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“The role of dialogue and networking:
From a transitional to an industrialized country”

Universities Revisited: Breeding a New Political Culture

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Abstract

Enormous challenges today require prompt intervention. Consider the combined long-term effects of worsening global poverty and international terrorism on political institutions of the world's democracies. As the West grapples with international terrorism, it is increasingly forced to reshape its democratic institutions to respond to the need for domestic and global security. As poverty worsens in the Third World, political violence, push struggling democracies to adopt extreme measures. In both instances, the casualty is democracy itself.

Universities could be an arena for reforms. This paper will discuss the strategic role of universities in helping shape political culture. Through the learning experiences provided by the curriculum, through design, form and content of teaching and learning, assessment schemes, incentives and provision for student participation in university governance — universities could influence generations of political actors.

University education should not narrow down to formal instruction alone. Through its community outreach services, universities can undertake educational activities with civil society groups such as on voters education. University students could successfully carry out grassroots mass education to mobilize people towards developmental goals. Their work could have profound effects on both the formal and informal political institutions and ultimately, in the long term on political culture. When combined with increasingly democratized access to formal higher education, the younger segment of the social pyramid could be a strong force in advocating reforms. Campus activism in the 60's and 70's proved the might of student power.

The paper will likewise illustrate how the university through a partnership with student governments can help build consensus. Also discussed are the survey results on comments and reactions of students to the three functions of student organizations. These are the area of conference, the area of governance and the area of representation.

For the university to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and therefrom forge consensus among various social sectors, it has to invoke the processes of democracy. Only democracy offers an environment where diversity and change is celebrated.