

Fifth Anniversary of Charter Day
University of The Bahamas
Major Accomplishments since November 10, 2016

This is an update on accomplishments and activities as University of The Bahamas approaches the 5th Anniversary of the University's Charter.

Within months following the celebration of Charter Day on November 10th 2016, the country had a general election and simultaneously embraced the establishment of a newly appointed governing Board. Despite numerous challenges, compounded by Hurricane Dorian, then the COVID-19 pandemic, much has been accomplished as we continue to move the University in the right direction.

Digitalization – Implementation of Banner

The University began implementation of the world's most advanced data management system in October of 2016, Ellucian Banner. This system is used by more than 5,000 colleges and universities in more than 50 countries. The use of Banner has propelled the University's administration and teaching modalities into the 21st Century. Students are now able to be advised, register for classes, pay tuition and fees, apply for financial aid, apply for deferred payments or any other student services, all online and from anywhere in the world. Long lines are a distant

memory.

Faculty members, as a result of the University's digitalization, are able to deliver academic material, using more "flexible learning pathways" from their homes, in hybrid environments and from any location world-wide.

In 2020, University of The Bahamas was one of only six institutions around the world to be recognized and awarded the 2020 Ellucian Impact Award for advancements in the institution-wide application of technology.

The next step is to prepare the country's educational systems for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in order to advance the knowledge building process using Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR).

Board of Trustees

The appointment of the government appointees to the Board of Trustees in 2017, initiated the establishment of the University's first Board of Trustees. Throughout 2018, '19, '20 and '21, the Board continued to be constituted with elected Trustees. Some of the key areas of focus of the Board included:

- a) Establishment of Full Board Meeting dates to coincide with key periods within the administrative and academic cycles of the University;
- b) Establishment of the Executive Committee and Standing Committees of the Board to oversee the affairs of the

University. These Committees are staffed by vice presidents;

- c) Establishment of the Bye-Laws for the Governance of the Board of Trustees;
- d) Establishment of broad Policies for the Governance of the Universities; and,
- e) Establishment of Ad-Hoc Committees, as needed (UB-North and University Strategic Plan).

Among matters requiring the government's attention are two Acts requiring amendment in order to fully implement the University of The Bahamas (UB) Act, 2016. These are the Pension Act and the VAT Act.

- a) In reference to the Pension Act, an amendment needs to be made in order to allow conformity to the UB Act, Part III: Financial Provisions, Section 17 – Pension Scheme; and,
- b) In reference to the VAT Act, an amendment needs to be made in order to allow conformity to the UB Act, Part III: Financial Provisions, Section 18 – Exemption.

Experience over the past few years, since November 10, 2016, has made it clear that the University of The Bahamas Act, requires amendments in some areas. It is anticipated that proposed amendments will be brought to the government's attention at the earliest possible date.

Academic Senate

Like the Board of Trustees, the establishment of the Academic Senate began in 2017 with the campus-wide election of Senators, as specified in the University of The Bahamas Act, 2016.

Once respective Senators and officers were elected, the Academic Senate focused on the writing of the Senate Bye-Laws. Once the bye-laws were completed, respective Standing Committees of the Senate were constituted and populated.

The Academic Senate approves new degree programmes (Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral levels), reviews and approves academic policies, as well as students for graduation prior to recommendation to the Board for approval. The Academic Senate also takes on special assignments associated with the delivery of education at University of The Bahamas.

The Academic Senate meets monthly, participates in Senate Conferences, and focuses on maintaining the highest standard of excellence across the curricula.

Administrative Council

The Administrative Council is comprised of the President as Chair, the Executive Vice President who is the chief operating officer, and Vice Presidents who are divisional heads reporting directly to the President and CEO. This team meets on a weekly basis throughout the year, and weekly in one-on-one sessions with

the President. The President is a member of the Board of Trustees and also sits on all Board Committees, chaired by Trustees and staffed by Vice Presidents.

University Strategic Plan

Between January 2018 and July 2019, University constituents engaged in an in-depth planning process, beginning with status assessments across all areas, followed by Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats or Challenges (SWOT-C) analyses, by divisions. The Board of Trustees, through the Ad-Hoc Strategic Planning Committee, reviewed submissions and recommendations for strengthening the foundation of the institution, by way of proposed policies and procedures that were aligned with core requirements for international accreditation.

The Board of Trustees approved the University of The Bahamas Strategic Plan, 2019-2024, in October 2019. Updates on the implementation of the plan indicated that as of June 2021 a majority of proposed policies and procedures were completed and approved.

Accreditations

University of The Bahamas remains in compliance with all requirements of the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas (NAECOB).

University of The Bahamas began the journey toward attaining international accreditation with the writing of the University of The Bahamas Bill, later upon passing by the legislators, becoming the University of The Bahamas Act, 2016.

All required governance standards for international accreditation were used to carefully guide the drafting of the Bill. The University's Strategic Plan, in the same vain, contains all necessary policies and procedures required to meet other international accreditation standards, as referenced earlier. The process is a three-year one from the date of application. The delay in submission was due mainly to the Audit requirement. All audits will be current as of February 2022, with the submission, according to the external auditors, of the 2021 audits.

