

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND BENCHMARKING ACADEMIC CEREMONIES: THE ORGANISATION OF CONGREGATIONS IN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA, GHANA.

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an overview of incorporating quality assurance and events management principles in the organisation of congregations in institutions of higher learning. It accomplishes this by identifying challenges associated with the organization of congregations in UEW and prescribes some solutions to those challenges in the light of quality assurance measures, principles in higher education as well as benchmarking practises. The challenges identified included stress on key institutional officers, deserting ceremonial grounds before official closing, improper dressing by graduands, problems associated with the use of open and partially enclosed venues, poor sound quality and attendant problems. The paper recommends some good practices such as delegating authority, use of enclosed venues, managing risks and the adoption of a graduation week policy.

INTRODUCTION

Congregation is the term used to describe graduation ceremonies. In other parts of the world, it is termed commencement ceremonies or admission ceremonies or baccalaureate. It means a gathering of members and friends of a University to witness and celebrate the conferring of degrees on graduands. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2009) defines graduation as a conferral or receipt of an academic degree or diploma marking completion of studies. The Collins Thesaurus of the English Language (2002) defines graduation as an academic exercise in which diplomas are conferred. The essence of congregation is to ensure that graduating students are officially or formally conferred with degrees or diplomas.

Quality Assurance has become an essential aspect of higher education globally, especially in the wake of increasing presence of public and private higher education institutions. Since 2010, almost every country in the world has developed and instituted a quality assurance programme in its higher education sector. The importance of ensuring quality in education therefore cannot be overemphasized. Literature has indicated that the term Quality Assurance includes processes such as evaluation programmes, accreditation and audit (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009). Hangula (2011:3) defines Quality Assurance as “the continuous improvement of the quality of education and the products thereof, through a systematic process, for which openness to comparison with others based on agreed benchmarks is paramount.” Quality assurance also encapsulates “all policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is measured, maintained and developed” (Nyathi et al. 2011:20). Thus, quality assurance is about defining, assuring, maintaining and improving the quality of a higher education institution.

It has been acknowledged that the long term aim of quality assurance is to cultivate a culture where everyone looks out for opportunities to improve and ensure that an institution complies with fixed criteria (Nyathi, Kadhila, Aipanda, 2011). It has also been indicated that quality assurance promotes accountability of the institution to its stakeholders and promotes transparency of the institution’s systems. It has again been expressed that “each unit, department and division in an institution is responsible for the quality of its mandated activities (Nyathi, et. al, 2011:11).” It is expected that the operational units of an institution strives to promote and maintain quality in their activities. Likewise in the organization of academic activities including congregations certain principles must be ensured to assure quality in it delivery.

The University of Education, Winneba is a teacher training university in Ghana. The role of quality in the institution is to ensure the continuous improvement in the mandated activities of the institution. Ensuring quality education in UEW should be of concern to all individuals in the university community: management, academics, administrators, other staff and students.

Over the years, different institutions across the globe have developed different modalities for holding congregations. Procedures and traditions vary in different places. The questions that underpin this memorandum are: what quality measures informs the final output and delivery of an institution’s academic and administrative activities and what lessons, good practices and traditions of organizing congregations are worth emulating in our local context (UEW)?

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF CONGREGATIONS

Oxford University is said to have organised the first Baccalaureate Ceremony or Graduation Ceremony in 1432 (Rae, 2006). It was a time to confer degrees on ministers who had completed their studies at Oxford University. Over the years, the ceremony has metamorphosed into a moment of conferring degrees or diplomas over a wide range of graduands. Different institutions across the globe have developed different modalities for holding Congregations. Procedures and traditions vary in different places.

In the United States of America (USA), for instance, where hundreds of degrees or diplomas are conferred on graduands, the ceremony is held at a sports stadium, amphitheatre, parade ground or

lawn. Other large - often outdoor venues are also used (en.wikipedia.org). Such main ceremonies have been preceded by smaller ceremonies where Deans of Academic Faculties confer diplomas on their graduating students. In other instances, several ceremonies have been held over weekends for very large numbers of graduating students, instead of a single ceremony.

