

**Quality and the Role of the University**  
**Opening Remarks by Conference Chair, Leonidas-Phoebus Koskos**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on University Evaluation**  
**12 October 2007**  
**Athens, Greece**

Honored speakers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

As Chair of this 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Quality Assessment, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Athens and to the Conference Center of the Hellenic American Union.

Allow me to begin by acknowledging the representatives of the organizing institutions present here:

**Chris Spirou** – President, Hellenic American Union

**Ilias Kouskouvelis** - *Rector, University of Macedonia*

**Georgios Kalkanis** - *President, Technological Education Institute of Ionian Islands*

**Ömer Gebizlioglu** - *Vice Rector, University of Ankara*

**Alexander Fedotoff** - *Vice Rector of International Relations, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia*

**Sezai Rokaj** - *Rector, University of Tirana*

Let me also acknowledge Ms Marietta Giannakou, the previous Minister of Education, and former Minister Mr. Stefanos Manos. Both have been pioneers of reform in their respective areas.

Two years ago in this room, during the first conference, we began an important conversation about quality in higher education. We discussed methods of evaluating quality, the role of organizations that assess quality, and efforts to develop shared systems for the assurance of quality. The next three days will provide an opportunity for us to continue and deepen this conversation.

Quality assurance has become the reigning issue in the world of higher education. As stakeholders demand more and more accountability, institutions of higher learning are increasingly being asked to demonstrate evidence of quality.

But quality to what end?

In the service of *what*?

If quality implies value, then value to whom?

What does such value contribute to?

What, in the end, is the role of the university and what are the core values that it serves?

These core values are often expressed in an institution's mission. Although mission statements vary widely, they often state what the university strives to achieve; The principles that guide its work and the contribution it seeks to make.

In one view of assessment, evaluation consists in determining how far and how well the university is in fact achieving this mission. In a somewhat broader view, assessment may evaluate the mission itself, but only in terms of its appropriateness to the university's resources and history. Or the resonance it finds within members of the university community and the like.

The mission itself is taken for granted. But I would argue that there are certain fundamental values that a university must serve—and be judged on—whatever its particular mission or identity.

By its very nature, definition and tradition, and because it administers social resources, the university is an institution of social responsibility. The university is privileged to, but also—and more importantly—**obliged to** make a significant and lasting contribution to the progress of society and the well-being of its citizens. The university advances knowledge that fosters social development and furthers an open society. Indeed, the university not only furthers an open society, it itself serves as a model and incubator; as home for an open society. Governed by the values of freedom of scientific inquiry,

freedom of speech and open dialogue, the University can give birth to new ways of seeing the world and new solutions to problems. Instilled with the values of pluralism and inclusiveness, it is obliged to promote social mobility and social cohesion. Committed to the search for truth, knowledge and justice, it can be the conscience of the society it serves.

What I have just described, of course is an ideal case, and it is the work of institutions and stakeholders both within and outside the university — regulatory bodies, evaluation boards, university faculty; administrators; students and parents; writers and social critics; it is their work to determine to what extent the university actually functions in this way.

But do we in fact consider social responsibility, social contribution and social accountability when we consider a university's institutional effectiveness and quality?

We cannot disregard the societal dimension of a university, because this is what keeps the university from becoming a wholly self-referring institution whose effectiveness is then measured by its institutional success alone: higher external research funding, larger applicant pool, higher rates of degree completion, better placement ratios. These are important, but not an end in and of themselves.

If we do not consider the contributions that a university makes to social development and the role it plays in furthering an open society, we may fail to look behind the numbers and fail to ask questions such as: What kind of research is being funded, and how much of it is industry tied? From what social classes are applicants coming from? Are we graduating leaders and pioneers? If our students are successful, have they also come to love learning? Does our placement success mean that we have allowed market interests to exclusively determine our curricula? Do our alumni think and act as global citizens?

It is perhaps ironic that in many cases when universities fail to ask these questions, their students will.

The student upheavals in Paris, Berkeley and elsewhere in the late 60's were an attempt to redefine the university, which had lost its role as a social innovator and had come to reflect broader social stagnation. It was the students who gave back to the universities their role in the vanguard of society.

The role of the university in social progress is particularly crucial in emerging economies and societies. If the university is not continually rethinking itself, questioning itself, reforming itself, if it is not truly open to society, it will become an organ of **under-**development and will deepen discrimination instead of promoting social cohesion.

In Greece, the public university had always been a channel of social mobility and instrumental in redistributing wealth. This has not been the case for the last thirty years. It remains to be seen whether Greek university faculty members, women and men of principle, talent and intellectual acuity, will wish to accept the suicidal stagnation of the educational system. Or whether will instead endeavor to redefine the role of their institutions and themselves as academics. Indeed, if Greek public universities remain as they are, they will increase the size of the intellectual proletariat, sever the relationship between university education and social development, deepen class divisions, erode social cohesion and in all probability lead to social upheaval.

Please note that in Greece there can be little support and participation in the reform of higher education. We are a country where the overwhelming majority of the ruling elite and political class send their daughters and sons to study abroad. A country where inferior educational programs have been imported as a commodity for local consumption. Indeed, a new form of intellectual colonialism.

Allow me to note here parenthetically that the key issue in higher education in Greece is not whether or not private universities should exist. It is though an important question regarding human and civil rights; if they are not allowed to operate, the Constitution of our country will keep protecting a state monopoly in an area where freedom should prevail.

But the present Conference is about education, not about civil rights; so let us turn again to the main issue

One must understand that only radical reform in **public higher education** will return to Greek state universities the key social role I have talked about.

As regards the private tertiary educational institutions, their advantages have up to now emerged only because of the disadvantages of public higher education. If state universities lead the reform contingent, the quality of private higher education will also automatically be improved.

Universities should be places that seek to cultivate individuals with a rich awareness of our human heritage. Places of liberal education devoted to the developing the intellectual, civic, and creative capabilities of young people to the fullest. The obligation of educators should be to instill in our students the love of learning, the capacity for critical and creative thinking, moral sensibility, and social consciousness; one that recognizes education as a privilege, carrying with it a responsibility to work for social justice and social progress.

Make no mistake: as we develop standards, procedures, and guidelines for the assurance of quality, and as we pour over audits, self-studies, and workroom documents to determine whether institutions are meeting those standards, we are shaping values that will inform teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

In a world threatened by ecological collapse, ethnic hatred, exploitation and poverty, we must see to it that our universities offer quality programs that prepare students for careers that make a difference not only in their personal lives, but in the world in which they live. Students who will become true global citizens, who, without losing their own ethnic or national identity will be able to encounter, appreciate and truly converse with others from different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

The initiative to do so will come, in part, from within the university itself. Nonetheless, regulatory boards and assessment entities have an equally important role to play. If they focus only on quantitative indicators, infrastructure, expenditures and the like, they will only make it easier for universities to avoid confronting their social responsibilities.

If, on the contrary, the regulators and evaluators consider that the quality of a University is also integrally linked with its responsibility for social development; If their standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance reflect this guiding principle; then and only then, the regulatory bodies and the assessment boards will decisively assist universities return to their mission as pioneers of social mobility, social development, and social progress.