



INNOVATION

ZAYED UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION 2015

Convocation Address

Prof. Reyadh AlMehaideb,
Vice President of Zayed University



جامعة زايد
ZAYED UNIVERSITY

Esteemed Guests, Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalam Alaikum,

At the beginning, I would like to express on behalf of Zayed University our gratitude to the wise leadership of the country for their continuous support and follow up of all issues related to Education and Higher Education in general, and Zayed University in particular.

At this time, our prayers go out to the UAE and Coalition soldiers. We pray for the successful completion of their mission and their safe return. For the fallen ones the Shohada'a, we pray that they are accepted by Allah Almighty in his mercy.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the University Council members for their diligent work and follow up on the University's business and on their wise directions provided. And of course, to all the faculty and staff of Zayed University whose work, dedication, and continued contributions have made ZU the favorite Higher Education institution for the Emirati and non-Emirati youth in the country.

As we start the 18th year of the university, the institution has truly evolved into one of the premier institutions in the UAE and the region. It has accomplished what other institutions take three or more decades to accomplish. It has rigorous academics that have earned 5 of its 6 colleges international accreditation or recognition. We have supportive learning environments with beautiful campuses in the two major cities of the UAE, and student services that are expanding.

Our faculty and students are producing quality scholarly work that is getting noticed and recognized. All of which has contributed to the University's continued institutional accreditation from the MSCHE, and now CAA of the MOHESR. These are real and solid accomplishments that we should all be proud of and are well recognized and appreciated by the community.

They also provide a solid foundation for a promising future for ZU. Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna has emphasized the principles that ZU stands for. As we move into 2015-2016, it is important that we embed these principles in our plans and our actions. What I would like to address today is where I believe ZU is, and what are our priorities in the coming period.

There is no doubt as Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna has stressed that students are the focal point of each and every university. Universities are the places where they mature, their ideas get shaped, and they start taking their roles in the wider society. So how can the University assist them?

What role do we play as academics in shaping our programs and extra-curricular activities that makes their experience not only enriching , memorable, but prepare them well for the future? These are the questions that all of us here at this convocation are to answer.

There is also no doubt the reputation of any university is earned and not given by others. It is earned by the quality of its own programs, its faculty, and the outcomes of its employees and students.

To help the University in this endeavor, during this past year the University Council has hired educational consultants to look at Zayed University and provide us with their recommendations regarding three issues: Governance, Strategic Direction, and Improvements to Research.

Some of you have participated in their two workshops on campus. The University Council has now received their recommendations and considered them to come up with concrete actions, which will be reflected in the next period. I can relate to you that there will be some changes in the management structure to streamline operations and to have improved structures for operations that should better meet our aspirations for the next few years.

Most important of all, the University Council has stressed that all of us should adhere to the concept of “change management”. Being open to ideas, questioning why we do business in a certain way, and to have improved structures for operations that should better meet our aspirations for the next few years.

Most important of all, the University Council has stressed that all of us should adhere to the concept of “change management”. Being open to ideas, questioning why we do business in a certain way, and have the initiative and capacity to make positive change in the institution is essential.

As you well know, accreditation bodies look for the participation of faculty and staff in the development of universities. This is reflected in

different ways. One way in governance and decision making is having a process that allows for all to take part in the University's progress.

Last year, we carried out the first exercises of this concept and invited all Colleges and administrative units to put forth their ideas. As different units have formulated their plans, we have approved in 2015 close to 70 million AED in initiatives to develop Zayed University. Among these are initiatives in education are the smart learning project, which we continue to support.

We invite all faculty to participate as part of a global movement in education. Initiatives in developing research clusters and enhancing the research environment of the university with a new workload model with additional faculty lines for the Colleges and Institutes, as well as investing in educational and research labs will increase research output.

Initiatives to expand student services are by establishing the Student Counseling Center, refurbishing and opening the ECLC in Dubai, and re-staffing the other essential services such as the Career Office. Also, we are expanding the facilities in the Dubai campus with 30 new classrooms, parking spaces, and refurbishing spaces for the student clubs to allow them to take up their roles, in addition to the renewal of the IT infrastructure, building up the capacity of Institutional Research, and others.

Also as part of the distributed governance, all of the academic and administrative units, as policy holders each in their respective domains, have been reviewing their policies and procedures. The major part of this has been done and approved by the University Council. This included 36 new or modified policies, and over 20 new or revised procedures. We look forward to attain the remaining ones this year, mainly the Competencies that would allow our various departments to fulfill their tasks in a clear framework of governance and responsibility.

With the changes in the governance of the University and the new mindset to continually improve, we believe the University is well on its way to new heights. Our limits are not set necessarily by the management, but by the collective wisdom and efforts of all the University's constituents.

With the talent that exists today at Zayed University, the potential for improvement is surely significant and lies just ahead of us.