In most institutions in the United Kingdom, Congregations are held twice a year. The ceremonies are often held in enclosed venues such as Halls and Theatres. The University of Manchester, one of United Kingdom's largest and oldest Universities organises two graduation ceremonies: Summer and Winter Graduations. The Summer Graduation due to large numbers of graduands is spread over a two-week period. It is usually held in July. The Winter Graduation is spread over a week and is usually held in December (University of Manchester, 2012). During the Summer Graduation Ceremony, different University personalities are made to attend and preside over the different sessions of the programme. Personalities used include the Vice-Presidents and Deans. They often take on the roles expected to be performed by the President or Vice-Chancellor and Registrar. The benefit of this practice is that it allows more graduation sessions to be held at different times with different personalities of the University having vital roles to play. It therefore reduces the pressure exerted on the President or the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar.

Kingston University, London, a multi-campus institution, has adopted Faculty-Based Graduation Ceremonies. Faculties are allowed to organise or plan their ceremonies. Four main Graduation Ceremonies are held in the year to commemorate academic achievements: January, April or May, October and November. Several sessions (Morning, Afternoon and Evening) are held over a number of days during these months. Selected faculties, departments and schools graduate students during these periods. The Ceremonies are held either in theatres or halls. The benefit of holding several sessions in a year allows each faculty the space to determine the time to graduate students from their faculty. The Academic Regulation of Kingston University makes provision for the Vice-Chancellor, who is the Chairman of the Academic Board to delegate his authority to others (often senior members of the academic board). This academic policy reduces the burden of having the Vice-Chancellor to attend all the graduation ceremonies held in the University.

In Africa, an institution such as Makerere University of Uganda adopted a graduation week policy in 2008 (Makerere University, 2013). The graduation week is organised during the last week of January. The graduation ceremonies are held in a partially enclosed venue - the freedom square - in order to accommodate the large numbers of graduands. During this week-long celebration period, different colleges, faculties and schools graduate students on each day marking the one-week (Alina, 2012). The Chancellor, the Chairman of the University Council, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Registrar attend such ceremonies and read various speeches to grace the function.

In Ghana, the University of Ghana, Legon organises two main Graduation Ceremonies in a year: the March and November Sessions (University of Ghana, 2013). The venue for hosting the ceremonies has been the Athletics Oval, an open venue. The Chancellor, the Chairman of the University Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar attend the various sessions to undertake their respective roles at congregations. The practice of having two sessions in a year has helped to an extent in addressing the large numbers of graduands per session.

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, has adopted an annual week-long period of graduation. Each day witnesses degrees conferred on graduands from some selected Colleges and Schools at the Great Hall. The graduation week is climaxed on Saturday. The ceremony is attended by key functionaries of congregation such as the Chancellor, the Chairman of the University Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar. The annual week-long ceremony has helped in reducing pressure on limited facilities and resources such as the ceremonial venue and has also helped in reducing pressure on the organizers.

The week-long celebration of academic excellence is often organised by institutions which have adopted the Collegiate System of governance. The Collegiate System of governance is the system where the governing authority and functions are divided between a central administration and a number of constituent colleges. These Colleges are given some level of autonomy to undertake some vital academic activities (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegiate_university). Such levels of autonomy vary from one institution to the other. Some colleges are given the right to confer their own degrees, whilst others depend on the central administration system for the purposes of degree conferment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE DEFINED

Like all other tertiary institutions UEW organizes congregations. During its twenty one (21) years of existence, about eighteen (18) congregations have been organized. The question is how successful or otherwise have these ceremonies been and can there be any improvements? A short discussion on the subjects of quality assurance and benchmarking may be useful in this context.

