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RESEARCH ARTICLE

HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA AS A PREMIER NON-PARTISAN INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Although Humanities in Higher education continues to be a subject that garners little institutional support, it is nevertheless tantamount to any other academic pursuit. Specifically, political philosophy and socio-economic nationality are subjects that have the potential to guide humanity into a balanced and sustainable future. In Guyana, the University of Guyana (UG) remains the premier academic institution and continues to maintain relevance and respect by being non-partisan. This essay attempts to reveal the context of this paradigm and suggests that the UG's mission and vision are needed now, more than ever. Teachers and students of Humanities will be responsible for coalescing a culturally divided society, manifesting a nation where collective wealth is paramount to individual successes. In this essay's commitment to social history, the use of Newspaper articles is paramount and reveals either public sentiment or, propaganda. Ultimately, though, the results show that there is an acknowledgment that UG's role will be tested in these times of economic change and, furthermore, that this is a defining moment for Guyanese to decide how development could transform all lives.

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Introduction:-

The honor in Humanities is a product of the connection between the student and teacher, and this duality of dedication produces a synthesis that is the crux of education philosophy. This essay attempts to reveal the inextricable links between subjects such as History, Political Economy, and Philosophy, where students, teachers, and the public ultimately enjoy the benefits of rigorous Socratic dialogue. This paradigm is even more relevant and resonates more efficiently when Academia solidifies its role as a non-partisan institution, focused on creating a conflation of oppositional socio-political ideas rather than producing conflict in societies. Ultimately, the role of Humanities in Higher Education is to produce positive thoughts that benefit humanity, alleviating the cerebral customs that stagnate social evolution. This essay endeavors to address the role of Academics, in general, and particularly the University of Guyana's (UG), effort to be non-partisan. In the small population of Guyana, the UG is positioned to be the impartial voice when ethnic divisions and conflicting class consciousness permeate the lives of academics, activists, and ordinary citizens. Furthermore, this essay is not concerned with academic content, but with context, and its focus is not on the dynamics of division, but on the promise of peace, positivity, and prosperity at UG and in Guyanese civil society.

The intellectual contribution that this essay attempts to produce does not infer that universities are more relevant when they are non-political, rather, it recognizes that students and teachers of Humanities in Higher Education have a

responsibility to thoroughly investigate and provide analyses for public policy and public morale. Students and teachers of Humanities have an “obligation to create spaces to hear multiple perspectives, particularly perspectives that might otherwise not be heard in public discussions.”¹Civic engagement, community conflict resolution, and public policy critiques are part of the same political realm; however, they can be separated in theory and practice. The community is better served when students learn to be enthusiastic about development and, simultaneously, dispassionate about the partisan nature of political power. The critique of policy initiatives and policy planning must be manifested without personal and/or political confrontations, and furthermore, this impartial design by educators could convince the public to collaborate in this same way. Society is served better when students recognize the disparate educational and ethnic makeup of their communities, remaining neutral when considering contributions from all who are invested. Collaboration needs to incorporate “multidirectional flows of knowledge, relationships of reciprocity, work done with the public, and inclusive knowledge production...informed by the co-creation of knowledge.”²As it relates to social justice education, this sentiment is corroborated by Sarita Cargas that a non-partisan approach must be taken to foster a more harmonious civil society. As Cargas elaborates, students need to develop “enough knowledge of social systems and advocacy tactics for addressing the real-world problem (and furthermore) ...should teach the facts of social injustice...in exploration about the causes of and possible solutions.”³This can be accomplished only when neutrality becomes paramount to party patriotism. The banal repetitions of political parties cannot be part of a student’s formative rhetoric, and often, Universities have not declined involvement in partisan politics ubiquitous in most democratic societies. As a result, the development of fairness, justice, and social equity becomes too subjective. Universities’ commitment to political participation must provide a holistic, and multi-perspective analysis that is often inherent, and sometimes incoherent, in political public spaces. Without proper philosophical engagement, students are susceptible to the vagaries of popular sentiments. Ultimately, Humanities studies have the power to determine the way in which students value human nature, producing positive, productive, and peaceful behavior. However, the primary concern is whether Universities can truly be impartial. Indeed, educators can present all sides of a polarized issue, while teaching and persisting that consideration is better than conflict. This political, but non-partisan approach requires compromise, inclusivity, and mutuality, at the theoretical and practical levels. Ultimately, Humanities in Higher Education has the potential to provide students with the fortitude of fairness, even with the costs being their personal privileges.

