

Biography of Professor Eon Nigel Harris



Professor E. Nigel Harris, MPhil, MD, DM

Professor Eon Nigel Harris assumed office as Vice Chancellor on October 1, 2004.

A Guyanese by birth, Professor Harris was previously Dean and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, USA from 1996-2004.

Professor Harris graduated *magna cum laude*, *Phi Beta Kappa* from Howard University, with a degree in Chemistry and proceeded on a fellowship to Yale University, where he received a Master of Philosophy degree in Biochemistry. He earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania, completing this within three years and again graduating with honours.

He then returned to the Caribbean where he completed his residency in internal medicine at the University of the West Indies at Mona and was awarded the post-graduate degree, Doctor of Medicine (DM).

He is internationally known for his work as a Rheumatologist. With Doctors Aziz Gharavi and Graham Hughes in London, he helped to define a disorder which they called the *Antiphospholipid Syndrome* and devised a diagnostic test (the anticardiolipin test) for it. For this work he shared with Dr Graham Hughes, Dr Aziz Gharavi and others, the Ceiba-Geigy Prize. Over 150 papers, editorials, reviews and chapters on this subject have been published by Professor Harris. He joined the University of Louisville, Kentucky, in 1987 and by 1993 became Professor of Medicine and Chief of the Division of Rheumatology. There he launched the Antiphospholipid Standardisation Laboratory which leads worldwide efforts in standardisation of the anticardiolipin test and distributing these standards to over 500 laboratories worldwide. He was one of the initial organizers of a series of International Conferences on Antiphospholipid Antibodies, beginning in 1984 and held every two years since in Europe, Jamaica, the USA and Japan.

Since coming to the University of the West Indies, he has focused on programmes that will enhance contributions of UWI to Caribbean Governments; strengthen services of the University to its stakeholders; broaden funding; and enhance alumni relations and marketing. A particular area of interest has been re-structuring the UWI presence in the 12 contributing countries without campuses (he refers to them as the "UWI-12"). Successful consultation meetings were held with governments, private sector and local tertiary institutions in each of the UWI-12 countries to determine their educational, research and consultancy needs and how best the UWI could meet those needs. Strengthening ties with Universities outside of the 15 UWI countries, such as the University of Guyana is also in progress.

His academic, administrative and personal qualities have earned Professor Harris a number of leadership positions. He is Chairperson of the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), the Council of the Caribbean Epidemiology Research Centre (CAREC) and the UWI Institute of International Relations (IIR), and he is a member of the Board of the Caribbean Knowledge Learning Network (CKLN). While he was Dean and Senior Vice President of Morehouse School of Medicine, he served on leadership committees of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the National Centre for Research Resources (NCRR), The Arthritis Advisory Committee of the Food and Drug Association (FDA).

He has received many Honours and Awards, including the Centennial Award for contributions to Medicine by the National Medical Association of America in 1995.

Professor Harris is married to Dr C. Yvette Williams-Harris, a general internist and they have three children.

Enhancing Research Productivity in the Caribbean: A UWI Perspective

Professor Nigel Harris

Vice-Chancellor

The University of the West Indies, Mona (Jamaica)

enigel.harris@uwimona.edu.jm

ABSTRACT: The University of the West Indies (UWI) is a regional university serving 15 English-speaking Caribbean Island Nations with major campuses in Jamaica (Mona Campus), Barbados (Cave Hill Campus) and Trinidad (St. Augustine Campus). Total student enrollment is about 39,000 with an academic staff numbering in excess of 2000. From its inception in 1948, attention was given to societal relevant research through early creation of research units such as the Institute for Social and Economic Research [now the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies (SALISES)], responsible for internationally recognized studies in social and economic issues relevant to the Caribbean and developing world, and the Tropical Metabolism Research Institute (TMRI), recognized internationally for work on malnutrition, nutrition, chronic disease management, and early childhood development. While UWI is responsible for more than 90% of scholarly articles and books emanating from the English-speaking Caribbean, there needs to be enhancement of global visibility of this work and increased need for studies to impact regional growth and development. Strategies to enable such enhancement include expanding the cadre of academics doing first rate research, building a more robust research graduate programme, modernizing facilities for research, creating a Regional (CARICOM) Research Funding Pool for which researchers can compete. Funding should be directed primarily at areas of importance to sustaining regional development, namely - energy, education, health, biotechnology and agriculture, crime and security, environmental protection, etc. Mechanisms to translate research findings into practice and policy must also be implemented to ensure meaningful impact of research findings on societal growth and development.

For many centuries, Universities have been centres of learning and discovery. This has been made possible by the frequent assembly of societies' greatest thinkers and investigators with generations of students into the walls of these entities. In recent times with the proliferation of post secondary institutions providing only instruction, sometimes for profit, the role of research and creation of "true learning assemblies" is often forgotten, even by Policy Makers. However, it is clear that in a global environment where knowledge and creativity are the vital ingredients of growth and competitiveness, the preservation and enhancement of universities in which research, innovation and translation of their products into industry and policy are important imperatives.

