VALEDICTORY LECTURE

IN CHARACTER AND IN LEARNING: TILL HEALTH DO US PART
(38 YEARS OF THE FUTO MAGIC)

Delivered by

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JULY 2018

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1.0 PREAMBLE

In all the 38 years of its existence (1980 - 2018), our university – the Federal University of Technology Owerri FUTO has not had the practice nor a culture of Valedictory Lectures. When our elders, our professors, the cream of our academia, and the best of our best retire, they like Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), sneak away or are allowed to sneak and fade away into oblivion without even as much as a farewell salute, a goodbye lecture, or a final parting address.

In my recollection and as witnessed in the records of the University Lecture Series Committee, apart from Prof Amagh Nduka’s lecture, more than 25 years ago, no valedictory lecture by a retiring tenured professor has ever been hosted so far in this university.

I must therefore begin my lecture today by first of all paying tribute to our present Vice Chancellor Prof. Francis Chukwuemeka Eze, for permitting and approving this valedictory address. When I went to his office to officially inform him that I was proceeding on my well earned three months pre-retirement leave and that I would like to activate the academic culture of valedictory lectures in our university, and volunteered to begin by presenting one myself, he not only most readily welcomed the idea but encouraged me. The leadership he showed by that approval is visionary. Thank you Mr. Vice Chancellor. I would therefore like to wish that my colleagues in this university will continue with this culture even after today’s valedictory.
2.0 CONCEPT OF A VALEDICTORY

The real concept, meaning and idea of a valedictory has in recent times been often drowned by the noisy fanfare of praise singing, parades, draping of the colors, and showy celebrations, oftentimes with grandeur, for a career well-lived, well-earned, and well-ended. The drums are rolled out, the guns echo in triumphant salvos, the retiree is decorated with feathers, plumes and medals. Drinks flow, backs are parted in rueful and nostalgic goodbyes as the departing guru fades into the dustbins of our horizons.

Although, a valedictory truly accommodates all the above things; but for us in the academia it means much more. For us in the hallowed towers of the intellect; for us who by our training and in our practice stand at the frontiers of knowledge; for us who have been entrusted with the custodianship of standing as sentinels in the fragile hymen of our nations education; a valedictory means much more. Yes, it requires much more.

Yes, for us who have embraced the difficult task of molding the next generation of acolytes in the temples of the academe; of providing leadership and mentorship to a growing guild of scholars who yearn to drink from the fountains of knowledge, an apprenticeship, a pupilage and a discipleship of learning which will drive, propel, sustain and perpetuate learning, research and scholarship; certainly, a valedictory means much more.

And for us, the noble and distinguished professors of a university, upon whose shoulders have been entrusted the responsibilities of providing leadership for the enthronement of the intellect, so that our universities can regain and again wear the toga of excellence; the occasion of a valedictory presents us with the opportunity of driving further that professorial mantra and in a parting farewell, and in a goodbye statement, fire it beyond the confines of a prescribed professorial tenure, where hopefully its resonance may continue to re-echo down the hallowed hallways of time.

That is why I have chosen to present this valedictory.
3.0 CONCEPT OF A UNIVERSITY

As eloquently presented in my earlier works (Iloeje 2004a, 2004b, and 2018), it has been suggested that the earliest form of a university originated in Egypt and in the early civilizations of the Asia Minor. However, the concept of a university as we know it today owes its origin to the old universities of Europe. It evolved from the medieval schools known as studia generalia which were generally recognized places of study open to all scholars from all parts of Europe.

The word universitas originally applied only to the scholastic guild (or guilds) - that is, the corporation of students and their masters, within the studium. It was modified as universitas magistrorium or universitas scholarium or universitas magistrorum et scholarium. In the course of time, probably towards the later part of the 14th century, the term began to be used by itself, with the exclusive meaning of “a self regulating community of teachers and scholars whose corporate existence had been recognized and sanctioned by civil or ecclesiastical authority.”

This early European academic tradition deeply influenced the development of universities in Britain, America and elsewhere.

3.1 THE EUROPEAN MODEL

In its earliest form, the European model of university education extolled a tradition of loyalty of discipleship in which there was a master and his pupils. Learning took the form of an apostolic followership. Intellectualism was an art. The master and his pupils formed a guild of scholars. Education was learning through a pupilage or an apprenticeship of training in the scholarship of a chosen discipline.

3.2 THE BRITISH MODEL

When these concepts crossed the Channel and arrived in Britain, they were confronted by a different academic tradition in a different society. They were assimilated, but essentially transformed. They acquired by a process of social
mimicry some of the prevailing assumptions about university education into what we came to regard as the British model, typified and dominated by the un-challenged influences of Oxford and Cambridge.

Prominent among these assumptions was a conviction that the university exists to produce servants for the church and the state; cultivated men but not intellectuals; civilized rather than learned; doers not thinkers; bishops not theologians; statesmen not philosophers; schoolmasters not scholars. In this British model, a single tutor nurtured a select-group of pupils for three or so years, and he taught them a whole range of the curriculum. His personality and his outlook on life were as much a part of the curriculum as were the Latin texts and Greek philosophy.

Of course stimulated by reformers, Oxford and Cambridge and many other old universities of that era finally accepted the new idea (already adopted in the then newer Universities of London, Manchester etc, and now in all British universities) that university teaching should be in the hands of professors not tutors; scholars not schoolmasters; and that teaching should be a product of research.

