

Opportunity Amidst the Wreckage Rebuilding Haiti's University System

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even bleed into contempt—can produce more than “relief.”

Caveant consules!

Endnotes

¹ Conscious or not, some imply the humanitarian crisis stems from the January 12 earthquake. But a look at any of numerous reports from international organizations or NGOs—with their statistics concerning access to water, healthcare, sanitation, housing, etc.—make it clear that the Haitian population has been living in a “humanitarian crisis” for decades.

² PNUD, *Vulnérabilité et pauvreté en Haïti*, Rapport national sur le développement humain, 2005.

³ *Idem*, p.87.

⁴ Dilley, Maxx, et al., *Natural disaster hotspots*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005.

⁵ Robert Charvin, “Notes sur les dérives de l’humanitaire dans l’ordre international,” *Revue belge de droit international*, Bruylant, Bruxelles, pp. 468-485.

⁶ Conférence à Washington, 26 octobre 2005 cited by Rony Brauman “Mission civilisatrice, ingérence humanitaire” in *Le Monde diplomatique* de septembre 2005.

⁷ On this subject, see *Le Nouvelliste* “Haïti : des experts vont accoucher du PDNA pour Haïti,” édition du 12 mars 2010, <www.lenouvelliste.com>. ■

After the earthquake of January 12, an international group of academics, including myself, formed a group called the International Committee for the Construction of a University Campus for l'Université d'Etat d'Haiti (UEH), Haiti's state university. The founding idea was to organize a group that would contribute to the design and implementation of a lasting and modern renewal of the country's academic institutions. The universal sentiment of the group's founders was that Haiti should not lose the opportunity created by the terrible tragedy of January 12.

Several schools of the UEH, located in various parts of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, were severely damaged as a result of the earthquake and some of these facilities are no longer functional. Given that the physical reconstruction of the university is an immediate necessity, it would be advantageous for the UEH to relocate all of its schools and departments in one place, not only to function more efficiently in economic terms, but also to facilitate a more collegial atmosphere among students, professors and researchers in all fields.

To achieve this goal, the UEH requires a considerable sum of money, more than the university or even the nation of Haiti has at its disposal at this time, given the destruction of the building that housed the taxing authority and all its documents, and the damage to ports through which activities that generate hard currency must pass. The beautiful word “solidarity” is now Haiti's password.

The Committee has as its principal objective the raising of a substantial part of the funds that the UEH needs to build a safe and modern campus, with buildings that will not be vulnerable to hurricanes and will have the latest anti-seismic technology. The Committee will send the money collected directly to the UEH, which will give official

notification of the receipt of the funds and will apply them exclusively to campus construction. The UEH will not, under any circumstance, be able to spend the money on any other activities.

Haitians must reconstruct their country in the context of solid development so that they can overcome, progressively and in the coming months, the terrible situation created by the earthquake of January 12 and, at the same time, create a development model that will allow the country to increase its standard of living over the coming years.

In that context, given the strong correlation between higher education and development, the country must be able to count on a solid university system. Haiti's national university can and should assume the role of educating future professionals and leaders in science, social science, and culture: agronomists, architects, engineers, doctors, professors and researchers, advanced technicians, etc.

Rebuilding the physical plant, therefore, is not enough. Rethinking the role of higher education in Haiti is also an imperative task at this time. In this context there are a number of urgent questions that must be confronted in order to reconstruct a Haitian university system worthy of the name.

The Functions of the University

One key question deals with the nature and function of the university itself. We now have the opportunity to ask ourselves whether we want the university to essentially be a place of prolonged secondary education—a complaint I lodged some time ago—or whether we would rather convert it into an authentic institution of higher learning, containing all of the instrumental apparatus required for the production and dissemination of knowledge in the contemporary world.

MANIGAT *continued...*

I know that nothing can replace a great professor delivering a masterful course and imparting academic knowledge at the highest levels of human understanding. In Haiti, we still have professors who give master classes from memory, and require that students be able to repeat the text, without omitting even a comma, to satisfy the demands of medieval-type exams.

But there has always been a legitimate concern among those who supervise the formation of new professionals and intellectuals that there be some critical, practical work, supervised in the classroom, along with constant training and hands-on laboratory work whose importance is recognized in the diffusion of experimental method. At the depths of Haitian anxiety lies a genuine desire in favor of a renewed university that can form creative thinkers at the highest levels of the country's educational system. We ask our true friends for their help in this endeavor.

This does not mean that there is only one way to proceed. For the past century, for example, Haitian higher education has been the site of a debate between those who would emphasize classical speculation concerning fundamental knowledge and aesthetic preferences (the good?), and those who would emphasize a pragmatic concern with operational ends (the useful?). This is the familiar debate between the classical heritage of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions on the one hand, and Anglo Saxon pragmatism on the other. I have explored the Haitian context for this debate in a study entitled "The Substitution of the New U.S. Hegemony over the Traditional French Influence in the Conjunction of 1910-1912."

Another set of questions focuses on the need to organize research in Haiti. Research is a component of higher education that implies a specialized expertise on the part of a university professor. In Haiti, research as

such is organized in institutions dedicated to scientific investigation. Research centers are springing up all over, as is cooperation on an international basis, and it is an appropriate moment for all this to be happening. The emergence of transnational research teams is a new sign of the recognized importance of the spirit of the technologies of human knowledge, of the emergence of a new humanism. This spirit should direct more and more scientific investigation toward collective research in Haiti.

