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The many roles of academic leaders



By Datuk Dr Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid | jjabaiw@yahoo.com

Writer is a deputy vice-chancellor, INTI Laureate International University

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MIGHT AND RIGHT: The right combination of leadership is crucial to face challenges



ACADEMIC leaders reside in many domains and exercise many roles. While the sites for academic leadership are typically universities, academic leaders are also located elsewhere.

For instance, there are academic leaders in the Academy of Leadership for Higher Education and in the Malaysian teacher education institutes, in ministries and in agencies such as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

Academic leaders are also in think tanks and in Academies of Sciences and Humanities.

One very important area of academic leadership is through professional organisations. Academic leaders are expected to be the guardians of academic integrity and professionalism, and to protect the rights of students and teachers.

The integrity of their contributions involves their responsibility to reflect

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the best of thinking and to surpass their uninformed personal opinions, ego and ignorance.

A society which does not have academic leadership does not have the capacity to define itself, understand its past, find solutions for the problems and challenges of the present, chart out its future and develop national character in its own mould.

Academic leaders should inspire the new generation of path finders, pioneers, inventors, innovators, adventurers, and a creative, democratic, just and authentic generation of scholars with the courage to struggle against oppression of any type.

Academic leaders can contribute at the international level, not just to solve the problems of their immediate community but also the problems of humanity.

Academic leaders in Malaysia are contributing ideas to solve the problems of climate change, economic underdevelopment, poverty, educational development, peace and security, disease prevention and control, and human capital development.

Academic leaders are the guardians of universal principles of human civilisation and promoters of the quality of decision-making regarding values and good thinking. They exercise leadership in important committees, such as academic boards and senates, and beyond, in national and international committees and commissions of importance.

Academic leadership is thought and global leadership for learning. Their role is to share existing mature knowledge and the state of understanding of cumulative and non-cumulative knowledge worth knowing, to question reality and develop hypotheses and theories, push further the boundaries of knowledge, generate new understandings and insights, where hitherto none exists.

Academic leadership is about developing knowledge content, thinking processes, mindful questioning, knowledge synthesis and management.

Academic leadership is about the disciplined mind which is able to analyse and make sense of phenomena and reality, whether regarding man and society or the permanent physical environment.

Academic leadership is about the struggle and pursuit of elegant thinking par excellence. Academic leaders are thought leaders and intellectual elites of society. Academic leaders provide exemplary leadership in their academic specialisations and niches, and as public intellectuals on broader matters. The strengths of these academic leaders constitute the knowledge strengths of society. The challenge for each academician and academic leader is to be the best they can be in their respective fields and contribute maximally towards the betterment of society.

There are more academicians and academic leaders than there are elected political leaders. Typically, political leaders are about the control and use of the might and instruments of state for good or otherwise. Typically, academic leaders are about the definitions of right and the use of mature ideas, the instruments of academe and the circle of virtues of the national and world community of scholars for the good of mankind.

The right combination of academic and political leaders, of might and right would place the society in good stead to face any kind of challenges and to contribute effectively towards the creation of higher levels of contemporary civilisation.

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