3.3 THE AMERICAN MODEL
While all these were happening, these newly gelled ideas crossed the Atlantic into the Americas. They entered a different environment and underwent different modifications. The most powerful environmental factor in the American higher education sector was not the hegemony of the older established universities. It was the utilitarian attitude which America and Americans have towards higher education.

Hence, the American model of university education was decidedly utilitarian. Curricula were extended to offer academic, professional and vocational training. This great new American concept which makes university education available to all who want it and in any discipline they desire it, is best typified in the great seal of Cornell University (founded in 1865) which has inscribed
upon it the immortal words of Ezra Cornell “I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.”

It is probably worthy to mention that the oldest university in North America is the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (National Autonomous University of Mexico) and was founded in the year 1551. Currently as of the year 2017 it ranks in the 160th position in the world university ranking. However, the oldest university in the U.S. is Harvard University founded in 1636, but chartered in 1650. As of the year 2017, Harvard University ranked in the 3rd position in the world, behind Massachusetts Institute of Technology MIT and Stanford University which ranked 1st and 2nd respectively. Our university the Federal University of Technology Owerri ranked in the 3665th position in the world and 12th in Nigeria; whereas the University of Ibadan which was ranked 1st in Nigeria ranked 1099th in the world.

Before you take these world rankings too seriously, maybe it is worthy to note that in the 2016 Financial Reports for various world universities, Harvard University spent a total of $4.5 billion; M.I.T. had $3.35 billion; whereas the national budget for the entire Federal Republic of Nigeria in that same year was N6.07 trillion (ie $16.86 billion).

Enough of the digression, now back to what we were saying! The 19th century idea of a university was essentially a hybrid, with its heredity from Europe, Britain, and America.

3.4 THE AFRICAN MODEL
As the 19th century dawned into the 20th century, this new idea crossed the Atlantic again, but this time into colonial and post-colonial Africa. The African model of a university, or more appropriately and better still, the universities in Africa as we know them today are an amalgam of the American, British and European models. Of course, every developing society tends to develop institutions which will enable it to acquire and advance knowledge relevant to
the tasks which, it is thought, will confront it in the future. Of these institutions, the university is the most important.

Hence, the establishment of universities in Africa has followed these perceived objectives, with a requirement for them to address the needs of the African world by providing African society with men and women equipped with the skills that will enable them participate fully and usefully in the economic, social and technological development of the continent.

In so far as the needs of society may vary from one part of the vast continent of Africa to another, so also would the character of the African university vary from one part of Africa to another. Hence, in each country in Africa, social forces have acted to adapt the idea and traditions of the university to the national needs. This holds true for the Nigerian universities.

3.5 THE NIGERIAN MODEL
In the African context, Nigeria is comparatively very rich in universities. The establishment of these universities has followed the perceived specialized developmental needs of the Nigerian nation, from colonial times to now. According to data from the National Universities Commission NUC, as at December 2017, there were a total of 158 universities in Nigeria; 40 of them are owned by the Federal government, 44 by the various State governments, while 74 of them are privately owned. Many of these are conventional universities and offer a wide variety of curricula of studies in diverse fields and disciplines; while some are mission-specific universities offering specialized curricula.

3.6 THE FUTO MODEL
Our university, the Federal University of Technology Owerri is one of the mission-specific universities in Nigeria. In keeping with the stated objectives of our university (see Federal Universities of Technology Act: CAP 143: Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria), we are charged with the responsibility:
(a) To encourage the advancement of learning and to hold out to all persons without distinction of race, creed, or political conviction the opportunity of acquiring education in technology.

(b) To develop and offer academic and professional programs leading to the award of diplomas, first degrees, postgraduate research and higher degrees which emphasize planning, adaptive, technical, maintenance, developmental and productive skills in the engineering, scientific, agricultural, medical, and allied professional disciplines with the aim of producing socially mature men and women with capability not only to understand, use and adapt existing technology but also to improve on it and develop new ones.

(c) To act as agents and catalysts, through postgraduate training, research and innovation for the effective and economic utilization, exploitation and conservation of the country’s natural, economic and human resources.

(d) To offer to the general population, as a form of public service, the results of training and research and to foster the practical application of these results.

(e) To establish appropriate relationships with other national institutions involved in training, research and development of technologies.

(f) To identify the technological problems and needs of the society and to find solutions to them within the context of overall national development.

(g) To provide and promote sound basic scientific training as a foundation for the development of technology and applied sciences, taking into account indigenous culture and the need to enhance overall national development.

(h) To undertake any other activities appropriate for a university of technology of the highest standard.
These are the eight stated objectives of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri as enumerated in the Law cited above. My point here is not to recite the Law but to point out the uniqueness in the mission-specific nature of the objectives for which our university was founded, in juxtaposition to the objectives of other conventional universities in Nigeria.

You will note the repeated emphasis on technology, applied sciences, technological development, the need to use, understand, utilize, adapt, and develop new technologies consistent with overall national development. These emphasis project and define the true soul and body of the FUTO mandate and bring to the fore our uniqueness in both context and meaning; as well as the distinctiveness of our departure from other conventional universities in the country.

