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## University Leadership and Quality of Academic Programmes

### **University Appointments, Promotions and Award of Honorary Degrees**

Universities worldwide consider teaching staff as the core of their functions. Basically, the role of lecturers is to teach, conduct research and disseminate the findings thereof. They are expected to publish their work for the common good of humankind. Promotions to high cadre are normally pegged on the number and quality of the papers, financial attraction or sourcing and seldom administrative roles. That is why one is always advised to publish and innovate or fade into oblivion. In any university worth its credibility, scholarly work is the only consideration used for promotions.

Peers respect persons of high academic credentials. They compare notes and enjoy reading and critiquing others' work. They love to debate and correct their colleagues without any intimidation. For example, a course in Critical Thinking is designed to teach several strategies for increasing one's abilities to react critically and form opinions after reasonable arguments. Those arguing seek to gain the acceptance of others for their points of view.

The participants will learn and acquire the art of asking the right questions, including self-criticism about one's own thoughts. One will learn the art of reasoning. One will also research for useful data, pinpointing the real issues and offering critical options based on those evaluations.

Critical thinking, therefore, is not just an art but also disposition and a commitment. As compared to formal debating skills, one's informal strategies for advocating and arguing positions will be sharpened since one examines reasoning capacities of others in speeches, conversations, essays and group deliberations. University lecturers and professors are always entangled in debates on issues they consider important. All areas of discipline will always provoke debates and proven research.

Universities in Kenya expect persons who have attained a higher degree to be appointed at a lecturer's level. He or she might be expected to have published some papers. This is the norm in many universities. At the time of writing this book, there are 22 public universities and 17 accredited private universities. Of the 22 public ones, there are over 800 degree programmes spread in all of them. Ideally, lecturers with earned PhDs should teach the courses within the programmes.

I have, in my opinion, given a clear method of awarding a degree and the expectations before its award. What I did not cover is the reasoning behind the award of *honoris causa* (honorary degrees).

Honorary degrees are bestowed or conferred to persons of distinction. They are conferred or rewarded for exemplary services, roles, duties, distinction in service to mankind, university, nation and academia, and unique assistance. Possessing an honorary title or post is not a qualification without necessarily performing services towards the earning of such an honour. One simply receives the reward on the basis of some exemplary undertaking. The recipient does not go in lecture halls to be taught, write examinations and then dissertation.

During my tenure as a Vice-Chancellor, I awarded four *honoris causa* degrees only. I consider honorary degrees very special and should be awarded to the most deserving as examples to the present and future generations. My Senate thought I was mean. But, afterwards, they appreciated my stand since other universities dished out the same to non-deserving individuals. As the current chairman of Kenyatta University Council, I have advised Senate to consider carefully individuals they wish to be conferred with honorary degrees. The name of a university is held high in tandem with the awards it gives. Awards of diplomas and conferment of degrees is such an honour to the recipient that if such a process is abused, the reputation of a university goes down the drain.

The award of *honoris causa* in 1994 to the retired President Moi was done as a routine activity as he was the Chancellor of all public universities. It was therefore an obligation to award him the degree. He could not perform the function of a Chancellor without the said award. It took me some planning and preparations to have him gowned and declared my first graduate soon after JKUAT was elevated into a full university in 1994.

President Moi was my first Chancellor. I had to repeat the same when I again awarded President Mwai Kibaki (now retired). Soon after winning the 2002 presidential elections, Mwai Kibaki performed the first public function at JKUAT. I had to confer him with the honorary degree in his capacity as my second Chancellor before the Acts changed. The two honorary degrees were awarded because they had to be, according to the 1994 Act of Parliament. President Kibaki served as my Chancellor for less than 24 hours. He had posted me to the National Environment Management Authority.

Mr Koichiro Matsuura was the Japanese Director-General, UNESCO. He was influential in education matters in Africa and particularly the JICA support to JKUAT. It was my humble submission that we, as senate, award a re-known Japanese national an honorary degree. This was due to the generous technical support of JKUAT by the Japanese government.

