The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has been mandated by law to chart the direction of higher education in the Philippines. In carrying out our tasks, we have been greatly aided by the studies done by the Congressional Commission on Higher Education on the state of our higher education from 1975 to 1990. Our centennial celebration is an opportune time for us to look back and review the progress of our higher education from a longer time perspective, a hundred years of higher education.

In CHED and in higher education institutions we are faced with the responsibility of developing our human resources for the needs and well-being of our society and nation and the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We have been reminded time and again to gear ourselves for the demands of globalization and the information age. We have been forewarned by futuristic scholars that the twenty-first century, which is just one year away, will be heavily science- and technology-based. It will be a century that will increasingly demand the services of knowledge-creators and knowledge-workers. As we plan the path that our higher education institutions should pursue for our continued progress into the twenty-first century, we must ask ourselves what we can learn from our experience in the past 100 years. From this historical perspective, we should ponder upon and reflect on the philosophy that should guide higher education efforts to meet future needs and challenges. How should our higher education institutions prepare our people, i.e., develop their talents and

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potentials for the survival of the Filipino nation—the preservation and enrichment of our culture, our way of life, our identity as a people, and the utilization and conservation of our natural resources for the continuing development, progress and sustenance of our society into the third millennium? How can we ensure that our people will be able to successfully compete and survive in the global society of the twenty-first century?

In this note, I propose to look into some of the concerns that I have raised above. The first part of this note will dwell on a general historical survey of higher education since 1898. I shall provide a general overview of the past 100 years of higher education.

The second part of the note will focus on the underlying values, principles, and visions that were transmitted by higher institutions of learning in the nineteenth century and helped shape the ideals of the revolution that gave birth to our nation. I shall examine which of these values, principles and visions have endured and how we can use them to guide us in our task of preparing for the future.

Higher Education in Nineteenth-Century Philippines

The year 1896, when the Philippine revolution began, marked 373 years since Magellan first set foot in Mactan. Some 36 years earlier, i.e. in 1863, the Spanish government issued a royal decree which was intended to reform the educational system in the Philippines. The decree provided for the establishment of a system of elementary, secondary and collegiate schools, teacher training schools, and called for government supervision of these schools (Alzona 1932, 20–23, 46–52; Robles 1969, 219–29). The implementation of this decree was never fully realized.

In 1898, on the eve of the first Philippine republic, there was still only one university for the entire archipelago. This was the royal and pontifical University of Santo Tomas (UST) which was run by the Dominicans (Alzona 1932, ch. 1). It was originally established as the College of Santo Tomas in 1611 by Fray Miguel de Benavides. It initially granted decrees in theology, philosophy and the humanities. During the eighteenth century, the faculty of jurisprudence and canonical law was established. In 1871, the schools of medicine and pharmacy were opened. From 1871 to 1886, the University of Santo Tomas granted the degree of Licenciado en Medicina to 62 graduates (Caoili 1983, 302–3). For the doctorate degree in medicine, at least an additional year of study was required at the Universidad Central
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de Madrid in Spain. In 1876, UST granted the bachelor's degree in pharmacy to its first six graduates in the school of pharmacy. Among them was Leon Ma. Guerrero, who is usually referred to as the "Father of Philippine Pharmacy" because of his extensive work on the medicinal plants of the Philippines and their uses (Caoili 1983, 302-3). The total number of graduates in pharmacy during the Spanish period was 164 (from Nino 1970, cited in Caoili [1983, 302-3]).

There were no schools offering engineering in 1898. The few who studied engineering had to go to Europe. There was a nautical school created on 1 January 1820 which offered a four-year course of study that included such subjects as arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, physics, hydrography, meteorology, navigation and piloting. Other professional schools that existed during the nineteenth century were the School of Commercial Accounting and the School of French and English Languages which was established in 1839.2

The decrees issued in Spain calling for the establishment of a school system in the colony were not effectively carried out (Alzona 1932). In general, education under the Spanish colonial administration was geared mainly towards the propagation of the Catholic faith. Primary instruction was for the most part taken care of by the missionaries and parish priests in the villages and towns. Owing to the dearth of qualified teachers, textbooks and other instructional materials, this was mainly religious education.