Quality assurance refers to the processes and procedures that systematically monitor different aspects of a service, process or facility to detect, correct and ensure that quality standards are being met. In developing products and services, quality assurance is any systematic process of checking to see whether a product or service being developed is meeting specified requirements.

Quality assurance relates to the achievement of educational programme standards established by institutions, professional organizations, government, and/or standard-setting bodies established by government. Quality assurance mechanisms are the processes by which the achievement of these standards is measured. A quality assurance system is said to increase customer confidence and a company's credibility, to improve work processes and efficiency, and to enable a company to better compete with others.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The following are some of the operational areas of assessing quality in higher education. They include: quality of programmes and courses, quality of teaching and learning experiences, quality of research, quality of community engagement activities and extension services, assessment of quality of support services and assessment of the quality of infrastructure, resources and facilities (Nyathi et. al, 2011).

There are some basic principles which support internal quality assurance in higher education. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2009) recommends the formulation of a policy and procedures for quality assurance in an institution; the need to conduct

monitoring, approval and periodic review of programmes and awards; assessment of students using published criteria, regulations and procedures must be applied consistently; quality assurance of teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information systems and public information.

A university's goal for Quality Assurance is to ensure that its objectives are met through regular self-evaluation, internal and external review, and by benchmarking results against relevant national and international organisations to compare and evaluate its performance.

BENCHMARKING

In addition to using quality assurance mechanisms to improve upon the organisation of congregations in UEW it is also recommended that the University would seek to benchmark on some, if not all, of the features mentioned as common to all universities.

Benchmarking is the process of comparing and measuring an organization against others, anywhere in the world, to gain information on philosophies, practices, and measures that will help take action to improve performance. In simple terms, benchmarking is the practice of being humble enough to admit that others are better at something and being wise enough to learn how to match - and even surpass - them at it.

Benchmarking is the process of comparing and measuring an organization's operations or its internal processes against those of a best-in-class performer from inside or outside its industry.

Benchmarking is the process of comparing the business processes and performance metrics including cost, cycle time, productivity, or quality to another that is widely considered to be an industry standard benchmark or best practice. Essentially, benchmarking provides a snapshot of the performance of an entity and helps it to understand where it is in relation to a particular standard.

PROCESS BENCHMARKING

It is a systematic and continuous improvement process; a process of continually measuring and comparing an organization's business processes against business pro leaders anywhere in the world to gain information which will help the organization take action to improve its performance.

It is recommended that UEW introduces benchmarking in the organisation of congregations because benchmarking:

- has increasingly become a popular improvement tool
- concerns processes and practices
- is a respected means of identifying processes that require major change
- compares process and/or practice with a competitor's best-in-class process or practice
- seeks to find "secrets of success" and adapt for improvement.

UEW can for example benchmark with any of the sister universities in areas like preparations before congregations, budgets, souvenirs and memorabilia, among others. Does the UEW congregation

budget compare favourably with that of the other universities? What are the adjustments to be made? are a few of the issues which could be considered to improve the organisation of congregations.

BENCHMARKING AS IT RELATES TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Today's competitive world does not allow time for gradual improvement in areas in which a company lags way behind.
- Benchmarking can tell a firm where it stands relative to best-in-class practices and processes, and which processes must be changed.
- Benchmarking provides a best-in-class model to be adopted, or even improved upon.
- Modern customers are better informed and demand the highest quality and lowest prices. Companies have a choice to either perform or go out of business.
- Benchmarking supports total quality by providing the best means for rapid, significant process/practice improvement.