I also had a choice of awarding the JICA president but opted for the UNESCO Director-General. He was also an academic in his own right who was nominated to head the powerful UN office in Paris, France. He later created a chair in our Biotechnology Department. The chair was also an honour to our university as it was the first one by a UNESCO Director-General. The Japanese Embassy to Kenya commended us for the coveted award.

The Senate was convinced that Mr Matsuura deserved the award and Council approved it. The exercise followed the full normal process as prescribed in the university statutes.

Prof. Risley Thomas Odhiambo was a scholar, an innovator and researcher. He was the founder of many academic institutions, including International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). It was my honour to bestow him with an honorary degree. The Kenyan scientist deserved it. That was the very last one that I conferred as a VC at JKUAT. One disturbing trend emerging both within public and private universities is the award of honorary degrees either to politicians because of some patronage networks or financial considerations, which awards do not benefit the academic or financial reputation of the universities.

University appointments and promotions follow laid-down procedures with specific academic requirements. During my tenure at JKUAT, we were specific and clear on the requirements for upward mobility. I was accused of slowing promotions or being too strict. I was certain of one thing: to retain the staff. I wanted motivated members of staff who would be my best assets. But I also knew that career development was every employee's target. They looked at the opportunities ahead for career advancement and considered training as one criterion to enable one to proceed to another level of grade.

When I reflect on how I retained staff, one reality comes into my mind: we had reasonable package allowances like housing and commuter then. There is a major problem currently because many universities in Kenya are experiencing an unusual number of academic staff departures. Maybe, the employees are feeling undervalued by their employers.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of staff welfare. There are specific reasonable allowances like commuter, students' fee waiver, books, per diem, computer packages, medical care and utility which, if enhanced, would retain staff and reduce excessive attrition/ mobility. Many universities, for example, are unable to reimburse medical expenses. Staffs give up following the refund and develop low working morale. A medical scheme is one area which is so vital, yet so neglected. This does not build the institution.

Competitive travel grants can be introduced for staff to attend national and international meetings. It can be conditional. One has a reputable paper to present or attend a meeting which would benefit and promote the university. Universities need visibility and global image/fame in their academic and educational pursuits. Councils can always oblige to some reasonable package requests. My motto was to always retain good members of staff even if it meant creating extra duties for them to engage in as long as I would justify it.

The University of Nairobi, for example, has among the most demanding criteria in staff promotion. I sit in senior appointment committees and realize that despite those demands, staffs enjoy work; they stay in the same positions until their time comes when they have met the stipulated requirements. Despite those who leave for higher competitive posts like Vice-Chancellors, the rest of staff go through the rigour of interviews in order to qualify for the next positions.

Currently, Kenya has 32 universities, both public and private. There has been unprecedented exodus of staff from one campus to another, as academic staff seeks fast promotion. This is affecting the quality of education negatively. The University of Nairobi has a policy on such an exodus which I consider very well considered.

If a lecturer moves to a sister university on promotion and wishes to return, he or she will revert to the same grade he or she was at before leaving, despite the higher grade received from the other university. This condition has made it difficult for migrating members to return to the University of Nairobi because they fear being downgraded. The reality is that promotions at the University of Nairobi are strictly determined by the laid-down requirements which cannot be circumvented. This is part of upholding the institution's high quality and standards. The university still maintains its staff despite the continuous squabbles from some quarters.

In the early 1970s and 1980s, there was only one University of Nairobi. Things may have been different then. In the effort of attracting and retaining staff, it is most likely that hiring regulations and procedures may have been flouted.

I have heard of exchanges during interviews to the extent that interviewees even stormed out of the boardrooms. Possibly, such panels may not have been competent enough to interview some senior members of staff. The promotions to full professors are demanding and controversies exist even unto this day.

The Chairs of Council those days were businessmen who knew little, if anything, about university promotion requirements. They did not have academic and teaching qualifications to chair interview panels. They wholly relied on the Vice-Chancellor's guidance and recommendations. It was therefore likely that major rifts and favouritism could prevail during such high-position interviews. Requirements could be flouted in favour of particular people, especially if there existed some differences amongst the panel and/or the interviewee.