Bringing us closer to the immediate problems of the country, we must consider not only the question of those who teach and what they teach, but also the question of who has the opportunity to be taught. The Haitian university system brings together some 50,000 students, half of whom attend the UEH, which is organized into thirteen separate faculties and schools. The needs of this small world are relatively enormous. The problem of scholarships, for example, cannot be resolved without taking into account the limited funds, questions of social justice and the priorities of the nation.

Toward a National University System

The lack of a central university campus is also a key problem. Most of Haiti's governing elites have been reluctant to concentrate a massive student population in an area "dangerous" to the public peace. This fear stems from the contagious "subversive" capacity of a volatile student world. Twice I have had the opportunity to work with colleagues within the academic community preparing a site for a central campus. Twice we had architects' models prepared by privately funded firms, and detailed conversations with faculty and students who would be most affected. Both times, the plans came to naught.

Today, the question has been raised in somewhat different terms with the emergence of private universities. The Adventist University has constructed a major campus in Diquini with ample multifunctional spaces and sports facilities. The Quisqueya University had just—a month before the earthquake—inaugurated new facilities for its Port-au-Prince campus, only to see it all destroyed on January 12. We will now have the opportunity to start anew in the planning of the location(s) and coordination of a national university system, including both public and private institutions.

This brings us to the question of the proliferation of new private universities, impelled by the massive numbers of eligible students seeking a higher education who cannot be accommodated by the UEH. These students are channeled into private universities, whose profiles range from serious academic institutions to low-quality, profit-making businesses. There are now some 150 private universities, with only forty or so recognized by the state. I should add that some of the serious private institutions have been, with foreign support, in the vanguard of certain specialized areas of study.

This trend has led to some serious competition with the state system. For example, the UEH School of Medicine admits a maximum of 200 students per year. Two of the more serious private universities, Notre Dame University and Quisqueya University, each admit double that number, though certain specialties can only be found at UEH. The required hours spent by private school graduates in internships and residencies at public hospitals are relatively few, but all titles and degrees must be approved by the state.

In another career track, some well-known, long-standing business schools that have

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previously operated at the secondary school level have been converted into technical schools at the university level. This has not improved the country's quality of higher education.

Finally, a new higher education law, still in gestation, will hopefully deal with the impact of the era of modernization and globalization on the reconstruction of academic institutions in Haiti. It is here that we must link the most important questions: What sort of academic and political practice is most appropriate for the strategic exploitation of the "human development index"? What is the relationship between the general culture and the specific formation of university administrative and technical personnel? How do we best make use of new technologies, like the use of the Internet in the schools? How do we plan for the use of school and university locations? How do we control the measure of the nation's rate of growth as compared with the human criteria at the base of every civilization?

International cooperation should reign in these areas of human intervention, and Haiti should take its bad fortune as something positive for the leaps forward based not on its "backwardness" (a word we should use no more), but on the archaic nature of its present stage of development.

[This article integrates portions of a longer essay, the author's "Breve esbozo histórico de la evolución de las instituciones universitarias en Haití," (unpublished manuscript, 2010), with the founding statement of the International Committee for the Construction of a University Campus for l'Université d'Etat d'Haiti (2010), the group the author chairs.] ■

In case you are still debating whether to attend this year's LASA Congress, here are 11 reasons not to miss our Toronto meeting this October 6-9:

• Pre-Congress Program

We are pleased to announce the first-ever Pre-Congress Program, to take place at 2:00PM on October 6, right before the official opening of the meeting. The program consists of *three academic seminars* on:

- 1) the political economy of the economic crisis in Latin America;
- 2) new scholarship on the Independence bicentennial; and
- 3) new trends in films and documentaries from Latin America.

In addition, we are offering a *symposium on publishing trends* in journals, books, and new media, starting at 4:30PM the same day. To learn more, visit: <<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/eng/congress/pr>>.

• Presidential Panels

Prominent scholars, invited by the LASA president, will address topics such as Obama's foreign policy, disaster relief in Chile and Haiti, the bicentennial of Independence movements, and the region's response to the latest economic crisis.

• Cultural Dialogues

This is another new feature. It consists of three debates every evening by leading intellectuals. One debate will focus on the role of the humanities; another will deal with the role of the social sciences; and the final debate centers on the role of policy innovation in the Americas today.

• Sessions and Workshops

More than 880 sessions with panelists from 48 countries.

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This new feature consists of a special workshop on writing successful research grant applications, led by representatives from the Fulbright Association and the Inter-American Foundation.

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LASA2010 will have the largest exhibit of books and instructional materials on Latin America and the Caribbean, and a chance to meet with editors.

• Film Festival

This award-winning festival of films and documentaries from Latin America provides opportunities to meet some prominent directors.

• The Gran Baile

A LASA favorite will return this year!

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All sessions will take place in the meeting space of two hotels, the Sheraton Center and the Toronto Hilton, within a five-minute walk of each other. The hotels are connected by a network of underground tunnels filled with shops and places to eat for all budgets. The hotels are centrally located, with most downtown attractions within walking distance.