EVENTS MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES IN CONGREGATIONS

Congregation is an event. A lot of processes precede it. As an event, its organization should follow the principles of successful events management. Event planning requires foresight; follow through and attention to detail. One needs to see the big picture as well as the tiniest of details. No matter how large or how small any event is, vision, experience, skills and knowledge are required to fulfill its ultimate potential. Other principles and factors to consider in organizing congregations include:

- level of wheelchair access available
- the capacity to accommodate participants and audience
- car parking facilities
- fire safety precautions
- toilet and baby changing facilities
- possible disruptions to traffic
- telephone and first aid kit on site
- difficulties with access to the venue, if any
- risks of the venue, if any

SOME COMMON FEATURES OF CONGREGATIONS

Different institutions across the globe have developed different modalities for holding Congregations. Procedures and traditions vary in different places. However, the following are common features in almost all congregations. The subject of quality assurance may be discussed in the light of these features:

PREPARATIONS BEFORE THE EVENT

Universities and Colleges make elaborate preparations towards graduation ceremonies. The preparations fall under two broad categories. Those made to host graduates and the large number of visitors who patronize the ceremonies. But of great interest in this discussion are the preparations to give graduands a great occasion; including the updates on the websites of the universities to inform

and educate graduands and also to solicit relevant information from them. The graduands are offered the opportunity to register to attend the ceremony and place orders for goods and services.

Of great significance in the preparations towards congregations are the announcements of the dates for the ceremonies, arrangements for registration and placing orders for goods and services on the occasion. Some of the old universities announce dates and other arrangements not later than six (6) months before the dates of the congregations. Elaborate preparations before congregations do not make life easy for university administrators alone but go a long way to make the occasions pleasant and memorable.

BUDGET OR COSTS

How much should it cost a university to organize a congregation? And how much would it cost graduands to attend and participate in the ceremonies? In the face of dwindling government subventions, congregations should be a very important avenue for generating income for a university. However, the costs to be borne by graduands should be as minimal as possible so as to get almost every graduand to celebrate the occasion whilst the university seize the opportunity to rake in as much income as possible. Very good organization and planning as well as good collaboration between the University and private entrepreneurs will be the key to achieving this objective.

GOWNS

It is not compulsory to wear an 'academic dress' (gown, hood and hat) for the occasion in some institutions. But even in these institutions however, everyone is encouraged to wear an 'academic dress' and most graduates make an effort on the day. In almost all Ghanaian universities, it is a requirement to wear a gown.

The type of gown, hood and hat as well as the colours to wear depend primarily on the qualification to be awarded. Graduates are entreated to know the type of 'academic dress' they would wear as part of their preparations towards the ceremony.

PHOTOGRAPHY

No graduating student would like to miss out on the photographs. Professions and amateurs strive to take shots before, during and even after ceremony. They are ready to take pictures of you in your hat and gown, certificate in hand (hopefully smiling and with your eyes open).

SOUVENIRS AND MEMORABILIA

These are the things which will not only keep the memories of one's graduation day but also the memories of one's mates and alma mater. A DVD, a specially designed clock, a ring etc. will be a wonderful way to relive one's days in college. The graduands could register for their souvenirs and memorabilia as part of the preparations towards the ceremony. Carefully selected companies could supply these items for sale with a small margin being retained by the university.

UNRULY BEHAVIOUR

Many a ceremony potentially face disruptions. Excessive noise from cheering, clapping, etc by graduates or their guests turn to mar the beauty of an otherwise colourful ceremony. Stern

instructions and various prohibitions are issued prior to the ceremony and a wide range of sanctions including the withholding of certificates are brought against those who put up unruly behaviours and flout acceptable norms.

GIVING OUT CERTIFICATES

Many universities, especially in Ghana, have had challenges giving out Certificates and transcripts on the day of graduation. They often issue something to represent certificates and or transcripts. The situation has often been a big disincentive to attending congregations. Those who do attend return not very fulfilled, however great the occasion had been because they had graduated without their certificates and transcripts in hand.

Most universities, including UEW, follow a tradition of not replacing or issuing duplicate certificates but others do. Whatever the case, receiving one's certificates in one thing all graduating students look forward to.