Schools providing higher education were set up by the different religious orders in the urban centers, most of them in Manila. For example, the Jesuits founded in Cebu City the Colegio de San Ildefonso (1595) and in Manila, the Colegio de San Ignacio (1595), the Colegio de San Jose (1601) and the Ateneo de Manila (1859). The Dominicans had the Colegio de San Juan de Letran (1640) in Manila.3 Access to these schools was limited, however, to the elite of the colonial society—the European-born and local Spaniards, the mestizos and a few native Filipinos. Courses leading to the B.A. degree, Bachiller en Artes, were given. By the nineteenth century, these courses included science subjects such as physics, chemistry, natural history and mathematics.4

On the whole, higher education during the Spanish regime was pursued for the priesthood or for clerical positions in the colonial administration. It was only during the latter part of the nineteenth century that technical/vocational schools were established by the Spaniards. The first school of arts and trades was founded in the province of Pampanga and a school of agriculture was opened in
Manila in 1889. A school of fine arts was established in 1849 and was reorganized in 1893 into the Superior School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving (Alzona 1932, 43-46, 158-64).

Higher education during the Spanish regime was generally viewed with suspicion by the colonial authorities who feared these institutions would encourage conspiracy and rebellion among the native Filipinos. For this reason, only the more daring and persevering students were able to undertake advanced studies. The attitude of the Spanish friars towards the study of the sciences and medicine can be gleaned from a statement attributed to a rector of UST in the 1860s, i.e.: “Medicine and the natural sciences are materialistic and impious studies” (quoted in Le Roy 1905, 206; cited in Caoili 1983, 304). It was not surprising, therefore, that few Filipinos ventured to study these disciplines. Those who did were poorly trained when compared with those who had gone to European universities. In spite of the small number of Filipino graduates in medicine and the sciences from the UST, they still faced the problem of unemployment. This was because the colonial government preferred to appoint Spanish and other European-trained professionals to available positions in the archipelago (Alzona 1932, 143-44; Mabini 1969, 27). Our historians attest that many of these Filipino graduates later joined the revolutionary movement against Spain.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 facilitated travel, communications and commerce between the Philippines and Europe. The prosperity that resulted from increased commerce between the Philippines and the rest of the world enabled Filipino students to go to Europe for professional, advanced studies. As we know by now, Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar, Antonio and Juan Luna, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Pedro A. Paterno, Mariano Ponce, Isabelo de los Reyes and many other Filipino intellectuals in the nineteenth century were able to pursue advanced studies in Spain and other European countries. They imbibed the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment, i.e. freedom and progress (Corpuz 1989, vol. 2, ch. 13). They set up the propaganda movement in Europe, which later on spread to the Philippines and eventually led to the revolution against Spain in 1896.

Higher Education During the First Republic

The outbreak of the Philippine revolution led to the closing of many schools in the country. The revolutionary government took steps to open classes as soon as circumstances permitted. On 29
August 1898, the Secretary of the Interior ordered provincial governors to reestablish the schools that had been abandoned before (Agoncillo and Guerrero 1970, 207). During the short-lived Philippine Republic (1898–1900), the government took steps to establish a secular educational system. By a decree of 19 October 1898, it created the Universidad Literaria de Filipinas as a secular, state-supported institution of higher learning. It offered courses in law, medicine, surgery, pharmacy and notary public. Most of its faculty and students had actually come from UST. During its short life, the university was able to hold graduation exercises on 29 September 1899 in Tarlac. Degrees in medicine and law were awarded (Alzona 1932, 177–80; Agoncillo 1960, 250–51).

Higher Education During the American Regime

As soon as civil government was established in the Philippines, the Americans introduced a secularized public school system of education. In 1901, the Philippine Commission (which acted as the executive and legislative body for the Philippines until 1907) created a Department of Public Instruction (Act No. 74) and provided for the establishment of schools that would give free primary education with English as the medium of instruction (Caoili 1983, 309). The commission also set up the Philippine Normal School in Manila to train Filipino teachers. This was followed by the establishment of secondary schools in 1902. The Philippine Medical School was established in 1905 and was followed by other professional and technical schools.

