

Higher Education Quality Imperatives in the Philippines¹

Catherine Q. Castañeda, PhD
Director, Office of Programs and Standards
Commission of Higher Education,
Office of the President
Philippines

Presented at the Seminar on Knowledge for Development: Role of
Universities, January 25, 2006, Colombo, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the Philippines is the concern of so many sectors. It is thus structured to respond to the needs of a growing and fast moving population and a vibrant labor sector that eagerly awaits the very best every graduation day. The Philippines has a highly literate and educated society with over 84 million population. Education remains a priority development agenda of government and at the tertiary level it remains a major concern. Philippine educators constantly lament the dismal performance of many higher education institutions (HEIs) that churn graduates who cannot be gainfully employed.

Higher Education is provided by both the private and public sector. There are 1,600 higher education institutions with a yearly enrolment of about 2.5 million full time, part-time and foreign students. Higher education in the Philippines is highly skewed to the private sector; approximately 76% of the higher education institutions (HEIs) are privately owned and 24% are public schools which are government subsidized. There are approximately 795 bachelors degree programs; 407 masters programs and 116 doctoral programs

Higher education institutions have mushroomed extensively, producing more than a thousand graduates yearly. This however, does not necessarily mean producing the best for the labor market's consumption. Data from the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) tells us that only about 1/3 of those who take the licensure exams make it. Government supported schools totaling 112 known as state colleges and universities have increased; these are basically "products" of legislated moves. A third set of HEIs are the local colleges and universities created and financed by local governments in the various cities and municipalities throughout the country.

¹ Citation: Castañeda , Catherine Q. (2007). Higher Education Quality Imperatives in the Philippines. Seminar on "Knowledge for Development: Assessing the Capacity, Quality and Relevance of Universities in Asia" Colombo, Sri Lanka, 25th of January.

I. THE STUCTURE OF EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippine has a 10-year basic education set-up: 6 years in elementary and 4 years of secondary or high school. Graduates of high schools take entrance exams to enter into degree programs in higher education. Most baccalaureate courses are completed in 4 years, others like engineering take 5 years; veterinary medicine, 6 years; law, 8 years and medicine, 10 years. Degree programs less than 4 years and with no General Education component are basically regulated by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), the country's technical vocational education ministry. (Please see attached diagram)

PHILIPPINE EDUCATION STRUCTURE

Age of Student

Government Agency
in Charge

Education

22+
16 to 21 +

CHED

Post Graduate

Diploma course

Graduate

Undergraduate

16 and above

TESDA

Technical
Vocational Courses
Less than 1 year to 3 years

12 to 15

Secondary

6 to 11

Elementary
6 years

3 to 5

DepEd

Pre-School
3 years

TYOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Though not formally classified yet, about 80-90% of HEIs are teaching institutions with varying levels of standards. Approximately 5% are research universities and the rest are specialized universities that zero in on e.g health and health related degree courses, or on business predominantly, maritime only, or engineering related programs only. As of this writing, the Commission is still fine tuning the criteria for such typology.

II. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAMS

1. Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation for Quality Assurance

The institutional Monitoring and Evaluation for Quality Assurance (IQuAME) is a flagship program of the Commission aimed at enhancing educational institutions' capacity in designing, delivering and managing its programs and services, identify its areas for reform and intervention and ensure that quality learning outcomes are responsive to changing domestic needs and comparable to international standards. Basically, IQuAME enhances accreditation and accreditation enhances IQuAME. Program accreditation shows the HEIs ability to set and achieve program standards, while IQuAME looks at the effectiveness of an institution in its entirety, particularly the development of institutional systems that ensure the quality and standards of programs. This new program will be implemented in all HEIs in the Philippines.

2. Centers of Excellence/Centers of Development (COEs/CODs)

The Centers of Excellence (COE) project is an inherent mandate of the CHED designed to strengthen and improve tertiary education. Since these COEs are expectedly the very best in terms of graduate education and research, they are expected to take the lead in uplifting the quality of education, initiate linkages & networking projects focusing on faculty development, industry-academe collaborations, sharing of equipment & library resources & joint research activities. The COEs are expected to promote the "big brother-small brother" relationship, where COEs assist the development of HEIs situated within their geographical area of coverage.

General criteria developed by the technical panel of CHED experts include the following: instructional quality (45%), research & publication (30%), extension & linkage (20%), and institutional qualifications (5%). Details of each criteria are tailored according to the nuances of standards per discipline. To date, only the COEs in

Science & Math have been screened and identified; the rest of the other disciplines will complete their screening and evaluation in the early part of 2007. Benefits, financial as well as non-monetary subsidies such as graduate scholarships, research grants, priority in bilateral agreements and training arrangements with foreign universities are some of the privileges.