AN OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONS IN UEW

The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) has organised seventeen (17) congregations since its inception in 1992. Organization of graduations in UEW since 1992 has experienced some gradual transformations. Formerly, one (1) ceremony was organized once in a year for the entire University at the Winneba Campus. However, from 2005 to 2010, one congregation has been organised on the Winneba, Kumasi and Mampong Campuses each year. In 2011 two sessions of congregations (Morning and Afternoon) were held on the Winneba and Kumasi campuses. However, the Mampong Campus held one session of Congregation. In 2012 and 2013, due to rising numbers in graduating students' population two Congregation sessions (November and April) were held at the Winneba and Kumasi Campuses. Two sessions a day were held for the November session of the congregation.

The trend in graduate output from 1992/1993 to 2011/2012 academic year has indicated a steady increase in graduate populations, except 2000/01; 2001/02; 2005/06; 2009/10 and 2011/12 (UEW, 2012). The increase has not been without challenges in terms of having to organize congregations.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN UEW CONGREGATIONS

Though efforts have been made over the years to improve upon subsequent graduation ceremonies, the following challenges have been witnessed during the events:

STRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

During the graduation ceremonies of UEW (Winneba, Kumasi and Mampong Campuses), key personalities such as the Chancellor, the Chairman of Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar, who are responsible for conferring degrees and diplomas and also play vital roles have had to be physically present to undertake various functions at congregations on all the campuses of the University. This practice, to an extent, exerts pressure on the officers and organizers of congregations. The issue of stress on key institutional officers could aggravate when student numbers make it such that the number of graduation sessions in a year should be increased.

Evidence has shown that stress could lead to many human diseases and ailments such as depression, cardiovascular diseases and cancers (Cohen et. al., 2007). It has again been identified by Vyas (2012) that long-distance travel could lead to the deterioration of several human diseases such as chronic heart diseases, kidney diseases, blood pressure, diabetes, respiratory disorders and back and

neck aches. In a nation with poor road networks, it compounds the issue of stress. That is why it is imperative to adopt measures which seek to reduce stress on institutional officers.

DESERTING CEREMONIAL GROUNDS

Many graduating students leave the grounds before closing. In recent congregations in the University, it has become a common sight to behold graduands leaving the ceremonial grounds minutes or hours before closing. The reasons given for this practice has been the desire of friends and relatives to spend some time with their wards before making their return journeys back home. It has also been brought to light that some relatives and friends of graduands in an attempt to avoid heavy traffic on their return journeys leave the grounds earlier, especially for those ceremonies held on Winneba Campus. Other indications have proven that some graduands leave the grounds for no reason other than to chat and snap photographs with colleagues, friends and relatives. This practice often leaves behind an unpleasant sight at the ceremonial grounds as institutional officers, dignitaries, invited guests and members of convocation remain seated, whilst graduands, friends and relatives of graduands dissent the ceremonial grounds. Such behaviours affect congregation procedures or the order of the ceremony.

Congregation programmes or procedures require that the event begins and ends with procession and recession by key institutional officers and members of convocation. Where graduands, friends and relatives of graduands leave their seats before the official recession, standardized congregation procedures are compromised. Also, such acts portray indiscipline and tarnish the image of the institution in the eyes of invited guests and dignitaries. As graduands, relatives and friends of graduands leave the grounds, it generates noise and this interferes with the ceremony. Scheduled institutional officers expected to take on various functions eventually rush through the remaining programme in an effort to avoid the disturbing and disgraceful sights.

IMPROPER DRESSING

Improper dressing by some graduating students has been detected during graduation ceremonies. Generally, graduands are expected to be modestly and decently dressed to merit the prime importance and value of the ceremonies. Appropriate dress codes for various functions in the University have been prescribed in the handbook for students of UEW. However, disturbing dress codes have been worn by some graduating students during such ceremonies. The improper dressing is often detected either during the conferment of the degree or diploma or after the entire ceremony. As a result, it becomes difficult ensuring that graduands adhere to the prescribed dress codes.