4.0 EARLY YEARS OF THE FUTO MAGIC
The Federal University of Technology, Owerri was founded in October 1980 and admitted its first set of students totaling 225 in number in the 1981/82 academic year. All of the pioneer students were enrolled in the only one School existing at that time – the School of Natural and Applied Sciences (SNAS). The initial academic staff strength was 23.

In a carefully and scrupulously well planned curricula, which embodied bold new ideas that uniquely departed from, and exhibited new improvements on the old curricula in other conventional universities; our University Senate has continued to deliver cutting-edge programs of studies leading to the award of several categories of FUTO degrees in new areas of learning hitherto unseen in many of the old generation Nigerian universities.

Although the first meeting of the academic board chaired by the new Vice Chancellor was held on 12th August 1981, however the very first meeting of the properly constituted University Senate was held on Thursday 22nd October, 1981 and was chaired by Prof. Umaru Dechi Gomwalk our pioneer Vice Chancellor.
Since then, our University Senate has continued to excel in its mandate of executing one of the finest academic programs in the Nigerian university system. That iconic very first meeting was attended by the full Senate comprising the following eleven members:

**PRESENT**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. U. D. Gomwalk</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor - Chairman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. S. J. Igarashi</td>
<td>Dean, SNAS - Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. V. O. Nwoko</td>
<td>Chemical &amp; P. Eng.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. C. O. G. Obah</td>
<td>Electrical &amp; Electronics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. G. O. Iwuh</td>
<td>Industrial Chemistry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. A. Nduka</td>
<td>Mathematical Physics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. J. C. Anafulu</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. S. C. O. Ugbolue</td>
<td>Polymer Chem. (Tex. Tech.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. C. C. Ntamere</td>
<td>Econ. &amp; Social Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. L. Ogbuji</td>
<td>Material Engineering</td>
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<td>Dr. C. I. Anunuso</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
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**IN ATTENDANCE**

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<tr>
<td>Mr. K. Lupton</td>
<td>Director of Acad Plg/Dev.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. M. Okoye</td>
<td>Asst. Registrar (Student Affairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. A. I. Ekwemalor</td>
<td>PAR. (Council Matters) - (Secretary)</td>
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**APOLOGY**

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<tr>
<td>Prof. E. O. I. Banigo</td>
<td>Food Science &amp; Tech. - Member</td>
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From its initial twelve members in October 1981, our University Senate has today grown to more than 150 members.

The FUTO Senate, which by Law, is the body statutorily charged with final authority and responsibilities over all academic matters in the university has indeed lived up to her charges. I am very proud to have served in this Senate right from the 1981/82 academic year till date – a total of 37 years. Thus as of today, this makes me the longest serving member of our University Senate!
I have served with honor; and with modesty, I have indeed served with distinction. I am very grateful and have relished the privilege of sitting in the hallowed chambers of our Senate in the various capacities and duty posts which were from time to time entrusted to my charge; as member representing Congregation, as Program Coordinator, Head of Department, Dean, Director of Academic Planning, Chairman Business Committee of Senate, Member and Chairman of several Senate committees, and as Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) in which capacity I occasionally had the rare privilege of chairing the deliberations and proceedings of Senate.

With a staff Personnel Number of SP.70; and like a faithful servant, I have followed and participated in every process in the gradual development and growth of our university; right from our humble beginnings in the makeshift offices in the premises of the Technical College in Mbaise Road, offices in Ikenegbu, offices in 68 Okigwe Road, offices in our temporary Lake Nwaebere campus, and finally to the permanent site which we occupy today in Ihiagwa.

I remember with nostalgia when as a member of the pioneer Planning Committee of this university, I joined other committee members in the Fokker airplane charter flight provided by the Concarplan/Enplan Group on an aerial survey scouting the three alternative sites initially proposed as the permanent home for our university.

It is with joy that I recall those early, enthusiastic pioneering days in FUTO; the long and marathon brainstorming sessions, strategizing and crafting out paragraph by paragraph, line by line, sentence by sentence, the detailed components of such documents as the FUTO Academic Brief, the FUTO Strategic Planning Document, the Master Plan, the Handbook of Administrative Procedures, the Junior and Senior Staff Regulations, the Conditions of Service, the Guidelines For Appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff & Non-Academic Staff, and various other documents and briefs detailing the terms of reference for all the various Council, Senate, and Administrative committees.
Although I was junior to most of the very senior academic staff present at those meetings, yet I learned a lot listening to and participating in the deliberations chaired by our visionary pioneer Vice Chancellor Prof. Umaru Gomwalk and anchored by such other members as Professors S. J. Igarashi, S. K. Singh, V. O. Nwoko, E. O. I. Banigo, C. O. G. Obah, I. C. Onwueme, G. Iwu, Dr. S. C. O. Ugbohue, Dr. C. C. Ntamere, Dr. C. I. Anunuso, Mr. J. C. Anafulu, Mr. K. Lupton, Mr. G.O. Emerole, Mr. Tony Ekwemalor, Mr. U. A. Ike, Mr. M. O. Okoye, etc. Of course the Chief Catering Officer Mrs. Nwabuzor was always there to sustain us with the necessary tea, coffee and biscuits.

There is an old Igbo proverb that tells us that the spit is best from the mouth of him that coughed it. Although the occasion of this lecture is giving me the opportunity of coughing this story myself, however in the interest of time, I cannot fully exhaust it.