Humanities in Higher Education has the potential to produce ideas that socio-spiritual concerns are paramount to personal, material ones. Subjects like Art, History, and Philosophy often manifest layers of thought that transcend the quotidian, instant gratifications that plague somatic desires. Humanities education can provide students with the courage to be bold and confident in times of crisis and provides society with the tools of enlightenment in times of darkness. This point is echoed by Douglas Anderson, that “we must call upon the tradition to reclaim the notion that the humanities are freeing and liberating.”⁴In this same way, Humanities education can be recognized as a moral compass and the guiding light by which students begin to philosophize the nature of ideas and imagination, that shape their sense of value in the world. As Ibanga B. Ipke contends, “the salvation of the humanities is in its taking the lead in restoring the humanities to humanity and by doing so reassert the rule of reason over the senses... (resuming the) function of humanities as therapy.”⁵Ultimately, this therapy is a remedy to the social maladies of capitalist culture, overconsumption, the dearth of egalitarian principles, and the divisive attitudes of ethnic, racial, and social class prejudices.

Financial education is a legitimate subject in university studies, but this must be combined with the dangers of avarice and usury. As students become more engaged with Humanities studies, they are more capable and could be trained, to be excited about uplifting their communities, rather than exploiting them. “Economics are a key factor in the devaluation of humanistic study...and computer science has displaced some of the intellectual excitement that

¹Martin Carcasson and Leah Sprain, “Democratic engagement through the ethic of passionate Impartiality,” *Tamara-Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry*, Vol. 11, Issue 4 (2013): 20.

²Carcasson, “Democratic engagement,” 19.

³Sarita Cargas, “Social Justice Education in Honors: Political but Non-Partisan,” *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council-Online Archive* 573, (Spring 2018): 34-35.

⁴Douglas Anderson, “Humanities Education: Can We Teach Without Apologizing?” *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2022): 134.

⁵Ibanga B. Ipke, “The Decline of Humanities and the Decline of Society,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, Vol. 62, No. 142 (March 2015): 51.

used to dwell in the liberal arts.”⁶In this way, the responsibility of Humanities education is to alleviate the reasoning that life after the University experience involves generating huge sums of income with the singular goal of material possession. There is considerable value in producing equity in business while growing that company to effectively serve society. Even so, there is honor in creating luxury and wealth for one’s family, while maintaining a responsibility to those less fortunate. Ultimately, the philosophy responsible for the creation of balanced, and enduring societies, can be attributed to studying subjects like Art, Political Philosophy, and History.

The good use of Humanities also relies on educators teaching their students to differentiate between knowledge, information, and misinformation. Educators possess the potential to initiate mental awareness and alleviate the trends that rely on the speed of information as an epistemic indicator. In this digital world, where truth is a measure of the force of information, spurious notions of History and Politics are ubiquitous, and often, this reality clouds the minds of students, prompting them to accept the world as they are/were shown. With thoughtful training by Humanities educators, students can break through liminal and limited thinking about the past, present, and future. In this way, students have the potential to perceive the world, not how it was or how it is, but how it could be. Douglas Anderson reassures that “the humanities can enable us to have a say in what the world could be like. They can be useful not only in the narrow way of providing skills, but by engendering the confidence to create and revise.”⁷This worldview has always been one in which positive outcomes have been envisioned, and negative visions of the world are acknowledged but diminished. Furthermore, the great statement is made that great works of Humanities offer an exclusive perspective of humanity’s desires and fears, their “illusions and truest insights, our basest emotions and noblest ideals.”⁸These personal, philosophical, and political insights determine how students view their role in their communities, and more importantly, it can be a part of their normative growth that will likely cement their socio-intellectual personalities.

Often, students are trained to believe in the value of Capitalism and material wealth, while spiritual wealth is undervalued, and unique problems arise when Humanities in Higher Education is not sufficiently studied. Humanities educators teach Spiritual intelligence and social wealth, as paramount to material possession, exploitation, and overconsumption. The poignant statement is made that “there is even greater despair about undoing the perversions of human nature by the misuse of intelligence and imagination.”⁹The misinformation and miseducation of the masses have always been present in the Academic tradition, always residing as a counterbalance to the philosophy of justice and truth, notwithstanding that philosophical truth is subjective. The schism between scientific and social knowledge is an ancient one, however, so is the inextricable connection between the two. Furthermore, Humanities studies could be viewed as the scientific analysis of how imagination and vision have helped, and could effectively serve, humanity to be more peaceful and productive. As R. Howard Bloch rightfully states, “it is worth remembering that the current crisis was the work of practical men, who believed in the efficiencies of technology, the dependability of rational choice, the effectiveness and ultimate good of markets.”¹⁰Technology and rapid financial gains may offer short-termed, instant gratification, however, they cannot provide the prosperity that human nature requires to evolve, rather, society requires a balance between concerns about profit versus the concern for people. If “science is about the domain of objects, and the goal of science is to discover the laws that explain the behavior of these objects”, then the science of producing a prosperous domain of social understanding could be considered equally important.¹¹Furthermore, knowledge production and the philosophy of truth is a scientific paradigm, albeit, influenced by the politics of the time, and in this way, Politics; the pursuit of power, and Academics; the pursuit of knowledge, have always been in contestation over the domination of culture and society. As a result, the training of educators, and their subsequent transmission of ideas, could either produce enlightened minds or severely prejudiced ones. The academic authority that college professors have over neophytes, relies on the very institutional power that this essay examines. As Broudy suggests, “this skepticism is based on the wide diversity of values held by people at different times and places and by the authorities themselves”, and also asks the question “what are the consequences of this situation for the study of