Currently, in the UoN, the clear guidelines have reduced complaints considerably. Senate passed the regulations and they are hitting hard on them.

I have no clue as to what the young universities do as far as associate and full professorial positions are concerned. Other than the older Kenyan universities which might have laid-down procedures for appointments, the younger ones are yet to come up with appointment requirements comparable to international standards.

It is instructive to note that if the head of an institution does not measure to the position, so shall be the followers. The head of the institution, in this case the Vice-Chancellor, must be a person of proven academic track record. This is the only way that laws and procedures can be followed. African universities have had appointed Vice-Chancellors.

The recent move on competitive hiring of the same has reduced rifts amongst senate members. Sycophancy has reduced and proper criteria have been put into use. Not all Vice-Chancellors fall into this trap of sycophancy. African universities, I must admit, have had some of the best Vice-Chancellors who have made a mark in the academic development in their respective countries. Building institutions to appreciate standards is an uphill task. Building and acquiring competent staff to run such institutions is not easy either. The head must be able to understand the dynamics of politics and make rational decisions accordingly.

In my own case, promotion from lecturer to full professor took a long path. My appointment to lectureship in 1980 called for a PhD and some publications. I had them already on my first appointment. It took nine years to ascend to senior lecturer and associate professor. This was with additional publications and mandatory MSc and PhD supervisions. I got my full professorial position in 1996, again with more published papers, PhD supervision and publication of books. It was not therefore an easy ascension.

It is in order to enumerate some MSc and PhD candidates who have gone through my tutelage as follows: Sibuga Piri Kallunde, Leonard Wamocho, Wariara Kariuki, Safary Ariga, Joseph Oryokot, Boniface Ita, Flora Kiririah, Ongusi Bongo, Ben Wafula Wanjala, Margaret Karembu, Bala. I was also able to write papers with them.

I was supervising the named students while I was doing my other administrative duties. It was a pleasure to lead young scientists and see them graduate. A good track record of a committed scholar matters a lot, as a role model, since future generations would always ask for tangible examples of work done.

All these demonstrate that mine was not an accelerated promotion rather I put in time and sacrifice. It is also important to mention here that greatness is not born but grown and nurtured. That is why I always advise the youth not to idolize those people who attain success overnight on a fast unexplainable track. One needs to go through a process to get to the summit. There have been cases

of unfair appointment based on tribal considerations even when the appointee did not qualify. The appointees did not deserve the promotion and ended up frustrating the systems, hence little, if any, development is witnessed. Those who deserved the post got frustrated and did not exert their potential.

This is a very common scenario in Kenya and nasty cases of nepotism have been brought into the public arena and embarrassed those with such tendencies. Even when laws prohibit the practice, many senior officers have been indicted in the courts of law with devastating revelations.

The hasty elevation of several Kenyan colleges into universities, from a mere seven to 22, is a case in point. Virtually every university's top echelon is dominated by one community or tribe. This is against Kenya's constitution; and the appointing authorities has been unable to unravel this misnomer despite the full powers they have. No wonder the nation is crying of falling academic standards! There is little distinction between some universities and *harambee* secondary schools which are run by the board of governors from one community. Members of the academia see the flaws and level hard questions at these institutions.

With the new University Bill 2012, there is order in the appointment of Chancellors, board chairpersons, Vice-Chancellors and top university organs. The powerful Head of States of state used their positions to directly or indirectly influence actions which would otherwise be questioned. The constitution demands for gender inclusion in all committees. The practice is now entrenched accordingly and qualifications are adhered to in the universities and public sector. Public appointments, however, are still tribal-based despite the academic requirements. Many African Head of States of state have yet to appreciate that they run countries which require public good to all. By and large, new Kenyan universities have unfortunately taken tribal dimensions in their setups.