There are many other excellent archival materials in our library which will inform you in greater details about the early years of the FUTO magic. The two I can readily recommend are the Convocation Lecture titled Wandering In The Wilderness given in 2005 by our pioneer Vice Chancellor Prof. U. D. Gomwalk, and the compendium published in the year 2006 titled FUTO @ 25 edited by Prof. Louis C. Asiegbu.

5.0 ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
The facts cannot be contested that the curricula of studies leading to the award of FUTO first degrees in various disciplines blazed new paths hitherto unseen and un-paralleled in the Nigerian university sector. Our trail-blazing in such new areas as Project Management Technology, Transport Management Technology, Maritime Management Technology, Polymer Engineering, Textile Engineering and several new engineering disciplines cannot be over emphasized.

In a bold new departure from the old and familiar Faculty structure hitherto existing in the conventional universities in the country, the
structure of the academic programs in FUTO adopted School/Departments as the basic academic units.

**The philosophy of our first degree programs** is to produce graduates who combine in-depth knowledge of their discipline with extensive industrial (practical) exposure. Our curriculum is therefore structured as follows:

(a) Foundation courses in mathematics, science and technology.
(b) Broad-based background in the chosen field or study.
(c) A minimum of nine months work experience in an industrial set-up and an extensive exposure to technical skill acquisition in the Center for Industrial Studies.
(d) Specialization in a particular area of a field of study.

In accordance with the above stated objectives, our five-year undergraduate program for the award of our Bachelor’s degree provide for the following:

(a) Year One (Semesters 1 and 2) Foundation Year courses in the basic sciences including Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, Engineering Drawing, Workshop Practice, Use of English, Social Sciences, Humanities and interaction of Science, Technology and Society.
(b) Year Two (Semesters 3 and 4) Basic Year courses common to all Schools including Statistics, Computer Programming, Workshop Processes and Practice, some Social Sciences, as well as some introductory courses related to each student’s subsequent specialization.
(c) Long Vacation Industrial Training (off Campus).
(d) Year Three (Semesters 5 and 6) academic studies of a specialized nature a great percentage of which will be within the student’s School and Department.
(e) Year Four (Semester 7) academic studies of a specialized nature mostly within the student’s Department.

(f) Semester 8 – Industrial Training (off campus).

(g) Year Five (Semester 9 and 10) academic studies leading to award of a degree in a special area.

This format, while providing four semesters for the final preparation of a degree specialization, really integrates the programs through common courses. Some courses are common to all students in the university, others to all students in one School, or to those taking some related specialization.

There are also Elective Courses basically of two types
(a) Restricted Electives - ie those chosen from a prescribed range of courses in cognate fields which are indispensable for an understanding of the student’s major field, and must be taken and passed.
(b) Unrestricted Electives - ie those courses opted for by the students in accordance with his or her own interest, willingly or in order to make up his complement of units for graduation.

The system of instruction is the course unit system which defines one course unit as a series of about 15 one-hour lectures or about 15 three-hour practicals per semester. Thus a typical Four-Credit course will entail 2 one-hour lectures, 1 one-hour tutorial and 1 three-hour practicals per week for a semester of 15 weeks.

Why you may ask, have I taken the burden to speak lengthily on all these facts, which after all are already well elaborated in the FUTO Academic Brief, of which many of you may have seen or are familiar with?

The truth is that many of our younger colleagues, tomorrow’s leaders of our university, may not have seen or cared to study our Philosophy or our Academic Brief. Some of these leaders of tomorrow are in this audience
today. It is for their sake that I have pained you all with these details. For those of you who may have read it in the past, today is yet another welcome opportunity to familiarize yourself, once again, with the details.

For didn’t Chinua Achebe once tell us that even though the moonlight shines in everybody’s homestead and you can see it even from your own backyard; yet, the reason why we gather at the village square on moonlit nights is to hear the elders talk and tell stories which will entertain, inform and educate the younger generations, our leaders of tomorrow, on our customs, traditions, beliefs, values and morals.

In my obligations as an elder professor, senior academic and university administrator who will soon be departing from our university, the opportunity of this lecture couldn’t have been better utilized in any other but this *moonlight* story.

6.0 WHERE ELSE BUT IN FUTO?

The beauty, novelty and innovations in the FUTO academic programs can best be illustrated with some specific examples.

Let’s take a course as Physics. In many other conventional universities in the country, a student may take a 3 or 4-year degree program leading to the award of a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics or the Bachelor of Education degree in Physics as a teaching subject. In FUTO we add a higher practical and technological value to that program. We train you in Industrial Physics thus giving you enhanced skills which make you more relevant to the industry and the technological needs of our country.

The same goes with our programs in Industrial Mathematics, Industrial Chemistry, and many others. The skills we empower you with will not just make you a job consumer but a job creator. No wonder why the Nigerian industrial sector have recorded several success stories of FUTO young graduates who within just a few years after graduation have founded and
propelled themselves as leading industrial giants in many areas of their endeavors.

Another example is in engineering. It is on record that FUTO took the bachelors degree training in engineering to higher levels hitherto unseen in Nigerian universities. We pioneered and introduced undergraduate training in such new engineering disciplines as Polymer Engineering, Textile Engineering, etc. Instead of the old regular training in Electrical Engineering, we expanded the menu of choices and offer students new degree training in such specializations as Power Systems Engineering, Communications Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electronic Engineering, etc.