On 18 June 1908, the Philippine Legislature created the University of the Philippines. The Philippine Medical School became part of the university. Among the first colleges to be opened were the college of agriculture in Los Baños, Laguna in 1909; the colleges of liberal arts, engineering and veterinary medicine in 1910; and the college of law in 1911. Four years later, the school of pharmacy and a graduate school of tropical medicine and public health were opened. These were followed by the establishment in 1916 of the school of forestry and the conservatory of music. In 1918, the college of education was opened (Caoili 1983, 310).

American educational policy in the Philippines was designed primarily to develop literate, civic-minded citizens and to provide a pool of Filipino professionals who would occupy positions in the colonial bureaucracy as teachers, lawyers, judges, physicians, scientists and
engineers. Before 1910, because of the dearth of highly-trained Filipino professionals, the American colonial government encouraged young Filipinos to pursue higher education, as much as possible, in American colleges. In 1903, the Philippine Commission passed an act to finance the scholarship of 125 young Filipino students to the United States, to be educated as teachers, engineers and physicians. These students came to be called pensionados. They were obliged to render public service for five years after their return from their studies (Caoili 1983, 311). There was a similar program to develop the Filipino faculty at the University of the Philippines. In 1908, most of the instructors in the sciences and engineering in the university were Americans and other foreigners. By December 1926, out of a total teaching staff of 463 in the university, only 44 were Americans and other foreigners (Caoili 1983, 310).

The establishment of the University of the Philippines satisfied the short-term needs for professionally-trained Filipinos in the American colonial government’s organization and programs. What the colonial authorities failed to anticipate was that by providing for an extensive public elementary and secondary school system, they had increased tremendously the social demand for higher education. During the American regime, the University of the Philippines remained the only publicly-supported university and could not meet the increasing social demand for higher education. Hence, the establishment of other colleges and universities was left to the initiative of enterprising Filipinos.

Private schools were established during the American regime not only to meet their increasing demand for professional education. They were also conceived by their founders as a means to conserve the national heritage and prevent the complete Americanization of the Filipinos, i.e. “for the purpose of providing enlightenment to the masses and at the same time to keep intact and conserve Filipino ideals” (M. V. de los Santos quoted in Caoili 1983, 314). Some of the private schools were the Liceo de Manila, now the Manila Central University, which was organized by the Sociedad Filomatica in 1900; the Colegio Filipino, established in 1900, which became the National University in 1925; the Instituto de Manila, founded in 1913, which became the University of Manila in 1929; the Centro Escolar de Señoritas, set up in 1910, which became the Centro Escolar University in 1930; and the Philippine Women’s College, founded in 1919, which became a university in 1932 (Isidro and Ramos 1973, 15–20). Two other existing universities—Silliman University in Dumaguete
and Central Philippine University in Iloilo City—were also founded during the first decade of American rule. They began as Protestant mission schools and gradually evolved into their present status.

At the outset of the American regime, there was no government policy on private schools. In 1906, the Philippine Commission provided for the regulation of private schools in the corporation law (Act No. 1459) which it enacted. It provided that any group could establish a school or college by forming a corporation and such an institution could grant diplomas and confer degrees only upon approval by the Secretary of Public Instruction (later on Secretary of Education). In effect, the Philippine Commission treated schools like commercial firms or business enterprises except that they would be under the supervision of the Department of Public Instruction rather than the Department of Trade and Industry. In 1917, the Philippine Legislature enacted Act No. 2076 (Private School Act), which recognized private schools as educational institutions and not commercial ventures. The Secretary of Public Instruction was mandated to "maintain a general standard of efficiency in all private schools and colleges so that (they shall) furnish adequate instruction to the public." The Secretary was authorized to "inspect and watch" these schools and colleges (quoted in Caoili 1983, 315).

The number of private colleges increased rapidly during the American regime. In 1925, the Philippine Legislature authorized the Board of Educational Survey to make a comprehensive investigation of the state of public and private institutions of learning in the country. Headed by Paul Monroe, the survey found most private schools sub-standard. It reported that most of these were physically ill-equipped and had more part-time than full-time faculty members (Isidro and Ramos 1973, 21). Following the findings of the Monroe Survey, the colonial government took steps to improve the supervision of private schools. The Philippine Legislature created the Office of Private Education to look into such matters as physical plant, school facilities, libraries, laboratory equipment and student load and administrative work such as enforcement of government regulations, evaluating credits taken by students, etc. Appropriations for the supervision of private schools were increased and consequently their standards were improved.

