undisturbed by the world outside, to labor over basic philosophical issues. It is, in a sense, the realm of the educated elites. It should be remembered that it was not so long ago, in the 1990s, that Oxford University was debating whether a business school has a place in the University, as it is considered a discipline lacking in academic rigor.

However, in recent years, two key trends have led to intense discussions about the roles and functions of a university. The first is the tremendous expansion in the number of universities. While it used to be the domain of the elites, university education has become a commodity available to a large swath of the population.

This has led to attending increased cost. Universities are very expensive places to fund, and a rethinking, especially among taxpayers and in turn, legislators, as to who should pay for the cost of tertiary education. There are competing demands for the resources of the state. In a sense, the relationship between university and the state has changed. In some countries, it has led to a reduction in government funding for tertiary education. Universities today are required to be more self-sustaining. This is clearly seen in the large number of countries where universities have been forced, willingly or unwillingly, into corporatisation, as evident in Britain, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia.

Brunei has been blessed in the strong support of His Majesty and the state in growing higher education. The University receives funding, under the *Rancangan Kemajuan Negara* (RKN) projects, to upgrade its infrastructure and teaching facilities. You will see in the next few years, a number of new developments around the UBD campus. Our new Institute of Medicine, Library and Faculty of Science extensions are symbols of our growth. The Government has also been very supportive in the development of research in the country. UBD has been very successful in the recent bid for the Science and Technology fund offered by the Department of Economic Planning and Development. Even so, it is important to rethink how universities can sustain themselves in the long run. Universities need to reinvent themselves.

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In the knowledge based world that we lived in, it is important to note that universities are one of the key engines of growth and in the production of new knowledge. There is a shift from resource based economies, with its emphasis on labor and infrastructure, to one that is knowledge based, with the creation of knowledge as the basis of competitive advantage. Knowledge, particularly the creation of new knowledge, is the major source of productivity. Thus, in the new economy, those who are best able to innovate and upgrade to exploit the opportunities available in science and technology are most likely to succeed.

In UBD, as part of the new GenNext program, the focus of the educational experience is on knowledge production, not rote learning, and increasing innovativeness to exploit science and technology. GenNext seeks to provide students with a broad based education, to engender flexibility, preparing students for careers that may not even exist yet at this point in time. In all our modules, we seek to instill in students a spirit of innovation and enterprise. This is particularly true in the Discovery Year, in their third year, students can choose from a range of options, including a Study Abroad Program, community work, internship for a year in various private sector companies, or start an innovation and incubator project. The focus is on design-centric and experiential learning. If a group of students decide to spend a semester building a better solar car, let them do it, with proper guidance of course. If they choose to start a business plan project, and incubate a company, let them do it. Education is about Discovery, about the ability to think outside the box.

Human creative capital is a key component of the new economy, and at UBD, at both the undergraduate level, in learning with the students, and in our plans to expand the graduate program, to focus on research and developments in strategic areas where we have a competitive advantage, such as energy studies, biodiversity, and food security, we seek to educate our students to meet the demands of our new economy. Moreover, new knowledge is often not compartmentalised, simply embedded in traditional disciplines. Rather they tend to cross boundaries. In UBD, we have an emphasis on inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary research, to create a “no walls” environment.

To promote a spirit of enterprise among student, and staff, UBD is in the process of setting up an Industry Liaison Office, a one stop office where staff and students can approach if they have inventions or applied knowledge, be it Information technology, Biomedical research, or in the service industries, that are “copyrightable” and “patentable”, and where they can seek advice and expertise to move towards commercialisation. The Industry Liaison Office will also encourage private-public sector collaborations, both in terms of funding and product development. For this reason, we consider that an effective legal framework for the protection of intellectual property is one of the key tools to bridge the gap between academic research and commercial enterprise.

Having said all these, a word of caution. If we remember the words of Newman, a university is a “stadium generale,” a place of universal learning. While cognizance of the need for change, especially in the role and function of the university, a university should not fall prey to mere utilitarianism and consumerist demands. While universities seek to produce “useful” knowledge, it must also be interested in knowledge for its own sake, or as Edward Shils puts it, “fundamental problems for their intrinsic interests.” Who is to

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know what is considered quote unquote “unuseful” or “not useful” knowledge today may, or will become useful knowledge in the future.

Moreover, universities, particularly national universities, have a role to play in shaping the character of its students, including the spiritual and moral dimensions. That is why, for UBD, MIB remains, in the new curriculum, a compulsory subject for all Bruneian students, as a national philosophy on how to exist as a society and nation, and the sustenance of the Malay governance which is guided by Islam as the national religion with His Majesty as the supreme and paramount ruler. UBD has a role in shaping the intellectual and emotional makeup of our students, preparing them to be good but at the same time, productive citizens to cater to the requirements of our country and the challenges we face in the future.