Where else but in FUTO can you get in the Nigeria of the early 1980s a degree program in Transport Management Technology?

Where else but in FUTO can you get in the Nigeria of the early 1980s a degree program in Project Management Technology?

Where else but in FUTO can you get in the Nigeria of the early 1980s a degree program in Maritime Management Technology?

Where else but in FUTO can you get in the Nigeria of the early 1980s degree programs in Power Systems Engineering, Communication Engineering, Industrial Mathematics, Industrial Physics, etc, etc, etc?

FUTO blazed the path. FUTO provided the lead and others followed.

**In the area of Industrial Work Experience**, we were the first university in the country to effect the rigorous practice of awarding compulsory credits and letter grades to the SIWES program. These letter grades were compulsorily used in computing each student’s grade point average GPA. Today, after initial reluctance, some universities have followed suit.
It is on these grounds that I wish to take the opportunity of this lecture to engage, even if briefly, in the current nation-wide debate on whether an additional layer of one year should be imposed in our undergraduate curriculum. Proponents for the additional layering anchor their arguments on the poor performance of many of our graduates. Citing the one additional year of pupilage or internship as required by some professional bodies, they propose that this one year should be padded into a sixth-year residence before graduation.

I beg to differ. Rather than taking actions to stop the hemorrhage and the bleeding, the proponents of the extra layering are focusing actions on how to clean the blood.

Obviously, the products from our universities may not be optimally best because our universities are hemorrhaging and bleeding from lack of adequate funds to equip our libraries, laboratories, workshops, farms, classrooms and other teaching-support facilities. Our staff are hemorrhaging from a take-home pay that cannot take them home. Even the SIWES program which is the protagonist in this debate is hemorrhaging from the paltry financial support from the government’s Industrial Training Fund ITF.

We know that globally best benchmarks have been elaborately calculated to show the minimum unit cost of education for each of the courses offered in our universities. How has the government fared in allocating funds to the universities so that they can meet the minimum unit cost stipulated for each degree course? The additional resources both in funds and manpower which would be spent in implementing the additional one year layering will be better spent, and with better results too, if we channel those funds directly into upgrading the presently anemic resources available to our universities.
In my view, and I believe I am entitled to my view; this issue of an additional one year layering is yet another example of the unreality with which governments have been tackling several issues in our body politic. However, there is a saying in my village that as one approaches an elder’s status, one ceases to indulge in too many battles, for there comes a moment when age dictates the avoidance of certain forms of engagement.

Permit me therefore to use the opportunity of this lecture to call on the Federal Government to please abandon this idea of the additional one year layering on our undergraduate program. As colleagues, either under the aegis of the Academic Staff Union of Universities ASUU, or the Committee of Vice Chancellors CVC, or both, I urge you to please join your powerful voice to ensure that this policy does not see the light of the day, and prevail on the government to please channel the funds they would otherwise have spent on this ill-fated program and invest same directly into improving the teaching and research facilities in our universities.

7.0 WHY FUTO?
Those early days of the FUTO experiment were indeed very shaky, uncertain, tentative and fraught with difficulties. The general public was watching with trepidation to see if this new experiment will succeed or crumble. There were no classrooms, no library, no laboratories, no research facilities, no committees, no administrative set up, nothing! We had to start everything from the scratch; yes, from the scratch. We had to begin everything from the beginning.

Is it therefore not pertinent to wonder or ask why would any academically hot, upwardly-bound and brilliant young academic want to join such a struggling new university as the FUTO of the 1981 era? Why?

Many of us abandoned the comfort and the lucrative attractions of a career in any of the older more established universities and chose the challenges of this new university for a myriad of reasons. Of course, our individual reasons may vary as our personalities differ; but central to each of us was the
attraction in the novelty and satisfaction of pioneering work. We succeeded; O yes, we succeeded.

Look at FUTO today! At its recent ranking, the National Universities Commission NUC ranked FUTO in the top 12th position in the entire 158 universities in the country.

6.0 FUTO’S PLACE IN CHARACTER AND IN LEARNING

On our masthead is our bold promise to deploy technology for service. Year in and year out, and for the past 38 years we have continued to train and produce young men and women, who without distinction as to race, creed, or political conviction have acquired a higher training in technology. We have continued to graduate them and deploy them into the labor force with the stamp of our certification that they are indeed worthy in character and in learning to undertake their specific tasks with the skills we have given them.

We have offered and continue to offer excellent degree programs for the development of productive skills in engineering, scientific, agricultural, management, medical, and allied professional disciplines and thereby produced and offered to this nation and the wider world, matured men and women with capability not only to understand, use and adopt existing technologies but also to improve and develop new ones.

We have continued to offer to the general population, as a form of public service, the results of training and research and have fostered their practical application. Yes, we have continued to undertake numerous other activities appropriate for a university of technology of the highest standard.

6.1 SOME HARD QUESTIONS

While clapping and patting ourselves on our backs, can we please pause, and allow me take the opportunity of this lecture to ask ourselves how well have we performed in these numerous tasks? Have we done as well as we should? Are there any areas we could have done better? What and what should we do to improve and take the notch a wee little bit higher?
These are hard questions and I cannot pretend to have all the answers. May be no single person can proffer all the answers. There is however one little area in our performance assessment index which I happen to have examined more closely and I wish to share it with you.