The number of private schools continued to increase during the American regime. In 1932, the Commissioner of Private Education estimated that the government would have to spend at least P10,750,886 each year exclusive of the cost of additional buildings
and equipment, if it were to accommodate students enrolled in recognized private schools. This amount was more than the total appropriations for the maintenance of the Bureau of Education and the University of the Philippines. As one American official at the time noted, "the private schools in the aggregate are 'big business' and they supplement the public educational system by providing facilities which thus far the government has not had the funds to supply" (Hayden 1942, 549; cited in Caoili 1983, 316).

Higher Education During the Commonwealth

In November 1935, the Philippine Commonwealth, the transition government to independence, was inaugurated. The government, which was by this time completely managed by Filipinos, continued to expand the public school system. To accommodate the increasing number of schoolchildren, the government abolished Grade VII as the terminal grade in the elementary curriculum and instituted the "double-single session" plan, thus reducing the time allotment or dropping of certain subjects in the elementary schools. This decision was to have far-reaching consequences on the quality of education at the elementary level and a negative impact on the preparation of students for tertiary education. By 1938, there were 425 private schools recognized by the government, 64 of which were institutions at the college level. Seven were universities. These were the Centro Escolar University, Far Eastern University, National University, Philippine Women's University, Silliman University, University of Manila and University of Santo Tomas. Together with the University of the Philippines, these had a total of 19,575 students in the country.

The occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese during World War II totally disrupted the society and the economy. Educational activities were brought to a halt. Worse still, most of the higher educational institutions in Manila were reduced to ruins during the battles for liberation fought in 1944-45.

Higher Education Since 1946

When the Philippines gained its political independence in 1946, it had to face the enormous task of social and economic reconstruction, normalization of governmental operations, and rebuilding of
educational institutions. The pattern of relationship between the public and the private sectors in higher education which developed during the American regime has persisted in the Philippines. State support for education continues to be concentrated at the elementary school level, with state colleges and universities accounting for only 15 percent of total collegiate enrollment in 1990. Private colleges and universities continue to provide education for the majority of the collegiate population (which is a mere 15 percent of Filipinos aged 17 to 24 years).  

The number of state universities and colleges (SUCs) has been increasing since 1946. Their growth, however, has not been based on a rational plan. Partisan political considerations often determined the creation, location and staffing of these institutions. Hence, many of them have been ill-equipped and ill-prepared to provide quality higher education. This is especially evident in the sciences and engineering. State universities vary in standards, arising largely from the uneven distribution of resources for physical and research facilities, salaries and faculty development programs. The University of the Philippines System remains the most developed with extensive graduate and undergraduate degree programs in all fields including the sciences and engineering. Yet in the recently published Asiaweek survey of the top universities in Asia, the UP ranked only forty-six out of sixty-five comprehensive universities.

Private universities and colleges have similarly increased in number since 1946. However, these also vary in standards. Most non-sectarian universities and colleges are organized and managed like business enterprises and are heavily dependent on tuition fees. To operate profitably, they tend to concentrate on low-cost courses like business administration, liberal arts and education, and encourage large enrollments in these. Sectarian universities and colleges tend to be financially better endowed. Hence, they have been able to impose selective admissions, generate lower faculty-student ratios, and provide laboratory and library facilities required for science and engineering programs. The large number of private colleges and universities to be supervised and the limited budget and staff of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (CHED), which was charged with responsibility of government supervision and control of these institutions until 1994, hampered the achievement of quality standards in higher education. Since its creation in 1994, CHED has been held responsible for setting the goals and standards of higher education in the country.
The number of college students and graduates from public and private universities and colleges has shown tremendous increases since 1946. Nevertheless, the proportion of those in agriculture, medical and natural sciences, engineering, and the emerging fields of specialization such as molecular biology and biotechnology, information and communications science, marine and ocean sciences, computer science and computer engineering, has remained relatively low. There are very few graduates in the physical sciences. Most students (and graduates) in agriculture come from state institutions while most of those in engineering and medical sciences come from private institutions. A majority of college students and graduates continue to be in teacher training/education and commerce/business administration courses. This situation results from the fact that students tend to enroll in courses where there are perceived employment opportunities and which their families can afford. Engineering and science courses entail longer periods of study and have generally been more expensive to pursue.

