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The University of Gezira Advisory System: Academic Advising of Excellent Students

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1. Introduction and Justifications:

Excellent students are the promising scientists and leaders of their professions in the future and hence universities must assume full responsibility of supporting and encouraging those students during the undergraduate and postgraduate studies; a policy which can help producing competent graduates who can contribute significantly in the total development of the country. Traditionally excellent students are rewarded by prizes and financial incentives and enrollment in the academic staff as teaching assistants. Although the university rewards are useful in motivating students to achieve excellence, their benefits to the excellent students and the universities are rather limited; they are usually late and do not contribute in strengthening and enriching the curricula. Faculties and departments should have a clear plan of guiding and supporting excellent students; to help them contribute in the academic activities and choose their future careers appropriately. The academic advising system was introduced very early during establishment of the University of Gezira (1975) and has been included in the academic regulations, ever since it has been implemented, upgraded and evaluated several times. Experience showed that it is useful and effective in helping students achieve the University requirements of graduation; teachers and students are now familiar with it. However the system focuses on poor students and neglects excellent students. Following is a proposal of academic advising of excellent students. Examples are drawn from the curriculum of the Faculty of Medicine and the model could be adopted by other faculties.

2. Proposals of a model of advising excellent students Faculty of Medicine – University of Gezira (FMUG):

2.1. Objectives:

Choosing and applying appropriate methods of advising and supporting excellent students during their undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

2.2. Selection of excellent students:

It is imperative that excellent students should be identified and selected for advising and support as early as possible in the curriculum. The followings are suggested criteria of excellent students:

A student who achieves:

- A Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 4 in 2 consecutive semesters.
- A CGPA of 3.5 or more at graduation.
- The highest Grade Point Average (GPA) at the end of a semester.
- He/she should have no failure in any course and no punishment for misconduct.

2.3. Methods of advice and support:

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2.3.1 Required Courses for graduation

Each course in the curriculum includes a set of objectives (contents) which clearly indicate the level of expected learning outcome- perform, discuss, value, explain etc. The objectives are written by experts in the specific discipline. They aim to provide the graduate doctor with the optimum competencies required by the university and for the purpose of accreditation by the licensing regulatory body. All graduates must acquire those competencies and obtain a CGPA of 2.00 or more.

- **Role of course tutor:**

- It is assumed that an excellent student could have an extra academic load without affecting his performance in the required course activities. The tutor gives the excellent students an assignment to prepare and present it to the class. The topic of the assignment should be relevant to the course objectives but more advanced. The teacher guides the student to prepare the assignment; references, advice, practical work etc. The student presents his work to the class and exchange his experience with them and the teacher should be able to validate the material presented. The excellent student is not awarded extra grade points for the assignments and the end of course examination does not include any of the knowledge presented by the excellent student. Such an activity enriches the course and motivates the excellent student and may determine his future career.

Examples of assignments:

- **Course- Man and His Environment.** The main contents include effects of external and internal factors on haemostasis
Topic: Assessment of fluid loss in the hot climate of Sudan.
- **Course: Growth and Development.** The course includes objectives about the human genetics.
Topic: Description and uses of human genome
- **Course: Blood and Blood related Problems.** The course includes objectives in haemoglobinopathies
Topics: sickle cell anaemia in Sudan, Blood transfusion.
- **Course: Cardiopulmonary**
Topics: Risk factors of Ischaemic Heart Disease in Sudan, Peripartum cardiomyopathy, Cardiac catheterization.
- **Course: Endocrine and Metabolism**
Topics: Endemic goiter in Sudan, Diabetes mellitus in childhood.
- **Course: Genito – Urinary system**
Topics: Onset of natural labour, renal dialysis and its problems.

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Course: Endemic Diseases:

Topic: Malaria immunology.

2.3.2. Scientific activities:

The FMUG involves the excellent student in all the scientific activities organized by the faculty: meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences, curriculum development and programme evaluation. The Faculty encourages and supports the excellent student to contribute in national and international scientific activities; participating or just attending.

2.3.3. Research

An excellent student could be involved in a research work in the FMUG/U of G conducted by teachers or could even be allowed to do a research by himself under supervision. The FMUG helps the excellent student present his/her work in national and/or international meetings. The product of a number of excellent students (assignments and research) could be presented in a conference organized by the FMUG and should be issued formally in a proceeding.

2.3.4. Exposure to scientific journals:

The FMUG forms a Journal Club for regular review of published scientific

Work; excellent students are advised to attend the club and participate in its activities and that can help them learn the art of appraisal of scientific articles. It also enables them to learn about research methodology and scientific writing. Academic advisors should train students in electronic library search and the use of the computer.

2.3.5. Scholarships:

An excellent student could be granted a short term or even a long term scholarship to pursue his studies and to be exposed to recent advances in the subject matter of his choice. The sponsorship of those scholarships could be through the agreements of the U of G with other universities and academic institutions or by U of G itself. It is imperative that the FMUG/U of G includes the scholarships and exchange programmes in the agreements with all scientific firms.

2.3.6. Students' associations:

The FMUG/U of G facilitates the participation of an excellent student in the scientific programmes organized by student's associations and that could be through exchange programmes; visits or through the electronic media. e.g. TED MED

2.3.7. Post-graduate studies:

The academic advisor of an excellent student is expected to guide him/her carefully to choose the appropriate postgraduate qualification. The advisor should use a

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scientific approach in guiding the student; patiently reviewing his achievements as an undergraduate and exploring his learning style and aspirations in depth. The advisor should be democratic rather than autocratic and should avoid professional bias.

2.3.8. Enrollment an academic staff member:

In concordance to what other universities do, the UofG must encourage an excellent student to be appointed as an academic staff-usually teaching assistant and support his post graduate studies.

3. Conclusion:

Advising excellent students is of an immense benefit to the students, the University and community at large. It helps the university sustain its excellence and helps the country to utilize the advances in science in its total development strategy. The proposed areas of advising described in this article are not indefinite and could be more developed and upgraded. The authors recommend that the contents to be included in the academic advisory system of the University after modifications if needed. The FMUG/UOFG sets a clear plan of work for identifying excellent students and supporting them. The financial burden on the University is more likely to be insignificant; the number of eligible students is normally very small and a lot of stakeholders are willing to participate