The founders and early leaders of the University of the West Indies recognized from its beginning nearly 60 years ago that research and discovery directed at social and economic issues and at societal growth would be important. Hence, the Institute of Social and Economic Research [now the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies (SALISES)] and the Tropical Metabolism Research Unit [now the Tropical Medicine Research Institute (TMRI)] were initiated in the earliest years of the University. These Centres went on to produce ground-breaking work

in social and economic studies (SALISES) and in medicine (TMRI) (particularly in areas of malnutrition and child development over many decades). Today, the University of the West Indies has more than 50 Centres and Institutes conducting first rate research in a broad array of subjects, many relevant to the growth and development of the Caribbean, as well as to small island and developing states worldwide.

The University of the West Indies is one of two Regional Universities in the world (the other being the University of South Pacific) serving 15 countries in the English-speaking Caribbean. In the last five years, the University's undergraduate and graduate student enrollment has increased to nearly 40,000 with an academic staff in excess of 2000. There are hundreds of undergraduate and graduate programmes offered in Faculties of Social Sciences, Pure and Applied Sciences, Humanities and Education, Medicine, Engineering, Law and Agriculture. More than 90% of scholarly publications in journals and books emanating from the English-speaking Caribbean are produced by academics at the University of the West Indies.

Despite the above data, representation of UWI internationally in the world of published scholarship, research and policy development is in need of enhancement. There are several challenges to increased productivity including:

- Rapid enrollment increase
- Inadequate support for graduate students conducting full-time research
- Inadequate facilities and materials for competitive research.
- Absence of sizeable Research Funding and Venture Capital to support research.
- Insufficient translation of research findings into innovative products or into recommendations that may drive business competitiveness and provision of informed policy advice.

Each of the above problems will need to be assessed, if the full potential of universities in the Caribbean is to be realized.

1. **Enrollment Growth and Loss of Academic Time for Research**

Given the demands of both governments, students and their families for tertiary education as a means of fostering societal and individual growth and competitiveness, the demand for post secondary education has and will continue to increase. However, as the enrolment of students grow the quality of the education-learning experience and the quality of research can suffer.

Balancing enrolment growth with threats to quality and research productivity is challenging. One approach is to broaden the educational interests of secondary school students beyond traditional universities. Increasing the capacity for Technical Colleges and Vocational Schools to absorb some of the growing need for post secondary education is one useful approach. Sustainable growth depends not only on traditional University graduates but on technologists in areas such as energy (biogas, fuel crop production, and solar energy), informatics, forestry, soil conservation, animal husbandry, maintenance of equipment and so on. Students and their parents should be persuaded that opportunities for employment, wealth and intellectual growth are distinctly possible with appropriate technical and vocational skills, imagination and a sense of entrepreneurship.

Thus, expansion of opportunities for post secondary students to include Technical and Vocational Institutions will free time and resources in traditional universities for research and

quality graduate programmes. It would be important in these circumstances to ensure that there is not a two-tier system of Tertiary Education (University versus Technical College). All students, regardless of placement should be imbued with attributes of life-long learning. They should learn for productivity and learn for employability (see Learning: The Treasure Within [UNESCO, 1996] whatever the Tertiary Institution in which they are enrolled.

Increasingly, even within traditional universities, it is recognized that few academics can be great teachers, great researchers and great providers of service to their communities. There are academics who are gifted teachers, but not as productive in research. Provision of enhanced opportunities for those academics who wish to teach primarily and who can provide excellent teaching should be recognized as an avenue for promotion within the university. On the other hand, there should be in every faculty, department, centre and unit of a university, some group of able researchers provided “protected time” for research and innovation.

Formation of research teams or centres is also means of not only “protecting researchers” but of building collaboration, critical mass and cross disciplinary thinking necessary to address thematic areas of importance.

2. Expansion of Research Graduate Programmes

Over the past decade, the University of the West Indies has initiated a large number of “Taught” postgraduate degree and diploma programmes designed to provide professional and employment advancement opportunities for working adults with first degrees. The University also provides opportunities in several disciplines for students to pursue postgraduate **research** degrees at the Masters (Master of Philosophy [MPhil]) and Doctorate (Doctor of Philosophy [Phd]) levels. While student enrollment in Taught Masters degree programmes has expanded markedly, the expansion of students doing Research degrees have been modest. In addition, the latter suffer from high attrition rates and slow progress to final degree.

The challenges of postgraduate research degree programmes are multiple but significant ones are lack of funding for fulltime research students, poor employment opportunities post graduation and, in some cases, inadequate supervision. These problems must be addressed and the University is exploring waiver of fees for postgraduate students doing research degrees. They should also be provided stipends to meet modest living expenses. To ensure that scarce resources are effectively utilized to support postgraduate students doing research degrees, they should be rigorously screened to ensure that they are talented and sufficiently committed to completing their degrees. Supervisors of these students should also be carefully selected to ensure that individuals doing creditable research with good supervisory skills are selected. Workshops to train supervisors, use of supervisors from other international institutions, or options for students to do part of their training at reputable international institutions should be explored.