7.0 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT INDICES

I had the opportunity to serve as the Director of Academic Planning in this university from 1991 to 1997. During my tenure, I thought it would be interesting to do some research to find out how well we as a university, and we as teachers were doing our work; if we were succeeding or if we were not succeeding; and if we were meeting the benchmarks expected of us.

In corporate analogy, I looked at the university as if it were a factory. Our finished products are the graduates we produce. The production time is five years, ie ten semesters. Our raw materials are the freshmen students we procure from the secondary school system through JAMB. The front-line factory workers who transform these raw materials into finished products are we the teachers. As we move our finished products into the market, we brand our top quality products, our first-classers, with the certification and guarantee that 4.5 times out of 5 they will, summa cum lauda, perform optimally best. Our lower grade products are certified with lesser guarantees.

I presented my results titled Performance Assessment Indices of Academic Teaching Departments to Senate at its meeting on Thursday 26 September 1996. The results showed an analysis of how well our raw materials, our finished products, and our front-line production workers were interfacing in fulfilling the mandates for which the university was established.

I will not bore you with the minute details of that Report because I am sure you can retrieve it from the archived proceedings of Senate, as cited above.

However, using the benchmark indices of the approved NUC’s Minimum Academic Standards, the analysis of the performance of our front-line production workers, ie the teachers, showed how poorly we performed in
terms of the qualification, sex, and spread of the various categories of our teaching staff.

The staffing in many Departments showed a shortfall in the percentage of teachers with terminal degrees, which implied that a bulk of the teaching was borne by the lower and less experienced staff. Is this situation any different today?

The staff : student ratios for most of the Departments showed a criminally high teaching overload being borne by our staff. Are our teachers still not suffering under the yoke of excess workload today?

The Table which showed an Analysis of Graduation List and Admission To First Degrees, as well as the one showing an Analysis of Students Graduating In More Than The Stipulated Time provided a very disturbing trend.

For example, in each graduation class, an increasing percentage of students were graduating in the lower and bottom honors classifications. The implication is that even from our graduation list, the public can discern that we are indeed increasingly producing and dumping into the market lower and lower value products. Has that situation which we observed in the 1990s changed today?

Similarly, in each graduation class, an increasing percentage of our students were spending more and more time to graduate, beyond the stipulated five years. A very important parameter critical to the efficiency of any factory is the length of time a product stays on the production line. The longer the delay the less efficient the system is.

My report to Senate showed the results for the 1990/91, 1991/92, 1992/93 and the 1993/94 academic sessions for the School of Science, School of Engineering, School of Agric, and School of Management. It did not include data from years earlier than 1990 because they would have been affected by the provisos for supplementary resit examinations which were tenable in our university for a greater part of that period.
I have however continued, merely out of interest, to follow the trend quinquennially, every five years, up till the graduating class of 2014/15. I did it for the years 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. It will be nice if our Directorate of Academic Planning can regularly carry out similar research and empower Senate with its results.

My results as presented in Table 1 show a rather disturbing trend.

TABLE 1: ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS GRADUATING IN MORE THAN THE STIPULATED TIME OF 5 YEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION</th>
<th>SAAT</th>
<th>SMAT</th>
<th>SOSC</th>
<th>SEET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994/1995</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/2000</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/2005</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.1: Analysis of Students' Graduating in More Than The Stipulated Time of Five(5) Years
For example, in the School of Science 18.3% of the total number of students in the 1994/1995 graduating class spent more than 5 years (10 semesters) to graduate. This figure worsened to 20.6% in the 1999/2000 graduating class. By the 2014/2015 academic session, 25.4% of the graduating students in the School of Science spent more than 10 semesters before graduating. The implication is that one out of every four students in our School of Science required more than 5 years to complete our B. Tech. degree program.

Let us look at the School of Agric & Agric Technology. In the list of students who graduated in the 1994/1995 academic year, 11.3% of them spent more than 5 years before they could complete their degree program. This figure continued to get worse, year by year, such that in the 2014/2015 graduation list, 20.9% of the students who graduated in SAAT had spent more than 10 semesters in our university; i.e one out of every five students in SAAT required more than 5 years to complete our B.Agric. Tech. degree program.
The figures for our School of Engineering & Engineering Technology are indeed very disturbing. In the 1994/1995 academic year, 13.7% of the total number of students who graduated in SEET spent more than 10 semesters before graduating. By the year 2014/2015 this figure had worsened to a whopping 30.8%. The implication is that almost one-third of our engineering students are unable to complete their degree in the stipulated 5 years.

The story is the same in our School of Management Technology. 9.6% of the students who graduated from SMAT in the 1994/1995 academic year spent more than 5 years to get their degree. The figures progressively worsened to 15.8%, 16.3% and 17.8% in the 2004/2005, 2009/2010 and 2014/2015 academic years respectively. What this tells us is that whereas in 1995, one out of every ten students who graduated in SMAT spent more than 5 years to complete our B.Tech. degree; however, the situation worsened such that by the year 2015, two out of every ten students in SMAT were spending more than 5 years to struggle through our B.Tech. degree.
Either as teachers or as students, are we doing better or are we getting worse? The figures stare us in the face.