The problem has been made worse by a number of complex issues which include: over-enrolment of students; an extra demand in teaching module two students; lack of adequate learning facilities and materials; de-motivated staff; insensitive management styles; random and occasionally unilateral decision-making which affects harmony and focus negatively in respective institutions; prolonged procedures in staff evaluation and promotion; and, staff favouritism by a clique of managers.

With all these discouraging revelations, what then is the future of quality education in our schools, colleges or universities? It is gratifying that we are aware of them and talking about them. There needs to be immediate action on these anomalies. In the meantime, relevant authorities have decided to bury their heads in the sand. These trends will highly balkanize Kenya a country which for many years has been struggling to be a nation of one people. This issue will be discussed in the next chapters.

## **Struggling to Uphold University Academic Standards: Are Our Academic Standards Falling?**

The population of Kenya stands at approximately 40 million people. The number of students in secondary schools keeps on increasing every year. Those who qualify for university admission exceed available infrastructure. There has therefore been cause to increase institutions of higher learning. The increase has had its consequences.

In recent years, Kenya has had an unprecedented increase in the number of universities. Between 2010 and 2013, fourteen new fully-fledged universities were created across the country. Several of them were converted from middle-level colleges into independent universities. This ambitious move has brought about major and far-reaching implications on all facets of education in Kenya. The planning may have been too abrupt with minimal, if any, consultations.

University colleges are generally nurtured by their parent universities. This is how all the current East African universities came about. The idea of a university college, if well organized, is to run programmes just like the mother university, but under careful guidance. They need to have all the facilities, staff and students just like their parent campuses.

The only difference is that their courses and staff assigned to teach them are monitored by the parent university. In fact, they can be very strong in some disciplines and can even perform better than the mother university. But because of other complementary courses, they are still subservient to their parent campus. In my view, the arrangement is meant to cut down certain costs, ensure maturity of programmes, reduce course duplication, monitor market changes for graduates and have complementary services like teaching, equipment and laboratory utilization universities in other countries practice the collegiate system of higher education.

The contrary may be seen to be true. Such a system allows full autonomy early enough for independent development. These include having a full complementary staff, residential houses, developed programmes, their own budget and capital development. Our country's national budget may not sustain such fast growth.

Many countries tend to have no financial allocations for university development. I am not implying that we should not have many universities, but rather we need to develop them gradually. The current situation is pathetic, to say the least. Kenya needs to be a first world in the near future, but the development plan in place may not take the country far if we do not put efforts in quality university systems.

The following paper which I delivered at a private dinner meeting summarizes the problems we face in higher education. It analyses facts which affect quality in academia. It is reproduced here verbatim.

## **Compromising University Education: Quality versus Quantity**

Our country has witnessed an unprecedented growth of universities and student population. The increase has happened within the last eight to ten years and is commensurate with secondary school growth. The demand for university education is the ultimate academic desire for any average literate person. Kenya has witnessed increased enrolment for all cadres of degrees. What can nationally be done about this abnormal increase?

I have been in lecturing and administering university business for a long time and would like to offer my thoughts on the quality and quantity of our education progression against the backdrop of Kenya's Vision 2030. Teaching is a noble call. It is a profession which deals with human skills, knowledge and development. Quality therefore is affected by the deliverer and recipient of a subject.

What is quality? In simple terms, it is the fitness, the finish, the attraction on the package and wholesomeness of a processed product. In our nurseries, primary, secondary schools and universities, the deliverer is charged with the role of nurturing toddlers, children, pupils, and university men and women. Those responsible for teaching the said groups must themselves be knowledgeable and fully equipped with the processes that lead to finished and functional products.

I will, for the time being, ignore the lower cadres and address university concerns. To qualify for a lecturer's position, one must have completed his/her PhD from a recognized university. This expectation presupposes the rigorous stages that the individual went through in his/her area of expertise.

To declare that someone has been taught, supervised, examined and qualified for a specific award means that the person has had adequate contact with the lecturers and professors during his/her training. What does this mean? It is the duration taken to teach, consult, assign, mark quizzes, assessments, examinations, conduct practicals (where necessary), read theses, be available for academic guidance, write examination papers, write make-ups and be constantly on the laptops responding to open distance learners (ODL/ICT group) – who are usually at large. This is a typical scenario of a dedicated lecturer.