While rigorous research is often the province of students seeking postgraduate degrees, **all** students at the undergraduate and graduate levels should understand the principles of empirical research and should be involved in some form of research during their undergraduate years in which data gathering, analysis and evidence based conclusions are involved.

3. Inadequate Facilities and Materials for Research

Inadequacy of facilities and lack of materials (or lack of a system to supply materials in a timely fashion) are important hindrances to first-rate research, particularly in the sciences, technology, medicine and engineering. Access to complex and expensive infrastructure and materials to conduct cutting edge research is limited in the Caribbean. However, if any society is to compete in the current global environment, some investment must be made in the infrastructure, materials and individuals to conduct cutting edge research in specific niche areas. Policy makers should establish priority areas for research that will impact competitiveness, growth and sustained development, and facilities and materials provided for research in those areas.

It should be emphasized that there are areas of research in the social sciences, communications, culture and the arts and in health where expensive infrastructure is not required. These areas require primarily an active and creative intellect, attributes that can be nurtured in appropriate learning and research environments.

4. Sizeable Funding for Research

Availability of an adequate Fund for Research is a necessary requirement for promotion of competitive and innovative discovery particularly in the sciences, technology, medicine and engineering. Models of Funding Agencies supporting research exist in all developed countries. Examples in the USA include the National Science Foundation and National Institute of Health. Governments of countries with these agencies often allocate substantial funds on an annual basis for awards to the most competitive researchers in defined disciplines. Decisions about who should receive grant awards are made by *ad hoc* teams of experts in the given discipline who often make their decisions based on carefully crafted and objective criteria. Research proposals are scored, proposals are ranked. Usually, there is also Policy Board overseeing the Agency, and it is this body that ultimately decides which Proposals will be funded based on “its score, its rank and perceived relevance to defined national and Regional needs”.

We have long argued for the establishment of a Regional Research Fund (possibly named a “Competitiveness and Development” Fund to ensure better support from the private sector and policy makers). This would be run by an administrative group such as ones described above, operating out of CARICOM. In the setting of the Caribbean, Applied Research should be given priority over *Basic* research and might include alternative energy, biotechnology, agriculture, fisheries, the environment, ICT, health, creative approaches to maths and science education and others.

Even with well funded agencies offering grant awards, there will be insufficient interest unless academics are motivated to compete. Since in the Caribbean, salaries are not usually dependent on receipt of grant awards, other incentives such as special community recognition for recipients, credits for promotion and monetary incentives might be useful strategies to stimulate interest in applying for awards.

5. Translation of Research into “Applicable Products”

Academic researchers invariably establish the directions and goals of their research on individual rather than societal interests. In addition, they would prefer to work alone rather than in teams or other collaborative formations. Both attributes tend to limit the potential to conduct research relevant to societal growth and even when such work is being done, there is often inadequate translation into innovative products or to promote informed policy development. Some approaches to address this limitation include funding Centres and Institutes that address specific

societal development needs. This enables multidisciplinary teams of researchers to direct their research at specific social and developmental issues. Another approach to translation of research into meaningful product is creation of databases of researchers and the work they are doing so that these are accessible to government and business communities who can capitalize on research findings. A third approach to translation of research findings is popularization of significant research achievements in the lay press so that stakeholders can become aware of new findings and how they might be put to productive use.

Governments and Businesses are also often not as aggressive as they might be in exploring the University as a potential source of innovative ideas and of appropriate policy advice. Increasing the interactions of these sectors with the University through symposia, meetings and organized visits to each other's institutions are ways to promote "information flow between gown and town".

SUMMARY

Societies that have fostered a robust research enterprise have often done so by promoting excellent collaboration between government, universities and the business community. For universities to succeed in the conduct of research, at least some of their academics must be afforded "protected time" to conduct research. Building research post graduate programmes, where the most talented students are provided with support to do full-time research and where good supervision of these students by able and productive academics is provided, is important. Provision of opportunities for employment for individuals with postgraduate research degrees is also necessary to attract students to research careers. It should be added that all undergraduate students should understand the principles of empirical research and be given opportunities to get practical experience in research as part of their degree programmes.

Competitive research also requires good facilities, adequate materials and access, and funding support. The creation of a Research Funding Agency to disburse funds competitively, based on good peer review of applications, is important. The need for researchers to be given incentives to compete for awards will encourage them to apply for grant awards.

Research brings value to societies and avenues should be created for translation of research findings into innovative products and informed policy making. Creation of Centres around themes important to societal growth, research databases available to the public and communication of exciting findings in the media and in public fora are often modalities available to translate research into "usable products".

Scarce human and material resources should not limit meaningful research. The presence of universities committed not only to teaching but to research can boost creativity and innovation even in developing countries and are necessary ingredients for competitive growth and development.