Improper dressing to official ceremonies such as congregations compromise and undermine the quality and beauty of an important academic event as a congregation.

VENUES AND SEATS FOR CONGREGATIONS

The use of open and partially enclosed venues has not been without challenges. Such venues make it very easy for graduands, friends and relatives of graduands to desert ceremonial grounds and make it difficult to check improper dressing of graduands. Other striking issues worth considering are the lack of adequate seats at the ceremonial grounds. This has led to the encroachment of designated spaces for accredited persons by relatives and friends of graduating students. This

practice disturbs the seating arrangements planned for the ceremony and to a large extent, affects the order of congregation proceedings.

POOR SOUND QUALITY AND ATTENDANT PROBLEMS

Poor sound quality has been associated with the Public Address (PA) Systems used at UEW congregations. Inadequate seating spaces provided at the ceremonial grounds compel some friends and relatives of graduands to sit at distant places from the venue. This section of the audience strain to hear various speeches as a result of the poor sound quality of the PA system used. Also the lack of projectors at the ceremonial grounds makes it difficult for those who sit at such distant places to observe what transpires on the dais. Their inability to have a clearer view of what transpires on stage and follow proceedings compels them to engage in private conversations which eventually interfere with the order of proceedings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the challenges being encountered with the organization of graduation ceremonies in UEW, the following are recommended:

DELEGATING AUTHORITY

During congregations, the Chancellor confers on qualified persons degrees, diplomas and honorary degrees; the Chairman of the University Council gives the welcome address and declares the assembly duly constituted. He also dissolves congregations. The Vice-Chancellor gives his address or presents the annual report; the Registrar moderates the programme; and the Deans present certificates to graduands.

UEW could copy the University of Manchester's way of holding graduation ceremonies to address the stress on officials, staff and even graduands. The summer graduation is spread over a week or two and during each session different personalities (mostly senior members) play traditional roles usually expected to be performed by the Chancellor, Chairman of Council, Vice-Chancellor or President and Registrar of the institution. This reduces the pressure on the key functionaries of congregations because they are not made to attend all the graduation sessions held over the week or two weeklong periods.

With this approach in perspective, the Vice-Chancellor's Address could be read on his behalf by the Principals of College in Mampong and Kumasi. Also, the role of the Registrar could be played by the College Registrars or Deputy Registrars on the satellite campuses. The Chairman of the University Council could request a council member on each of the campuses to perform duties expected to be played by him. Similarly, the Chancellor could also request someone to represent him at such functions and perform roles expected of him. In this way, several graduation sessions could be held in a week, without exerting pressure on key functionaries of congregations in terms of having to travel to all the venues. On the final day of the ceremonies such key personalities would be present to mark the climax of the events.

USE OF ENCLOSED VENUES

Literature has indicated that the application of certain principles and standards of good practice can reduce the uncertainty associated with planning and organizing for a safe and successful event. Amongst the standards of good practice includes providing a safe venue and preparing for the unexpected (Dublin City Council Events Unit, 2012). It has again been argued that the number of people attending an event is a major determinant factor to selecting a venue for an event.

As the paper suggests, adopting a graduation week policy, could mean the number of persons attending each day marking the week long period could be managed. Hence, enclosed venues could be an ideal place for holding congregations. Again, as a way of having to deal with the challenge of graduands deserting ceremonial grounds before closing, such ceremonies could be held in large capacity auditoriums that would ensure that graduands are seated on time for the start of the programme and remain seated throughout the ceremony. Also, since the early raining period starts in April, this strategy would help provide shelter for all present at the ceremony ensuring a safe venue for everyone. It would also be easier detecting graduands who are not properly dressed and ensure that they put on the recommended dress code for graduation ceremonies.