3. Grant of Autonomous & Deregulated Status

This grant is given to discerning private colleges and universities which have consistently shown exemplary performance in the provision of education research and extension services. Basically, institutions with a long tradition of integrity and untarnished reputation, commitment to excellence and have sustainability and viability of operations are given this grant. Accreditation levels, number of programs with COE, IQuAME category (research institution) comprise the basic criteria. Singular or combinations of such criteria qualify HEIs to be either autonomous or deregulated.

These criteria include:

Commitment of Excellence	Sustainability and Viability of Operation (30%)
<p>A. HEIs that meet any of the singular criteria for Autonomous Status (70%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 5 programs are identified as COEs • At least 4 programs have Level IV accreditation • At least 3 clusters of disciplines of 6 programs have Level III accreditation • The HEI has an IQuAME category of A(r) (Research University of College) 	<p>A. Financially sound</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of profit and loss reflects the institutions' capability to sustain operations (80%) • Enrolment trend shows continuous increase. Otherwise, if ever decrease is shown, it is within the 5 to 10% acceptable range unless the institution voluntarily opted to scale down its enrolment (8%) • Enrolment and admission policies are in line with institution's Vision, Mission and Goals (8%)

<p>B. HEIs that meet any of the singular criteria for Deregulated Status (60%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 3 programs are identified as COEs • At least 4 programs are identified as CODs • At least 3 programs have Level IV accreditation • At least 2 clusters of disciplines or 4 programs have Level III accreditation • The HEI has an IQuAME category of A(t) (Teaching University or College) and two program recognition for academic excellence 	<p>B. Administrative Competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top administrators should be educationally qualified (6%)
<p>C. HEIs which meet a combination of any of the following criteria for Autonomous (70%) or Deregulated Status (60%)</p> <p>HEIs which will obtain a total of at least 200 points (equivalent to 70%) from the following items will qualify for Autonomous Status while HEIs which will obtain a total of at least 120 points (equivalent to 60%) will qualify for Deregulated Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COE/COD COE (40 points per program) COD (30 points per program) • IQuAME Category A(t) (100 points) 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level IV (50 points per program) Level III (35 points per program or 70 per cluster of disciplines) Level II (10 points per program for a maximum of 50 points) International or National Recognition for academic excellence (10 points per program recognition or 40 points per institutional recognition) for a maximum of 40 points. 	
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4. Monitoring and Evaluation of Graduate and Undergraduate programs in Higher Education

The implementation of CHED policies and standards is the major task of CHED's regional offices that make sure that HEIs comply with the minimum standards. Thus, the regional offices conduct monitoring and evaluation activities of undergraduate programs with the Regional Quality Assessment Team or RQAT (counterpart of the national-based technical panels) For graduate programs, selected degree courses like education, maritime, nursing, law & medicine, the Office of Programs and Standards (nationally-based) monitor & evaluate the programs with the assistance of the technical panel experts. The Commission has set high standards for graduate education so evaluation is implemented very rigidly. The maritime sector relies solely on one international standard set forth by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The IMO standards is strictly complied with by the country-signatories to the Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Convention. Nursing, a most explosive career field now in the Philippines, is likewise reviewed thoroughly, to answer the massive need locally and their high demand in developed countries. Medicine and law are basically treated as high level courses so national experts are called upon to assist the Commission in monitoring and evaluating such programs.

5. Benchmarking of Selected Curricula

The Philippine has identified specific curricular that the country needs to propel the economy and respond competitively to global demands. Thus, the CHED found it necessary to conduct benchmarking activities in selected developed countries in America, Europe, Asia and Australia to improve the Philippine standing in the disciplines of science and math, engineering, business, health sciences especially nursing and medicine, ICT, agriculture, the maritime industry, teacher education and selected social sciences. With limited funds, the CHED secured up-to-date data through international visits, exchange of materials among consultants who presented scientific papers abroad, internet scanning & extensive literature research in state-of-the-art libraries.

As a result, the Philippines has been identified as highly competitive globally in the fields of maritime education, engineering, architecture, nursing, midwifery and to a limited extent, accountancy and customs administration.

6. Faculty Development

Faculty members in various HEIs need faculty development programs (FDP) and a sizeable number need to complete their masters degrees. Thus, the FDP was conceptualized to enable existing faculty who teach the crucial general education curriculum (humanities and the required social sciences geared towardsthe development of the TOTAL MAN) to complete their graduate degree courses.