Values, Principles and Visions

The foregoing brief historical account of the origins and evolution of higher education in the Philippines shows the lasting influence of Spanish and later American colonial aims and policies on our present system. During nearly four centuries of Spanish rule, educational institutions were established primarily to Christianize the Filipinos, hispanize the elite class and ensure the subjection of Filipinos by Spaniards. During the American regime, an extensive public system with English as the medium of instruction was established to unify the archipelago, spread the ideals of democracy and facilitate colonial rule (Zwaenepoel 1975, 565–66). Higher education institutions were set up to train Filipino professionals who would staff the higher levels of the colonial bureaucracy.

Although higher education policies were controlled by the colonial authorities for a long time, Filipinos had their own values, ideals and visions of higher education for the country. These values, ideals and visions can be gleaned from the writings of the ilustrados and leaders of the Propaganda Movement during the nineteenth century.

One of the ideals shared by several Filipino patriots was the secularization of education, i.e. removing control of education from the powerful religious orders. This did not mean that the study of
religion is schools would be completely abandoned. This ideal can be seen in the writings of Rizal, for example, in his “Letter to the Women of Malolos” and his “Plan of a Modern School” (Rizal 1989, 12-18; Alzona 1932, 367-71). Much earlier than Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar espoused this idea of secularization in his La Soberania Monacal. He pointed out that friar control over education defeated the very purpose of the educational (Moret) decree of 1863. Moret had planned for the establishment of a university of clerical control. This decree had been enthusiastically received by the ilustrados (Alzona 1932, 169-70).

The ilustrados advocated the compulsory teaching of the Spanish language to the Filipino masses for the purpose of having a common language. This idea was expressed by Rizal and the members of the Asociacion Hispano-Filipina in Madrid which counted among its members Marcelo H. del Pilar, Mariano Ponce and Tomas Arejola (Alzona 1932, 169-70). The education of women was another ideal expressed by the Filipino patriots. This can be seen, for example, in Rizal’s “Letter to the Women of Malolos.” This idea was shared by Graciano Lopez Jaena. Rizal also advocated a balanced curriculum, one that would develop both the body and the mind of the Filipino. Thus, in his “Modern School,” he proposed to teach students fencing, swimming, horsemanship and even dancing (Alzona 1932, 171).

The ilustrados also gave importance to vocational education to lift the people from bondage to freedom. They urged Filipinos to pursue industrial careers and supported the establishment of schools of arts and trades. Rizal was an avid advocate of vocational education and demonstrated it in Dapitan while he was in exile. “Rizal impressed the people with the dignity of manual labor” (Alzona 1932, 172).

Long before the arrival of the Americans, Filipinos had been advocating the establishment of public schools. The Constitution of the La Liga Filipina stated that one of its aims was the encouragement of popular education. The desire for mass education had become widespread by the time the Americans reached the Philippines. Moreover, the ilustrados such as Graciano Lopez Jaena proposed the sending of meritorious students to study in foreign countries. Filipinos would thereby profit from what other countries could teach.

Filipino leaders in the nineteenth century advocated the inculcation of patriotism in public schools. Love of country was embodied in the writings of Bonifacio, particularly his “Ten Commandments of the Katipunan,” and “Pag-ibig sa Tinubuang Lupa”; and in the writings of Emilio Jacinto, Apolinario Mabini, Jose Rizal and others.
Rizal included in the curriculum of his "Modern School" the teaching of Philippine history, separate from Spanish or universal history. These educational ideals of Filipino patriots were later included in the provisions of the Malolos Constitution. These have also been integrated into the 1935 (Article XIV, Section 5) and the 1973 (Article XV, Section 8) Constitutions of the Philippines. In the 1987 Constitution, Article II, Sec. 17, states that: "The State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development."