This trend is continuing and it cuts across many Schools in our university. It is alarming and very disturbing. It glaringly shows that an increasing percentage of our students are unable to complete their degree programs in the stipulated 5 years.

What is the cause? Is it that the barber is not barbing well, or is it that the razor is not sharp?

It is either that our lecturers are not teaching well, or not well qualified to teach; or that the academic quality of the students we admit is too low to properly comprehend the subject material in our curricula; or a combination of both.

There is another disturbing fact which is easily discernable in the records of most of these students who require extra year or extra years to graduate. Their academic records are occasioned by approvals to carry extra units, approvals to defer one semester or two, all supported by spurious alibis on health grounds, financial difficulties etc. Of course, you don’t need me to tell you that many of those alibis are spurious! And as usual, requests for these concessions very cleverly come to Senate after-the-fact and approvals are almost fait accompli.

It is also disturbing and should be of great concern to us that in most of the cases of students who spend extra years before graduating, the most frequent offending causes are the subjects they offered and failed in their freshman year, especially the foundation-year courses in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Workshop Practice.

The final year degree results of students during the 2014/2015 academic year showed that about 48.3% of the non-graduating 5th year students still had carryover first-year courses in Mathematics and Physics.
The reasons for this may not be far-fetched. Since all first-year students must take these courses such as MTH 101, MTH 102, CHM 101, CHM 102, PHY 101, PHY 102, ENG 101, ENG 102 etc, the sheer large number of students renders the class sizes criminally overloaded when compared to the number of teachers available to teach them.

Can you imagine 2000 Year One students registered to take CHM 102? Where will the Chemistry Department get enough chemicals and reagents to effectively deliver one 3-hour practicals for each of the 2000 students each week for the 15 weeks in each semester? Where will the Chemistry Department get enough teachers to offer the required one-hour tutorial every week as prescribed in the syllabus? Any wonder why the students fail?

The story is the same for each of the other courses. Where, for example, will the Engineering Departments get enough teachers to instruct 2000 Year One students in Engineering Drawing, grade and mark 2000 such drawings, each week for the 15 weeks in each semester? No wonder why the students fail.

Certainly, many of the observations I made above are not new to most of us here. What may be shocking is how glaring their consequences are. Of course we can tackle this problem. Of course we can solve it. Yes my dear colleagues, we can. What we lack is the will to inflict and endure the pain of tackling it.

8.0 INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

As a pioneer staff who started being here when there was not even a single cement block standing on the other, perhaps you will permit me if I look around our campus today and proclaim that we have indeed done very well in developing our physical infra structure.

We must give kudos to the leadership of the various Governing Councils of our university, starting from His Royal Majesty Chukumelam Nnam Obi 2nd, the Ogba of Ogbaland who chaired our first Governing Council to our present Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council Prof. John O. Offem for the excellent work they have done in erecting all the various structures we see on our campus today.
In the most laudable way, we must of course recognize, applaud and give credit to every one of our Vice Chancellors who each worked assiduously, energetically and relentlessly to propel and move FUTO forward onto the great height it occupies today.

Starting from our pioneer Vice Chancellor Prof. Umaru Gomwalk - the legendary visioner who saw, created and put flesh on the dream; to our 2nd Vice Chancellor Prof. Amagh Nduka – a disciplined administrator and scholar of great repute; to our 3rd Vice Chancellor Engr. Prof. Chuka Obah – a man about whom it has been said that “…if Gomwalk was our Moses, then Chuka Obah is the Joshua that led FUTO into the promised land.” We are awed by the amazing consolidation work done by our 4th Vice Chancellor Prof. Jude Njoku – a quietly humble, humane and great achiever; and our ever effervescent 5th Vice Chancellor Prof. Celestine Onwuliri – may his kind soul rest in peace; to our 6th Vice Chancellor Prof. Chigozie Cyril Asiabaka who enthroned the culture and mantra of excellence and expanded the FUTO horizons to enviable heights. While we applaud our present Vice Chancellor Prof. Francis Chukwuemeka Eze for his great achievements so far, we must continue to give him our un-alloyed support and go the extra mile to see that he succeeds.

There are however one or two areas of infrastructural development where I think we may have to take a hard second look.

The encroachment and unhealthy interference of some members of our host community gives me a lot of concern, particularly the harmful and distracting effects it has in hindering the smooth and rapid development of our physical infrastructure. If we must call a spade a spade, I must also add that it is particularly disturbing when you hear from the grapevines that the deplorable situation is even being exacerbated by connivance from some internal members of FUTO staff. The problem is not intractable and we must not be pussy-footed in dealing with a heavy fist all encroachments and incursions on our property.
Another area in our infrastructural development which gives me great concern is our lamentable delay or inability to make FUTO a “residential” university. After more than 38 years of our existence, most of our staff and students still commute daily from the far away city of Owerri. The itinerant nature of our workforce virtually leaves our university as a ghost town by the 4pm close of work every day. This has negative effects which are obvious to anybody who is familiar with the upliftment which a bustling campus life has on staff productivity.

Even our Vice Chancellor has not been left out from this nomadic life. I am embarrassed that after all these 38 years of our existence, we have still left our Vice Chancellor to continue living in a rented apartment: and for crying out aloud, an old rented apartment built more than 40 years ago before the turn of the last century! Isn’t it time we erected a befitting Vice Chancellor’s Lodge, complete with the appurtenances commensurate to the exalted position of our Chief Executive? It is still morning on creation day, so I urge our Governing Council to please do the needful.