With this in mind, we believe the University will continue to evolve in measured ways, namely:

1. The upcoming restructuring will reinforce the role of the Provost as the leader of the academic sector of the University, charting its planning, assuring its quality, and supporting and overseeing all aspects of academic operations. The University's name is built mainly on Academics. This is where most of the planning will be focused and the resources will be dedicated so our programs will continue to evolve in response to national needs and continue to be offered at the highest academic and community recognized standards.

Also on the academic side, we will continue to recruit for talent and academic leaders both internally and externally. I am glad to report that we have two new deans this year, Prof. Robin Dada is now the regular Dean of the College of Education. We also welcome Dr. Ann-Maree Reaney as the new Dean of the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises. Both bring with them a wealth of experience, and we look forward to their contributions. We have three colleges with acting deans and will begin recruiting for these and other positions shortly.

2. The restructuring will also provide a dedicated Research Office to develop the mission of research in the future as Zayed University will be dedicating more resources to support researchers and research-oriented graduate programs. Our objective is to double the institution's collective research outcomes in the next five years. In 2014, Zayed University faculty and students generated close to 250 scholarly outcomes and a little less than 100 of these were in journals and other venues indexed by the major scholarly databases, namely SCOPUS, used by ranking services.

In getting here, the University is committing resources to direct research project funding, release time, conference travel, and equipment to support our researchers. We will continue to expand internal funding opportunities based on faculty response. We will be more open in our organization to supporting collaborative research and externally funded research to engage our researchers.

In this regard, the Higher Education Research and Innovation strategy

calls for Higher Education institutions to invest more than 5% of their budgets on research, development, and innovation. We will meet or exceed this target soon.

3. The development of Student Services is a work in progress. This year, we will continue to develop and empower the various student services and coordinate between them with the objective to fully support the students' academic experience in multiple ways; help students overcome the different challenges; and help instill national pride and civic duty. The services will be coordinated as pertinent with the Colleges. All Student Services will be reporting to one office that reports to the Provost.

4. Support Services will also get their share of attention this year. They will become more customer-oriented, responsive, and effective and efficient in providing the University's requirements. The University Council has started the process of reviewing the performance of all administrative units and has engaged relevant offices both internally and consultants to review the systematic improvements that can be made. We seek to ensure that these units can fully support the University community in an effective manner. The community should see the outcome of these systematic improvements soon.

5. We have grouped within the Planning Office both Institutional Research and Educational Effectiveness. The three units can truly become the source of institutional data, analysis and studies providing direction to planning and recommendations for continuous improvement. Across the colleges, Officers of Quality Assurance are tasked with participating in educational quality improvement and assisting the deans in gathering data for planning purposes.

The Planning Office reports to the VP and will make its recommendation to the Strategic Planning Committee, which was established last year, and engages with the President and all major internal stakeholders on campus in its major decisions. This is a fundamental shift and mirrors practices in different organizations to highlight the planning function.

Zayed University, like all federal entities, reports both its strategic and operational plans and their outcomes to the Prime Minister's Government Performance office. Also like all federal entities, ZU has submitted its plans to the Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence

Program. There are significant implications to this step as it is resulting in a reorientation of the University priorities to make them more coherent and supportive of the national goals. Since the Government now tracks ZU outcomes in a more comprehensive way and benchmarks these to others both within the UAE and internationally, it will also track ZU contributions to certain national measures that all of us need to be aware of. These are:

a) Contributions to the 2021 National Agenda, which includes Education, which is our main business. Other goals are in the areas of Health, Economy, Environment, and Government Services that ZU can contribute to through its research agenda.

Also, other government initiatives are:

b) Smart Government, which for ZU aspires to provide university services to stakeholders, namely Students, Employees, and Vendors in the most effective and easy way through especially designed E-services and mobile Apps.

In this regard, we are glad that the work of CSD, along with relevant offices, has enabled ZU to be among the few federal organizations that have achieved a 100% rating in meeting the first phase of the Smart Government Initiative. This initiative is a continuing and its next phases will be unfold in the next few years, among which is an expansion of these smart services and an 80% utilization of the smart tools in 3 years.

c) Also a set of common KPIs for the Government are in HR, Finance, and IT and are called Government Enablers. These compare all federal entities' performance against common benchmarks and include targets, for example in staff development, Emiratization, meeting IT and Finance standards, and others.

d) Finally, Innovation at Zayed University in its wider interpretation seeks to incorporate new ideas and adopt them. The second session today is focused on Innovation.

To develop the University and engage all Colleges and Support Services in the process, besides the annual task of reviewing our operational plans and setting the targets for 2016, ZU this year will be developing the next 2017-2019 Strategic Plan. This is an involved process that normally starts with stakeholders' inputs.

Thus, we included a market survey on the University consultants' list. They have now provided the survey results. These findings will provide us with guidance for new strategic directions. Besides the market survey, in the next few months the University officers as well as the Colleges and Support Services are also asked to document input from different stakeholders.

With the stakeholders' input, we can formulate the 2017-2019 strategic plan with input from the community, the government directions and initiatives, and our ambitions for the institution. We have a full agenda ahead. I welcome all of you to an exciting new year. I wish each and every one a successful academic year.

Thank you