⁶R. Howard Bloch, “Good Uses of the Humanities in Bad Times,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 156, No. 4. (December 2012): 417.

⁷Anderson, “Humanities Education,” 134.

⁸Bloch, “Good Uses of the Humanities,” 419.

⁹Harry S. Broudy, “The Role of Humanities in the Curriculum,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Autumn, 1966): 20.

¹⁰ Bloch, “Good uses of the Humanities,” 416.

¹¹ Broudy, “The Role of the Humanities,” 21.

humanities?”¹²The consequences of improperly addressing these disparate dialogues in academic thought produce political and social conflict, and this paradigm represents the danger of miseducation. The human tendency to disagree may never end, however, it is irresponsible to propagandize division using academic activities as a tool.

An investigation into the current state of Humanities education attempts to answer the question of relevancy. Humanities in Higher Education has continued to lose relevance when compared to other research subjects. Academics in Humanities have continued to apologize for this perceived irrelevance and have had to plead for justification. As Anderson states, humanists “do not have to reject the work of the sciences. Such work must play a central role in describing our world and in determining how we can operate in it.”¹³ Furthermore, the loss of academic authority in Humanities education has been a result of the declining number of students interested in the subject, compounded by Universities’ lack of prioritizing these studies. Furthermore, academics often regress into their own social corners, comfortable with their own knowledge and truth about human existence, sometimes ignoring society.

In modernity, subjects such as Business and Technology are more respected than subjects like History, Philosophy, and Political Science. Science and Technology often gain more institutional support and are seen as fundamental, while Humanities is overlooked as less important, and as a poor career choice. Douglas Anderson states “Philosophy, for example, is often characterized as useless and without any means for effecting a good and successful life.”¹⁴ However, as Ibanga Ikpe suggests, “the decline of humanities is indeed the decline of society.”¹⁵The attraction to material things over intellectual thought is a result of the lack of engagement with ideas pertaining to Art, History, and Philosophy. Students often choose to pursue careers that offer them material success and satisfaction, rather than socio-spiritual fulfillment. There exists a magnetism that often seduces society with instant gratification and material accumulation, and in turn, devalues the intellectual and internal gratifications of communal commitment. This essay does not promote that Humanities educators should instruct students on what to think, instead, they should enlighten them on how positive, thoughtful ideas are formed, and how these ideas can reform society. In this way, the decline of humanities can be, partly, attributed to a reluctance of academics to adhere to non-fashionable intellectual and philosophical studies. The decline of humanities and the perception of its irrelevance is both a product of internal institutional timidity, as well as external societal pressures that values materiality over spirituality. The interference of market forces into the university is indeed problematic, however, the intellectual forces within academia are equally capable of balancing such incursions, and academics have the power to continue to resist even when it seems that the war of ideas is lost. Ultimately, “this disconnect between humanities scholars and the general public has lost them the opportunity of leading opinion on issues that are relevant to contemporary life,” and this institutional crisis has dire consequences for academics and activists alike.¹⁶

The philosophical crisis in society is not isolated from the crisis within Humanities education, and there is an ebb and flow that continues to be reproduced, manifesting continuous conflict. This conflict is not transient and continues to require intervention from Academics and Activists. It is a crisis of human wisdom and human resources that has the potential to further the decline of reason over unnatural senses and sensibilities. It is a crisis that has the potential to deplete the world’s resources through continuous exploitation and overconsumption, instead of caution, conservation, vigilance, and vision. The cultural crisis is a direct result of the promises of short-term desires, and diminishing humanist principles as secondary to financial, business, technological, and even scientific knowledge. For example, the elevation of individual wealth as paramount to collective wealth is problematic, ultimately separating individuals from each other, producing division, disunity, and disrepair in society. This predisposition to things rather than thoughts is antithetical to the ideas inherent in Humanities education. This tendency is manifested as individuals become more interested in improving their own lives while ignoring the health and wealth of the communities in which they reside, becoming even more problematic when leaders, whether political, religious, or social, begin to transmit these ideas to impressionable, and innocent minds. In this same way, there is an opportunity for educators to encourage students, and the larger community, about the perils of unrestricted capitalism and individualism. This position is asserted by Ibanga Ikpe that “it is therefore up to the scholars of the

¹²Broudy, “The Role of the Humanities,” 25.