Consider the following counter-productive scenarios:

for example, due to high cost of living, a lecturer may opt to take up several part-time lectures across Kenya traversing from Western, Eastern, Coast and Central Kenya to the City of Nairobi where universities have campuses and where teaching opportunities exist. This is where the highest number of workers who yearn for knowledge resides. The transit lecturer who is on a permanent payroll elsewhere must be able to do all that appertains to the fulfilment and award of a desired course in another campus several kilometres away. He/she has to be a great time planner considering the state of our trunk roads and airports. This is not, however, a unique situation. I once had a lecturer who would fly from the University of California,

Davis, to Rutgers to teach us for 3 days a week and fly back to his base. It worked out for him because he was a great planner and a renowned world scholar.

‘The sum total of quality education calls for every input by a lecturer to a student in terms of content, coverage, feedback, mentoring and role modelling. Meaning? The sum of quantity production is merely to churn out graduates who do not apply their expertise and cannot think critically to create jobs for themselves or for others. They are not to blame. It is just the overall craziness of university degree acquisition.

The proliferation of universities has raised the need for unprecedented number of lecturers and yet these are already in short supply. They must circulate at a cost, do part-time and offer half-baked commitments. Departmental chairs are compelled to follow up on part-timers for results and the consequences are quality degradation.

This practice inevitably compromises on the quality of education. How then will Kenya realize her Vision 2030? Senates decide who teaches, what they teach, when and how they teach. A professor may choose what, when and how to teach. Some disciplines call for very elaborate practicals, which may not be possible to conduct due to unmanageable number of students and the cost involved.

What are the possible solutions? There are several alternatives which I would like to offer. Firstly, we need dedicated trained human power. I suggest we form a human power consortium of more established universities to train young upcoming graduates under staff development programme, pay them well and bond them for not less than six years. The ministry responsible for higher education should meet the cost of training specifically meant for the very newly upgraded universities. They have to be retained in specific areas of their expertise.

Secondly, the newly established universities should work together and identify critical areas to mutually contract a university or universities to train their PhD personnel. Some years back, a few African universities came together and formed an association with the University of South Africa, (UCT) to train our staff. The USHEPiA project assisted JKUAT in training PhDs in critical areas. This was an excellent arrangement for staff development.

The contracted university should give approximate period within which they graduate the trainees. In other words, the training university ought to put in extra time, expedite the supervision and degree award. Extra funds should come from the requesting university.

Thirdly, freeze for a while, any academic programs which are understaffed and then seek outside scholarships in the area. This will allow for the release of space and personnel for a quick jump-start.

Finally, create strong industrial linkages and appoint substantive chairs specifically for human power development. Name buildings, streets, and laboratories after these sponsors and strike lasting assisting deals with enterprising, resourceful and philanthropic individuals.

The continuous discontent with the deteriorating quality of education can be overcome by having enough dedicated university lecturers who are well motivated to arrest the situation. Equipment, supplies and learning facilities are equally critical in maintaining high standards. Other universities elsewhere are known for greater scholarly work because their countries know the importance of retaining trained personnel.

Solutions are available for Kenya's public universities, but lack of concerted efforts and funds have created this dismal scenario. We can uplift the academic standards of our universities. This is possible if only we make our management styles more responsive, consultative and visionary. The managers must take cognizance of their mandates. Universities are not commercial ventures but academic and scholarly in nature. They should desist from being seen as business entities. They must focus more on genuine and productive scholarship.

What I consider important in our efforts to create competent human power is the quality of degrees. There have been a lot of write-ups criticizing current university degrees.

My sincere belief is that any programme can be useful. The graduates have an option of utilizing what they trained in rather than wait for job advertisements. It is true that the speed at which colleges in Kenya have duplicated degree programmes is a worrying trend. I know for a fact that at present we have close to 1,000 degree programmes in the 22 public universities and their seven constituent colleges. New ones are being developed and others are being offered by their partners.