Higher Degree by Research Programmes

Our faculty and academic leadership have been intently focused on developing new graduate degree programmes that respond not only to national needs and priorities, but to global realities and opportunities. The Academic Senate recently approved two Higher Degree by Research (HDR) programmes – the Master of Research (MRes.) and the Doctorate of Philosophy, Ph.D. (Research). These degrees are focused on executing a research project and producing new knowledge from the study that will prove to be hugely beneficial in the academy, country and global arena.

Government Tertiary Education Grants

In June 2019, with the technical support of the University of The Bahamas, the Government implemented the Government Tertiary Education Grant. This education grant allows Bahamian students who are enrolled full-time, to qualify for education grants covering tuition and most fees. The programme has been highly successful in that even though there has not been a significant increase in enrolled students (part-time and full-time), there has been a significant increase in the numbers of students who have enrolled full-time as opposed to part-time. The added housing allowance of \$500 monthly for Family Island students has also been taken advantage of by many students, thus providing increased access to education and opportunities in safe living environments.

Audits and Finances

University of The Bahamas inherited several back years of incomplete audits. With the new data management system, the digitization of all financial administration records is now complete and fully accessible. The University has been steadily working to complete all back audits and as of February 2022, according to the external auditor, all audits will be current with the presentation of the completed 2021 audit from KPMG.

In addition, all outstanding increments and back pay, some due for several years are being brought current.

The Board of Trustees approved the 2021-2022 Budget, as submitted in August 2021.

Institutional Advancement

Over the past two years, a significant amount of work has gone into preparing the University for significant grant and fund raising. This level of fundraising could not have been done before stabilizing the internal administrative and financial accountability systems.

The University now has internal mechanisms for managing donations and grants as well as external mechanisms for international fundraising. University of The Bahamas now has two international tax exempt foundations, one in the United States and the other in Canada. Donations in the US to UB have commenced with a \$100,000 gift on October 22, 2021.

Despite not having these in place, however, over the past few years a significant amount of funds have been raised for initiatives determined by the donors. The University's Endowment has grown from just over \$2M in 2015, to approaching \$6M in 2021. It is anticipated that in the post-pandemic era, we will see the University's Endowment grow tremendously, as face-to-face fundraising is resumed.

General Counsel

In an effort to ensure implementation of the University of The

Bahamas Act, 2016, in 2018, a search was conducted resulting in the appointment of the University's first General Counsel. The General Counsel handles all legal matters, including those associated with the Industrial Agreements. The General Counsel reports to the Board and the President.

In 2020, the University Secretary who served as College of The Bahamas' Council Secretary, followed by being University Secretary, decided to return to his substantive post as faculty of law. Upon his departure, the President recommended and the Board approved that the positions of University Secretary and General Counsel be held by one person. This is the norm in higher education institutions.

Ombudsman

In 2018, and in accordance with the University of The Bahamas Act, 2016, a search was conducted resulting in the appointment of the University's first Ombudsman. The Ombudsman reports directly to the Board of Trustees and the President.

The Office of Ombudsman serves as the impartial resource for faculty, students and staff in addressing and resolving issues of concern. Reports are prepared by the Ombudsman for submission to the Board. These reports highlight the kinds of concerns, not specifics. This office maintains a very high level of confidentiality.

Executive Vice President

In 2021, the University filled the position of Executive Vice President, as indicated in the University of The Bahamas Act, 2016. This officer serves as chief operating officer. Filling this position will allow the President to engage in more external affairs and fundraising events.

UB-North Campus

In 2021, the position of Vice President for the northern campus, was adjusted to that of Campus President. This move allows the head of the campus to engage the wider community in the north from a position of increased responsibility and authority.

The main campus of University of The Bahamas-North was devastated by Hurricane Dorian. The residential facility, which opened in 2018, was completely destroyed in 2019 and had to be razed in 2020. The original and only building, the two-story classroom and administration structure, was severely damaged. The entire ground floor was washed away, leaving a shell only.

The decision, based on the recommendation of the University President and the Campus President, was to re-purpose the grounds by creating a Field Research Station housing, among other things, the Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Research Centre.

Upon recommendation, the Board decided to relocate the main campus to downtown Freeport. The intent is to purchase

several multi-storied buildings. These will be renovated and expanded.

Intellectual Property Rights Policy

The University approved its Intellectual Property Rights Policy on October 19, 2021. This is a major achievement for any University seeking to increase research and innovation. The research of faculty, staff and students will be protected and with the establishment of the Core Research Lab in the GTR Campbell Small Island Sustainability Research Centre, natural resource samples could be tested in country, while protecting future revenue for The Bahamas. By approving this policy, the University also moves a few steps closer to international accreditation.

In conclusion, the university's mission is "to advance and expand access to higher education, promote academic freedom, drive national development and build character through teaching, learning, research, scholarship and service." This mission is grounded and rooted in the national development of The Bahamas, and as such, serves as a strategic conduit for a better, more progressive Bahamas. Undoubtedly, a populace that fully embraces higher education is a healthier, more resilient and prosperous nation.

Rodney D. Smith, Ed.D.

President and CEO
University of The Bahamas

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