¹³Anderson, “Humanities Education,” 136.

¹⁴Anderson, “Humanities Education,” 127.

¹⁵Ikpe, “The Decline of Humanities,” 51.

¹⁶Ikpe, “The Decline of Humanities,” 54.

humanities to convince a skeptical public of their capacity to make a difference within the current crisis.”¹⁷ However, this is predicated on the universities’ constant and continuing commitment to the communities and societies to which they belong.

Guyanese are on the cusp of major development and will fully enjoy the societal benefits of a growing economy, only if they focus on collective development, with a non-partisan approach. This essay attempts to address curriculum context, not content, at The University of Guyana (UG), with the outcome of understanding pedagogic principles and fixed feedback from all stakeholders. Furthermore, the UG has a social responsibility to produce students who are committed to the holistic development of Guyanese society. In addition, it is important to understand how to produce academics and activists who are capable of challenging Guyana’s political and moral leaders, all the while being respectful and cognizant of the ethnic conflict that public political criticism creates. The polarization of the political landscape manifests in all spheres of Guyanese life, where the two main political parties; the People’s National Congress (PNC) and the People Progressive Party (PPP), often use their respective ethnic bases as the primary mode of generating support. The PNC’s traditional support comes from the Afro-Guyanese population and the PPP’s support base are Indo-Guyanese, who are the descendants of the Indian indentured servants transported to Guyana after the emancipation of the enslaved ‘African’ population in 1834-1838. The UG’s efforts at inclusivity have been an inspiration, recognized and respected by the Guyanese public, and is an example that Guyana’s political elite can reproduce. At the UG, the leadership of both the faculty and students, have been stellar in their detachment from the public political conflict. As the former Prime Minister of Barbados noted, Guyana’s “political future lies in the hands of the younger generation,” PM Owen Arthur added that political youth coalitions were able to “move away from the tribalism and form alliances that will allow them to build a better Guyana.”¹⁸

Meaningful learning means that students, especially in Humanities, are aware of their responsibilities to provide positive and productive service to the communities to which they belong. For example, the UG must transcend, and transform the community against the idea that “no one votes on issues but on race.”¹⁹ The remedy is for academics to transmit the counterproductive nature of this paradigm and be “passionate about addressing the problems of democracy without advocating for particular solutions to the problems.”²⁰ The remedies will ultimately be a synthesis of academic and activist ideas, with the potential to manifest citizenship education. In the past, the UG has managed to resist the temptation to be controversial, in order to provide “effective and transformative citizenship education (which) helps students to acquire the knowledge, skills and values needed to function effectively within their cultural community, nation-state, and region and in the global community.”²¹ Successful student-teacher collaboration at UG can produce formulas that could manifest Guyana’s national motto of ‘One People, One Nation, One Destiny’, and proliferate the idea that there is no deficiency in being dissimilar, rather, there is ‘efficiency in difference’.

Ethical considerations are equally important when determining institutional and pedagogic leadership, “leaders cannot shirk from their obligations to set a moral example for their followers.”²² Professional development cannot only be geared towards efficient curriculum delivery, students need to be respected. Their successful participation and partnership are integral to the credibility of leadership. Institutional credibility begins here, where community members, parents, and the public could continue to recognize the UG’s accountability to itself, and the voices of students are the most viable measurement. This in turn produces the authority of authenticity, relevance, and respect that UG needs, to provide proper political and philosophical guidance for the Guyanese community. Ultimately, these Professional Learning Communities will involve all stakeholders to provide positive policies and principles that guide the UG and Guyana. As former Chancellor Professor Nigel Harris declared, “we want to do away with the whole question of representation of political parties and other entities...there are still mechanisms proposed to

¹⁷ Ikpe, “The Decline of Humanities,” 60.

¹⁸ “Hope of non-partisan political future is in the hands of young Guyanese – Owen Arthur,”

Kaieteur News. June 14, 2019

¹⁹ “Paralyzed by Partisan Politics,” *Kaieteur News*. September 1, 2017.

²⁰ Carcasson, “Democratic engagement,” 23.

