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Dr. Tereso Abella, President of CLSU,
Ladies and gentlemen -

It is a great honor to have been invited to deliver a talk at this Academic Research Council Gala Night, here at Central Luzon State University (CLSU). Giving a talk on higher education these days, it’s quite hard not to mention the fourth industrial revolution. So, I would like to start by considering the challenges posted by the new cyber-physical systems world. For the education sector in general, the acceleration of disruptive changes will bring about new opportunities, for we can expect the new kinds of services to everyone in all sectors of society, business and public, as well as to individual citizen. The higher education sector will do what we have always been doing, that is to provide talents to society. How do we do it? How do universities prepare the young people for the talent pool of the new industrial revolution and the re-industrialization of our socio-economic system?

Allow me to read to you the two main passages from the World Economic Forum 2016, on the longer-term focus for the education sector. First,

Rethinking education systems: By one popular estimate 65% of children entering primary schools today will ultimately work in new job types and functions that currently don’t yet exist. Technological trends such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution will create many new cross-functional roles for which employees will need both technical and social and analytical skills. Most existing education systems at all levels provide highly siloed training and continue a number of 20th century practices that are hindering progress on today’s talent and labour market issues.¹

And second,

Incentivizing lifelong learning: The dwindling future population share of today’s youth cohort in many ageing economies implies that simply reforming current education systems to better equip today’s students to meet future skills requirements – as worthwhile and daunting as that task is – is not going to be enough to remain competitiv. Ageing countries won’t just need lifelong learning – they will need wholesale reskilling of existing workforces throughout their lifecycle.²

There are implications from the above longer-term focus for the education sector. The definition of “high skill” is reconsidered, by not relying on the advanced or specialized education, and not the set of defined capabilities within a profession or domain of expertise. The emphasis is on the ability of the workers to adapt continuously and learn new skills and approaches within a variety of contexts.³

Thus, with the world moving towards “the 4.0 society”, what our graduates need will be the combination of the advanced/specialized knowledge, skills and abilities, together with the cross-functional skills such as creativity, active learning, ICT literacy, social skills, complex problem-solving skills, etc. For the universities, does it require a paradigm shift? There are some questions to be asked.

At the university level, the questions are: how to become the center of global knowledge networks; how to facilitate innovation and entrepreneurship in the university-private sector-government partnerships; and how to develop the capability to manage a huge

¹ World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, January 2016.

² *Ibid.*

³ See Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (World Economic Forum, 2016).

volume of data so as to react or engage effectively with the strategic and administrative demands. At the curriculum level, there are some issues: how to accommodate the new core work-related skills in the curriculum; how to utilize alternative and innovative learning and teaching approaches; how to apply technology to learning; how to balance the demand of quality as the public good and the discipline's particular characters; and how to re-professionalize the academic staff.

I cannot answer these questions. Instead, I always look at the questions and challenges to the universities in ASEAN in a form of a "tension" or "dilemma". A dilemma is an unresolved problem. The main dilemma our universities are facing is the dilemma between "academic excellence" and "access to education". In between academic excellence of the university **and** the equal access to higher education resources, there is a tension between: quality and quantity; ranking and social justice; and global skill sets and individual needs. Why is this tension or dilemma? It might be because partly university has the resources and the delivery capabilities that are needed by individuals and many sectors of the society. And partly university is an institution with multiple missions. University cannot, and never be, the institution with a single mission. University produces talents or human resources for the society. University responds or serves the needs of the local communities. University could provide solutions to the business sector. And university can take part in the social and economic development of the country.

There is no easy solution to that tension. Despite that, the single most important factor is always the "academic standard" or the quality. This is because it is one of the two "currencies" that is most important in human relations. The other is money. Then, can QA or quality assurance be the answer to this tension or dilemma? I think not.

Yesterday I attended the Graduate Ball of Central Luzon State University. I have never been to the graduation ball before in my life. It's not the common or normal tradition where I come from. Accordingly, I could see something as an observer from the outsider's perspective. At the end of the official function, there was the moment when the President of the University addressed the graduates and gave a toast, standing facing the graduates was the line of university's lecturers and top administrative officials, it was the moment when the President uttered these words: "behold graduates, these are your teachers, and behold teachers, those are your graduates ...". This may look prima facie as ordinary words in an ordinary event of the universities. But it's not. To me, it signifies a lot. These words signify our culture. The culture of looking after your students until their graduation and beyond; and the culture of respect giving by the students to their beloved teachers. It's the culture of looking after your students until they finish their study programs. Culture is the key word here.

The topic that I have been given to deliver today is about "academic excellence and quality assurance". I don't want to over-emphasize the important role of QA or quality assurance in higher education especially at the program level. There are some negative pictures related to QA in this respect. Some of these negative pictures are: inflexible rubrics, inflexible curriculum, obsession with quantitative measures, irrelevant behavioral changes, etc. Given the challenges of globalisation and the post-internet society, the convergence of cloud, big data and internet of things, quality assurance must be done within the wider set of educational development encompassing curriculum design & implementation, development of teaching & learning approaches, resource management (including the use of your social capital), talent management (not just succession planning), society & stakeholders engagements, and governance. And QA must be done with "Deep Learning" as the target in all teaching classes and learning activities, within the university community whereby quality **culture** and practices are the norm.