Kenya's university education system is robust in accessibility. Was this the best investment? We can trace the problem back to the year 2000 when the World Bank encouraged commercialization and entrepreneurial practice as the sole means to drive university education. All public universities ignored their original missions and characters and went on a competition spree. Demand-driven courses were introduced. Student involvement in parallel degree programmes was quadrupled and duplication of courses soared. Hundreds of new courses were introduced with almost the same titles across universities.

The worry is that some degrees represented poor value for the resources spent and the parents and guardians remained confused as to whether their money had been put into good use. I have alluded, in my earlier chapters, to the fact that lecturers in many public universities in Kenya are over-burdened and have no time for research. The crowded teaching timetables may as well be transferred to junior colleges to be handled there.

The reality of the matter is that some students never cover their prescribed lectures and practicals in their entirety. Those that opt to go for module two pay a lot more and never realize full potential for their money. They are short-changed, compared to the regular ones, and because of these crush programmes, it is not certain to speak of quality or quantity education.

The former Commission for Higher Education (CHE) which was responsible for quality control has been quite weak in the context of providing effective leadership and vetting the degrees being offered. It is hoped that current constitution will bring some order in the management of higher education. The enactment of the new Education Act, 2012 will hopefully curb the academic degradation.

Currently, there is little control of rapidly growing programmes. Commission for university education has to provide firm leadership and vet the degrees being offered. universities exist for public good and indeed are the precursors to technological development and innovations.

The idea of attracting thousands of students under the scheme of privately-sponsored group to raise funds has been over-stretched. Some public universities seem to short-change the students, hence perpetuating poverty. Most rural folks find it very hard to raise school fees for their children. When a programme charges so exorbitantly, it leaves the sponsors poorer and hating education. CUE should standardize fees charged to all students but differentiate as per the programmes of study.

My personal take is to create a strong tertiary academic cadre which is practical and innovative-oriented. There is need to drastically reduce and or merge course programmes at our universities. Besides, others can be transferred to middle-level colleges so that the national focus in education is on internationally acceptable academic standards. universities are not polytechnics.'

### **The University Hierarchy and Tenets**

Let me not over-emphasize the importance of and respect for the university's hierarchy. As alluded to earlier, a university uses its Acts to produce statutes and regulations for governance. A belief in the guidelines for good corporate governance in any state-owned corporation must be well understood. Although I took a course on corporate governance several years later, I still fully executed its requirements. It is instructive to explain briefly my personal interaction with each organ and why I succeeded in my management of JKUAT even during the most turbulent times in Kenya.

The Chancellor was the President of the Republic of Kenya and served in a titular position. He attended all my graduation ceremonies personally and awarded the diplomas as well as conferring degrees.

As the Chancellor of all public Universities, and Head of State of state, it was not possible to reach him readily but he was always ready to receive the Vice-Chancellors for consultations whenever need arose. I had total respect for him as my boss and as the President of the Republic of Kenya. My relationship with President Daniel Arap Moi was cordial and he had a lot of respect for me. I did not use my position to my personal advantage for the thirteen years I was at the

helm of JKUAT. We used to brief him, especially when things got tough. The individual universities Acts specified so. We were hence compliant with the law.

My respect for and continuous briefs to the Council gave me opportunities to handle issues competently. I viewed my Council as the final in policy matters. The formulation and final drafting of both the 1994 University Act and thereafter the regulations gave clear roles for each organ. I always called my chairman of Council, Dr Stephen Mulinge, to brief him on any issue that needed the Council's attention. All matters passed by Senate were carefully analysed, apportioned for action by various bodies and I could only pick on those which needed the Council's action. I did not hold back any information which had direct bearing on the smooth running of the entire university.

The public expected the chief executive of the institution to be answerable to all. I was therefore the main link both internally and externally. I did not have any problems with my Council which was composed of the chair, Dr Stephen Mulinge and other members who included Dr Davy Koech, Mr Uhuru Kenyatta, Eng. Sharawe Abdullahi, Hon. (Amb.) Ali Chirao Mwakwere, Mr Tom Owuor, Prof. Joseph Mungai, two senate representatives, representations from ministries which were relevant to higher education, two student representatives and one alumnus.