In summary, our Filipino leaders a hundred years ago already had visions of a Philippines with a highly educated population, with experts not only in the traditional professions of law and medicine but also in the trades, in engineering, science and technology. They had foreseen the importance and necessity of education for women and the masses. They were fully cognizant of the need for quality education in order to achieve the goals of freedom, democracy and economic progress which were necessary for a sovereign, independent polity. These ideals were embodied in past constitutions of our country as well as the 1987 Constitution.

Contemporary Higher Education

Higher education in contemporary Philippines has been informed by a philosophical orientation that puts primacy on the pursuit of knowledge and formation of skills necessary to make the Filipino a productive member of society. Indeed, the purposes, plans, programs and delivery of higher education in the Philippines at present are based on this philosophy which evidently bears the imprint of our cultural and historical legacy and aspirations. More recently, this orientation has been reinforced in the Long-Term Higher Education Development Plan covering the period 1996 to 2005.

Higher education is a means to harness, develop and catalyze not only the productive capacities of Filipinos but more significantly the constructive use of their full potentials and capabilities in: 1) realizing the Filipino identity and strong sense of national pride; 2) cultivating and inculcating the moral and spiritual foundation; 3) attaining political maturity, economic stability and equitable social progress; and 4) preserving and enriching the historical and cultural heritage of the Filipinos as a people and a nation.
Higher education in the Philippines has evolved to accommodate the changing needs of society and of individuals. The content and provision of higher education was geared, for instance, to meet the requirements of establishing and building a nation during the early years of Philippine independence. Much later, higher education was viewed by government as a means to propel the country's economic growth and development. This was done by encouraging the disciplines deemed central to attaining societal goals and limiting access to those which were found peripheral to meeting economic and national development. This conscious attempt to fit higher education and societal needs was quite pronounced during the twenty-year existence of the Education for National Development Program (1970). The program included the institutionalization of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) as the screening mechanism that would insure the development of targeted manpower requirements for national development.

Recently, this orientation of higher education as an instrument to attain social needs has been reinforced with the explicit mission of higher education, as provided in the Long-Term Higher Education Development Plan, 1996-2005 (p. 4), to “accelerate the development of high-level professionals who will search for new knowledge, and provide leadership in various disciplines required by a dynamic and self-sustaining economy” and to “harness the productive capacity of the country’s human resource base towards international competitiveness.” Indeed, the twin goals for human resource development, namely people empowerment and global competitiveness, have been adopted to guide the country’s quest for rapid industrialization and development.

Higher education in the country has been shaped by social realities and aspirations as much as it has shaped Philippine society and culture. Its philosophical orientation will remain largely influenced by the pursuit of knowledge for the achievement of social needs and national goals. The challenge to its transformational capacity shall be to prepare and empower Filipinos to serve societal needs and concerns and to help achieve a greatly strengthened democratic and just society that will survive the intense competition of a global environment in the twenty-first century.

Planning for the Twenty-first Century

The centennial celebration of our independence as a nation is an opportune time for us to reflect on the past and ponder on the future.
Given our hopes and aspirations in higher education and the limited resources that our country has vis-à-vis the unlimited needs and demands, we must plan the directions of our higher education programs. We need to conceptualize and promote programs that will prepare our people and our nation for the dizzying changes that modern science and technology have made possible in our world. The world of the twenty-first century will change even faster. We need to be at the cutting edge of the pursuit of knowledge not for its own sake but for the benefit of individuals and society. We need to develop individuals who will have a broad general education, grounded on love of country and humanity, and who have special skills and knowledge suited to their God-given talents. To a certain extent the model general education (GE) program that we have worked on is designed to partly meet this need. The GE embodies the philosophy and values that I have discussed. The challenge for us now is to work on the disciplines and specializations that will equip individuals for the intense competition of the twenty-first century global society.

Notes

1. This historical account is based on an article by Olivia C. Caoli (1983, 302–33).
3. The Colegio de San Ildefonso developed to become the present University of San Carlos in Cebu City which has been administered by the Society of the Divine Word since 1933 (Alzona 1932).
4. The Bachiller en Artes then was equivalent to the present high school diploma.

References