10.0 TILL HEALTH DO US PART

As the adage goes, there is a time for everything under the sun; a time to sow, a time to reap; a time to cry, a time to laugh; a time to be born, and a time to die Yes, there is a time to retire, and most happily my time has come.

Life must have a new hue now. My sun is gradually mellowing to a golden yellow and my clouds are purple in golden puffs pasted on a soft blue sky. My moon is quietly peeping out with sprays of silver into the evening air, bearing the goodnight fragrance of the flowers as my trees begin the sure journey of folding their leaves to sleep.

Aaaah, it’s so lovely, clear, contented and fulfilled; yet still piquing my curiosity as tentatively as the early morning roses hesitatingly do when they peep out from their buds to gauge the early morning sun.

It is gooooood to retire! It is exciting to look forward to retirement; unless of course you want to be the Baobab tree … for the Baobab tree can go on and
on for years without flowering, without dying; barely surviving and clinging to life on the sparsest of moisture.

As I approach the biblical age of three score and ten, I once asked an older friend of mine, who is 80 years old, what changes I should expect. His answers are worth sharing. He said:

“Yes, I am changing.
After loving my parents, my siblings, my spouse, my children, my friends, now I have started loving myself.

Yes, I am changing.
I just realised I am not ‘Atlas’.
The world does not rest on my shoulders.

Yes, I am changing.
I have now stopped bargaining with the vegetable and fruit vendors.
After all, a few dollars more is not going to burn too big a hole in my pocket but it might help the poor fellow save for his daughter’s school fees.

Yes, I am changing.
I stopped telling the elderly that they’ve already narrated that story many times.
After all, the story makes them walk down the memory lane and relive the past.

Yes, I am changing.
I’ve learnt not to correct people all the time, even when I know they are wrong.
After all, the onus of making everyone perfect is not mine.
Peace is more precious than perfection.

Yes, I am changing.
I remain cool when someone plays dirty politics to outrun me in the rat race.
After all, I am not a rat
and neither am I in any race.

Yes, I am changing.
I’ve learnt to live each day
as if it’s the last.
After all, it might just be the last.

Yes, I am changing.
I am doing what makes me happy.
After all, I am responsible for my happiness,
and I owe it to me.

Don’t wait till you are seventy
before you change
as there is no guarantee of getting to that
in the first instance.
God in his infinite mercy
shall help us stay even longer and in full prosperity
in Jesus mighty name, Amen.”

If I may ask; is retirement the end or the beginning? For what we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is often to make a beginning. For according to T. S. Elliot (Four Quarters), the end is where we start from. Tomorrow was born yesterday, and today is the beginning of forever.

I am of the view that True Teachers Never Retire. A true teacher, the teacher who is true to his calling does not really retire. He is a teacher for life. For as long as his intellect is still active, and until senility dawns, he will continue to teach, albeit in the medium of various genres of creative pursuits. He remains creatively restless, pulsating with intellectual energy, right to the border of senility and until health do us part. And even when he dies, the true teacher never wholly dies. Yes, he never wholly dies; for as I once wrote in one of my poems: I Shall Not Wholly Die....Non Omnis Moriar

**Non Omnis Moriar**

*Non omnis moriar*

*Exegimonumentum aere perennius*

*Regalique situ pyramidium altius*
I Shall Not Wholly Die
I shall not wholly die
For I have raised monuments
More lasting than bronze
And loftier
Than the royal peaks of pyramids
No bitting storm
Can bring me down
No impotent winds
Nor the innumerable series of the years
Nor the swift course of time
I shall not wholly die.

Yes, the really true teacher has indeed raised monuments more lasting than bronze; he has raised monuments loftier than the royal peaks of pyramids; and no storm, no impotent winds, not even the innumerable series of the years can bring the true teacher down.

Yes my distinguished colleagues, if there is really a re-incarnation, in my next world, I will still be a P.R.O.F.E.S.S.O.R.

11.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANK YOU’S

Now comes the difficult part of every lecture, the part where you have to thank everybody. It is tempting to skip this part for the fear that I may inadvertently miss someone, thereby causing offence and most times to my peril. Let me however brave a general goodbye-salute to everyone whom I have been opportuned to meet, work with, toil, play, cry and laugh with during my past 38 years in FUTO. In a very special way, each one of you touched my soul and contributed immensely in deeply innumerable ways to make my oyster produce a pearl.
In my 532-paged Memoirs titled **AGAINST ALL ODDS** which has just been published, and will be formally presented to you shortly, I have copiously remembered most if not all the people who have accompanied me on this journey. Thank you, thank you, and thank you very much indeed.

Finally, I am happy that I have fought a good fight and I have finished the course. So in the famous words of Emperor Octavius Augustus Caesar, words often famously used to conclude a Roman comedy, may I say to you:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Since well I've played my part,} \\
\text{Clap now your hands,} \\
\text{And with applause,} \\
\text{Dismiss me from the stage.}
\end{align*}
\]

**THANK YOU LADIES AND GENTLEMEN & THANK YOU EVERYBODY. GRACIAS.**
REFERENCES