Although the Council used to meet quarterly, I used to brief the chairman occasionally in his office and usually sent him what I considered urgent for his attention. He would then advise accordingly. I also had a duty to brief the senate on matters I considered necessary. This kind of communication and trust for free flow of information was very vital to me as a means of easing stress.

The University Senate, in my view, was the most critical organ of the university functionaries. The decisions from the senate had to reach the Council for ratification. My senate consisted of my deputies, full professors, deans who were elected by their respective faculty members, directors, chairmen of departments whom I had appointed as per the statutes, the registrars and two student leaders (who could not attend deliberations on examinations).

The Senate was the most critical body which could determine the smooth running of the university. The composition of my senate included elected and nominated members. I had to develop confidence in them and run the business of the university as a corporate entity. As the Vice-Chancellor, I made sure that I followed the rules to the letter.

The University Act of 1994 and the attendant statutes were my additional benchmarks. I hired a lawyer to sit in all the deliberations and interpret clauses.

The elected leaders, deans, for example, had to appease their constituents at all times, while the chairmen of departments would side with one of them. Also, the two students' representatives had to please their union. The only persons who would be totally independent in thought and would make rational decisions were the full professors and the two alumni.

I made sure that I held my Senate meetings on schedule as per the almanac. They were always brief and this encouraged members to attend, knowing that they could not spend the whole day in meetings. I had constant consultations with the deans and directors on urgent matters which needed quick action and would always brief full senate meetings.

The role of Senate was stipulated in the statutes. It was the ultimate academic organ which recommended graduation procedures, awards of honorary degrees and processing of examinations, among other functions. It was my firm belief that all meetings were to be held at the university compound, especially if we had to close the university prematurely for any reason. One could not hold any such meetings elsewhere but within the campus as a way of keeping a keen eye on the institution.

I used to have several seminars, workshops, symposia and even conferences involving my senate. I would occasionally take them out of town to a more relaxed environment where they would bond, think freely and open up. My outside meetings were usually held at the coastal town of Mombasa or tourist sites like Maasai Mara. They enjoyed the interactions, and I learnt a lot from the bonding.

I shared with them openly that my job was not to be envied. I was only carrying out a national duty which any one of them could hold. In any case, I was a lecturer like them and their interactions with me should be collegiate. Our annual bonding outside the campus created an extremely enjoyable environment. Perhaps it was through these interactions that my university did not experience premature closures and staff unrests.

The processing of examinations can be one tedious and agonizing exercise. This was one task I was overly sensitive to. I set up an isolated, lockable, out of bounds premise strictly for examination processing. I vetted the officers in charge, and the DVC (AA) had to personally ensure total compliance to the requirements. Lecturers had to acquire passes to access the centre.

I did not experience or witness an examination leakage for the whole duration in JKUAT. I had trust in the staff manning the place and they also had confidence in me. I used to give them surprise visits and have tea with them.

The Senate therefore had full confidence in the examination processes and knew those responsible for them. Once one group knew that we worked as a team, it was automatic that all the others would join and share in the success. Two other groups were equally important for the university's successful operations: Faculties/schools/ the departments and student unions.

The university's basic grounding was centred at the departmental level. The chairmen were appointed but the deans were elected. However, this could potentially create several centres of power if the Vice-Chancellor did not have a good grasp of the university's complex system.

JKUAT had four faculties, one institute and one school. For the purpose of this discussion, just assume that all of them were faculties. The statutes specified that the deans were to be elected but directors and chairmen of departments were to be appointed by the VC.

In all my stay in JKUAT, the election of the deans was done every three years without fail. They had to be holders of PhD and be senior lecturers. The incumbent would contest only once and return to class to teach. I considered that if anyone stayed too long, promotions to higher grades would not be easy. Such an individual would not have enough publications through research for upward mobility.