More so, a controlled space would ensure that friends and relatives of graduating students remain seated in their allocated spaces and do not encroach on other spaces reserved for the media, dignitaries and members of convocation. Ensuring a suitable venue for an event such as congregation assures quality in the delivery and output of the event.

MANAGING RISK

Literature has thrown light on the need to assess risk and manage risk involved in organizing events. Dublin City Council Events Unit (2012:8) spells out “four general areas of losses associated with events: people, property, income and liability.” It has been recommended that risk assessment should be carried out in relation to the physical characteristics of the venue, likely audience behavior, technical installations, nature of performance, sudden change in weather condition and others. This would help put in place measures to minimize the risk factors.

Adequate and appropriate provision of facilities which relates to technical installations, suitable venue and maximum security could help minimize risk in the organization of congregations.

THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, ASANTE MAMPONG AS A CASE STUDY

The use of enclosed venues such as auditoriums to hold congregations ensure efficiency. The seating capacity of the auditorium determines the number of graduands to graduate on each day marking the period of the ceremonies. Using the College of Agriculture, Asante Mampong as a case study, the three hundred (300) seater-capacity auditorium at the college could be used to hold congregations. If six hundred (600) students were graduating from the College of Agriculture in a particular academic year, the 300 seater-capacity auditorium can be used to organise congregations for the six hundred (600) students over a period of six (6) days. From Monday to Saturday, a congregation could be organized for hundred (100) of the students each day. Each of the hundred (100) students could have two (2) guests at the ceremony. The congregation could start at 9:00am

and end at 11:00am. In future when the number of graduands increases, a second session could be held from 1:00pm to 3:00pm for another faculty or school on each day.

As is the practice at University of Manchester in the United Kingdom, different sessions of congregations are organised usually over a week or two and different personalities, who are mostly senior members are assigned roles to perform at the ceremonies. This lessens the pressure on key institutional officers. Similarly, the Principal of the College of Agriculture can represent the Chancellor or the Chairman of Council, a Dean can represent the Vice-Chancellor, the College Registrar or a Deputy Registrar can represent the Registrar and a Head of Department can play the role of the Dean on the first five days of the congregations to be held from Monday to Friday. The officials above will act on behalf of the senior officials of the University. So if a principal of a college was representing the Vice-Chancellor, he or she could present the Vice-Chancellor's annual report. The climax of the congregations, which would be held on the Saturday, would last for a longer time than the first five days. Special events such as honouring the most outstanding students and staff will take place on this day. Dignitaries such as the Omanhene of Asante Mampong Traditional Area (Mamponghe) can be invited to grace the ceremony. The key institutional officers such as the Chancellor, Chairman of Council, Vice-Chancellor and Registrar will also be present on this final day to grace the function. As mentioned earlier, the key institutional officers when present on the final day of the ceremony would take on their primary responsibilities at the ceremony.

The success of the Mampong experience can be replicated on the Kumasi and Winneba campuses with some modifications as may be appropriate but would still make the organisation of congregations simple, beautiful and less tiring for officials of the university.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, it can be said that organizing congregations can be made to be simple, effective and efficient when the institution learns from certain principles of quality which have informed the organization of congregations in other parts of the world. Such principles include but not limited to the following: adopting a graduation week policy and the need to reduce stress on the key functionaries of congregations through a delegation exercise. The paper also suggests that such delegation exercise could be possible when the University Statute is revised or interpreted in a way which supports this argument. Also, a policy framework on Quality Assurance which spells out various processes and procedures for organizing academic activities in the University including congregations should be developed and effectively implemented. There is also the need to ensure that facilities which support the organization of academic exercise are in high standards of quality to forestall challenges. Risk management at the event should be given attention. More so, there is the need to ensure that transport services are arranged and well publicized for the large numbers of graduating students and the public as a means of meeting the information system need and public information requirement of quality standard in higher education.

Finally, it can be suggested that the College of Agricultural Education, Ashanti Mampong case study cited above could be adopted to become a standard for congregations in UEW.

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