²¹ James A. Banks, “Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age,” *The Journal of Education*, Vol. 194, No. 3, Education in a Global Age (2014): 1.

²² Kerwin A. Livingstone, “Educational Leadership and the University of Guyana: A Critical Look,” *World Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, Vol. 5(2) (2019): 89.

get the input of the broad-based Guyana community...The point is that we are aiming to have a university that can be efficient and effective but still accountable to the Government and people of Guyana.”²³

The University of Guyana has always strived in its commitment to serve “the community, the nation and of all mankind an atmosphere of academic freedom that allows for free and critical enquiry.”²⁴This commitment has been the responsibility of UG’s faculty, staff, and the upper administration. Their public silence in political matters has never meant that their voices were quiet, and their political participation and social maturity have been reflected in their decisions to always support the sitting government. Whether this paradigm is by choice or chance, it has served the necessary function to remain relevant and ‘above the fray’. Although the political leanings of some leaders are public knowledge, their commitment to institutional and national harmony has always been paramount, and furthermore, their choice to create a non-partisan leadership team has been acknowledged by the Guyanese public. Furthermore, collaboration and inclusivity within UG have created a sense of common institutional destiny. This requirement is echoed by Livingstone, “in Shared Leadership, the objective is to ensure that the matters of the educational institution are addressed by all the staff members...Every individual within the institution has a say in how it should be run...leaders let their teachers know that their voice is important.”²⁵Ultimately, teachers have the capacity to control the dialogue, with the intent of being political without being partisan. This environment produces a space where students become better citizens, and citizens become better neighbors. This paradigm has become effective because of the commitment to “effective and efficient Transformational Leadership (which) can ensure that the UG accomplishes its Aim, Mission, and Vision.”²⁶In order for Guyana to be a harmonious society, it is important to recognize that this model could be applied to the community at large and extended to the nation. In an era of transformative economic and developmental change in Guyana, it is of utmost importance that Guyanese, as President Ifraan Ali says, “stop being defined by race. Stop being defined by politics.”²⁷Ultimately, leadership at the UG, and in Guyanese politics, have recognized that social evolution is maintained when leadership is fair, focused, steadfast, and sober, whether they are the sitting government or the opposition.

Guyana has remained racialized because of the politics of ethnic division. The major political parties have often played on the prejudices of the public to generate support, and this paradigm has permeated all spheres of public life. The University of Guyana has not been immune to this social malady, however, in the past it has been successful in resisting these tendencies. The diversity of their faculty and university council has been a great example of inclusivity and shared governance. Guyana’s political elites will do well as they become students once again, learning from UG’s successes at inclusivity. As James A. Banks states, “balancing unity and diversity is a continuing challenge for multi-cultural nation-states...a major problem facing nation-states throughout the world is how to recognize and legitimize difference and yet construct an overarching national identity that incorporates the voices, experiences, and hopes of the diverse groups that compose it.”²⁸James A. Banks purports this transformative education as students begin to “develop positive racial and ethnic attitudes as well as the knowledge, skills, and perspectives to deliberate with students from diverse groups.”²⁹As former Vice-Chancellor Professor Ivelaw Griffith lamented, “the University must be a place, a neutral ground for all places, critical of government, critical of opposition.”³⁰It serves Guyana best when these students are tasked with applying “theories and skills learned in various communication courses to local public issues.”³¹The University of Guyana has had a reputation for not allowing its members to be publicly partisan, and for example, in the past, it had made decisions to “depoliticize its 26-member council in order to ensure that political biases do not affect the affairs of the tertiary institution.”³²The University of Guyana will best serve Guyana when patriotic perspectives supersede partisan politics. Furthermore, cosmopolitan characteristics are welcomed, however, in Guyana, Humanities in Higher Education needs to be focused on the homegrown problems first. UG’s educators must be committed to a fair critique of public policy and development planning, without creating conflict, they must be political but non-partisan.

²³ Navendra Seoraj, “UG wants apolitical council,” *Guyana Chronicle*. March 9, 2018.

²⁴ Livingstone, “Educational Leadership,” 85.

²⁵ Livingstone, “Educational Leadership,” 86.

²⁶ Livingstone, “Educational Leadership,” 89.

²⁷ Michael Younge, “Leadership and putting Guyana first,” *Guyana Chronicle*. May 30, 2021.

²⁸ Banks, “Diversity,” 5.

²⁹ Banks, “Diversity,” 8.

³⁰ “Education...The University of Guyana: Challenge and Change,” *Stabroek News*. May 25, 2017.

³¹ Carcasson, “Democratic engagement,” 15.

³² Seoraj, “UG wants apolitical council,” *Guyana Chronicle*.

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