There are other scholarships like “sandwich” programs for Ph.D. dissertations in the development of cutting edge technologies to propel priority areas of development in the country. To draw these human resources from the HEIs, CHED extensively disseminated information to all the regions of the country to equitably enable those in the rural communities to avail of the scholarships. In addition, CHED also provides MS & PhD thesis/dissertation grants to graduate students.

III. RECENT QUALITY ASSURANCE INITIATIVES

1. Moratorium/Cut-Off Points in Licensure Performance

The Commission reviews performance of HEIs in yearly licensure exams given by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). For HEIs performing poorly, the CHED phased-out programs where results reveal a low five (5) percent turnout for five (5) consecutive years. For 2007, this will be increased to 8% across all professions.

At present, there is an existing moratorium for oversubscribed courses like nursing, and soft management programs and higher standards for teacher education, maritime education, engineering and business fields.

2. Strengthening the Proficiency of English Language Learners

While the Philippines is basically an English-speaking country, the bilingual program implemented in the 1980s has adversely affected proficiency in the use of the English language. To rectify this and in line with national directives, the CHED has embarked on English proficiency among teachers and students as well. Training programs for trainers, enhancement programs for teachers, development of centers of training will be implemented.

3. Harmonization of Standards

In the development of policies, standards & guidelines (PSG), the CHED has harmonized the criteria and standards across various professions for qualifications of deans & faculty, library holdings, laboratory requirements, infrastructure basics, classroom size, practicum requirements and community exposure/industry immersion. Competency standards for each field/discipline were also identified and course specification for each professional subjects were developed. These two form part of the PSG

4. Policies for Transnational Arrangement

The CHED is currently fine-tuning the policies covering various categories of transnational arrangements as follows: distance education directly offered by foreign higher education with local institutions; academic programs offered with local representatives as partners; franchised foreign programs; foreign educational programs offered in the conventional mode. Only foreign higher education

providers (FHEPs) recognized by their respective governments as quality higher education providers and accredited by a recognized accrediting body in the country of origin may be given government authority where it is required to offer undergraduate, graduate and post graduate degrees. No FHEP shall be allowed to establish its branch without approval of the CHED and appropriate registration required in the Philippines.

5. Regular dialogues with professional bodies and other education sector

To harmonize implementation of reform agendas in education, the CHED conducts regular dialogues and consultations on implementation of joint programs and assure focusing towards national thrusts. The CHED also holds regular dialogues with the Professional Regulation Commission to assure tie-ups in the preparation of licensure tests, joint visitations to HEIs monitored and evaluated, and uniformity of data and statistics on licensure examination for the HEIs utilization.

6. Regulation of Review Centers

Because of the generally low turnout of board passers, review centers have sprouted in all parts of the country, many of them hardly even known. With a Presidential Order, all review centers will now be regulated by the CHED.

Recently the country experienced some irregularities in the board exams for nursing prompting a thorough investigation of all involved sectors. Thus, the President tasked the CHED to regulate the establishment and operation of all review centers, setting criteria and corrective and preventive measures for the purpose. Now, review centers will have to tie-up with recognized and reputable institutions of higher learning for them to be allowed to operate.

IV. ENABLING PROGRAMS FOR GREATER ACCESS AND EQUITY

1. Distance Education

This is a mode of education delivery where teacher and learner are separated in time and space and instruction is delivered through specially designed materials and methods using appropriate technologies and supported by organizational and administrative structures and arrangements. In the Philippines, an academic program is classified as a distance education program if at least 25%

of total courses are offered via the distance mode. The CHED encourages only programs at the post baccalaureate level to be offered through distance education; undergraduate students need face-to-face interaction with mentor and peers as part of the academic environment for optimal learning. CHED has set the standards that only HEIs with Level III accreditation or is a center of excellence and has complied with the CHED Quality Assurance System can offer programs via distance education (DE) mode.

Crucial to DE is effective instructional materials which form the core of DE programs and that delivery strategies or modes consist of learning packages designed for independent learning. To date, the Philippine experience reveals the dearth of sufficient and effective instructional modules as well as assessment instruments and standards to gauge the learner's progress. Student support services especially guidance and orientation are likewise wanting.

2. Ladderization of Program Offering

In response to the President's call to enable more Filipino to study at a certain period, and then work as his needed but return to the academe to earn his degree, the program of ladderization of program offering was given a highest priority by government. This is essentially crediting competency-based courses in technical vocational education to higher education. The CHED has initially selected degree programs in eight (8) disciplines; namely hotel & restaurant management & tourism in business, maritime, agriculture, midwifery as a preparatory course towards nursing, information technology, criminology and teacher education. With the CHED Order, implementation is now in full swing and massive orientation throughout the country on credit transfer and the embedded TVET courses are currently being undertaken.