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## A strong university champions transparency student feedback

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A graduation ceremony. Universities should collect, evaluate, and modify programming based on undergraduate student feedback, among other avenues. FILE PHOTO | NMG

The ability to think critically, examine phenomena, build confidence to adapt, boost economic resiliency, and contribute towards community empowerment all form reasons for prospective students to pursue undergraduate education. However, not all university education is created equal.

In continuation of Business Talk's mini-series on tertiary education in Kenya, last week this column investigated selection criteria that every student and parent should utilise to choose a university for undergraduate studies. Today, we delve into part two of selecting an undergraduate programme.

First, how much does the university collect, evaluate, and modify programming based on undergraduate student feedback? The tertiary education sector stands as a famous example of an industry slow to respond to market demands and customer feedback. Unfortunately, since undergraduate students consume service but others, such as parents, often pay for the education, then the low elasticity demand for bad lectures, slow administrative services, or dismal campus environments builds complacency.

Prospective students should ask admissions personnel for concrete examples of when undergraduate student feedback forms following a course actually changed something in the classroom. Universities should remove poorly evaluated faculty from lecturing responsibilities.

Beyond the classroom, do elected student leaders regularly meet with a university's top management at least monthly? Are the learners' ratings of faculty made publicly available to students in order for them to select classes in fully informed disclosure? Are student course materials made available electronically? A strong university champions transparency and student feedback.

Second, learning beyond the classroom in extracurricular activities exists as one of the best life-preparation tools that any campus can offer. Club activities represent the extracurricular cornerstone of university life. However, allowing students to congregate for their own activities does not indicate adequate institutional support.

What extent does the university foster and encourage extracurricular activities? Prospective students should ask what percentage of the annual university budget is spent on undergraduate student clubs. Use the comparisons across campuses to make decisions on where you will enroll. Also investigate the level of autonomy that student clubs and leadership have in governing their own affairs. Many universities attempt to stifle student activities, opinions, and budget spending.

Third, a university should offer its undergraduates pursuing bachelor's degrees applied learning, not regurgitation of outdated theories. Students studying for a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship should not spend copious amounts of time learning "what is entrepreneurship", but rather actually start real businesses in their classes and gain techniques, coaching, and guidance along the way in an experiential learning approach.

Students studying journalism should not only look at examples of famous journalists, but instead start and submit their own content to receive feedback from famous journalists.

International relations scholars must not only learn about diplomacy triumphs of the 18th century but also take part in active applied learning such Africa Model United Nations in Nairobi, Global Model United Nations at Harvard, and start their own real NGOs housed at their tertiary institution.

Universities forcing only three-month paltry attachments at the end of an undergraduate programme is not sufficient to instill applied learning. The lack of experiential learning is why in Kenya we have graduates of accounting programmes who still do not know how to do real world tasks such as writing a cheque or conducting bank reconciliations.

So, prospective students and their parents must not only ask admissions officers, deans, and lecturers what is taught in classrooms but also HOW it gets taught.

*Dr Scott may be reached on [scott@ScottProfessor.com](mailto:scott@ScottProfessor.com) or on Twitter: @ScottProfessor*