Deans' meetings were often many and could not allow for enough time for research. This was also the case with chairmen of departments. In my case, nobody could contest for deanship if he/she had not attained a PhD degree and was not a senior lecturer. The deans were also expected to command respect, especially when they chaired meetings and appointment committees.

Departments are the foundations of academic, research and publications bases. They have to be well anchored and productive. I considered them the anchor of the institution. The chairmen of department can be powerful as, indeed, they should be. In fact I used to joke knowingly that department chairmen were my direct deputies and my representatives at that level. I had full confidence in them and gave them automatic access to my offices. I attended to them at any time, any place, and under any conditions.

They were the persons on the ground and had continuous contact with students and staff. They were the examinations chief officers and presented the same in the faculty board meetings. They were responsible for ensuring that courses were taught, examinations were administered, marked promptly and results were processed. No university could do without these organs. I trusted those I appointed but also had an occasion of sacking a few for gross misconduct in delaying the examination processes.

Finally, there was the students union, the Jomo Kenyatta University Students Organization (JKUSO). Students' unions in Kenyan public universities were banned because of their riotous behaviour. The ban was later lifted conditionally. When I was appointed the principal of JKUCAT in 1992, I decided to convince the Senate and the Council to allow me initiate the formation of a students' union. I was given the green light.

I appointed a team of three senior professors and two students to start the process. Students had approached me and requested for an organization through which they could air their views. In my mind, I knew that the organization could be both negative and positive in its functions. I was totally right. The dean of Science, Prof. Job Ndombi (deceased), chaired the drafting group and came up with a very workable constitution. We presented it to the senate which endorsed it and eventually the Council ratified it. This was in 1992.

This was the only organization which was officially functional since the other universities had banned theirs because of excessive riots. From 1992 to 2003, I conducted annual elections for the student leaders. I must admit here that there were times during the campaigns when I felt like disbanding the students union. But I put on a brave face and managed to control the would-be students' unrest. I had a few very bad secretary generals and chairmen.

By and large, JKUSO was indeed instrumental in maintaining stability at the university. They kept senior management on the alert and I had fulltime deans of students. Looking back now, JKUSO was the best students' entity I ever had because they made genuine complaints which we could attend to. One thing they knew me for was that whenever I said "yes" to a request, I would deliver; and whenever I said "no", I sincerely meant it and would not change my mind. I was firm in my decision and could not allow for any canvassing because I could not relent.

Consider the request that the VC should provide buses to ferry students from downtown Nairobi to Juja every morning and evening because they had seen a rich private university do so. I told them that this was untenable not even for the staff. Some of the requests were so ridiculous that I would tell them in their faces that even their sponsors would not be amused. I however enjoyed the students' leadership and they did not doubt any realistic promises. At times they were more supportive than some of the lecturers.

If I were to apportion my consultation ranking in terms of percentage and importance of each organ, the simple tabulated summary below reflects my feelings. It highlights their importance, dependability and time of consultations.

Department	Faculty	Senate	Senior Management	Council	Total
25 %	20 %	30 %	5 %	20 %	100 %

If any one of the above setups failed or jammed on a Vice-Chancellor, then there would be chaos. It was my secret management weapon which I used effectively to succeed in decision-making. In fact to ensure my collegiate belonging, I identified myself with one department, Horticulture, as a staff member. I taught and examined a course.

I used to attend departmental meetings as a bona fide lecturer, but not at the faculty. I also supervised two PhD students who were under staff establishment – Dr Leonard Wamocho and Dr Wariara Kariuki.

My interaction and presence with lecturers demystified my office without compromising my executive role. I remember my department chairman proudly telling the Senate that my marks were submitted on time for a course I had taught.

He was indeed my chairman and I respected his memos on examination marking and submission of results. I later humbly re-joined my original University of Nairobi, the Department of Crop Science and Crop Protection. I toed the line with pleasure and enjoyed seeing my young lecturers run the show.

What am I saying? Lecturers are very accommodating once they are accorded opportunities to relate with their bosses. I was easily understood and my occasional outbursts did not offend anybody but built a cohesive, great institution.