

AN OUTLINE OF THE MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY-HCMC

by Prof. **ĐÀO CÔNG TIẾN**
Vice-Director of VNUH

1. The Vietnam National University-HCMC (VNUH) was established by the Decree 16/CP issued by the Government on Jan. 27, 1995 by combining and restructuring certain universities and research institutes in HCMC, for the time being, it consists of HCMC University, Universities of Technical Education, Polytechnic, Agriculture and Forestry, Economics, Finance and Accountancy, Architecture and HCMC Branch of the University of Law.

2. The combination of nine universities brought many advantages

a. Advantages

- VNUH is staffed by over 4,000 teachers and officials, 2,900 of them are lecturers and some 20% of them have got Master, Assistant Doctor and Doctor degrees or held professorships. There are 18 main campuses with a total area in use of 160,000 sq.m. on a total area of 43 hectares. Four campuses of which are located in a 800-hectare lot at Thủ Đức and Thuận An (Sông Bé) where the main campus of VNUH will be built.

VNUH has a financial outlay of some VNĐ160 billion, 50% of it come

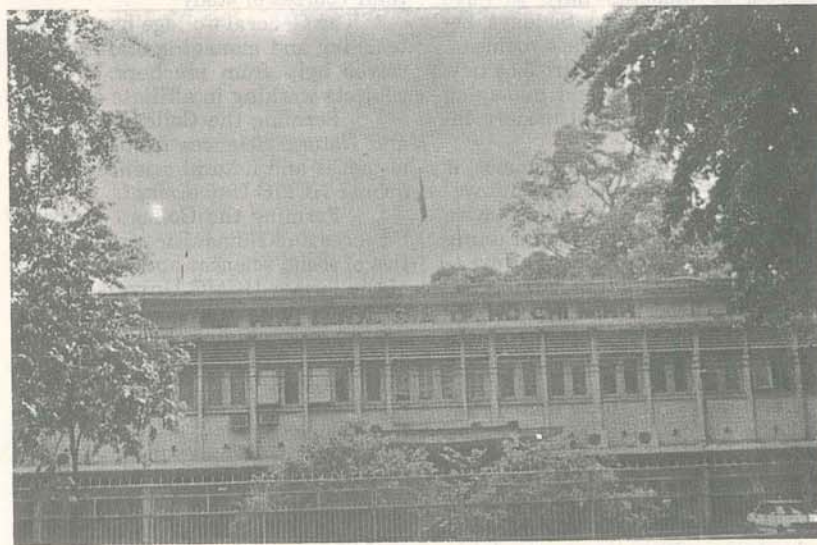
important sources is from international cooperation projects on training and scientific research (College of Polytechnic for example, in the school year 1995-1996 was provided with over VNĐ20 billion from these international projects).

Over 80,000 students are taking courses at VNUH: 40% of them attend full-time courses, other 40% go on sandwich courses and 20% on other courses. In nine member universities, there are 42 research centers that play an important role in supplying scientific services to the society, helping students put their knowledge into practice and increasing income of VNUH.

Teaching, studying and managing facilities are improved both qualitatively and quantitatively. Some universities are equipped with such modern facilities that the methods of teaching and managing are innovated profoundly. Many member universities have got good foreign relations: the College of Polytechnic, up to now, has sent 356 persons to foreign countries on business, the College of Economics is running 15 international projects on teaching and scientific research with total expenditure of US\$14 million.

- The structures of training courses offered and scientific studies carried out are diversified enough to be appropriate to the development of a big and multi-disciplinary university.

The training program offered by VNUH includes two main courses (or



and difficulties as well to the formation and development of VNUH:

from the Treasury and other 50% from other sources. One of the most

two stages): the foundation course covers basic subjects needed for advanced studies of seven disciplines (including natural sciences and maths; social sciences and humanities; foreign and Vietnamese language; industrial technology, construction and architecture; forestry and fishery; economics and management; pedagogy and technical education; law studies). The advanced course in the second stage covers 68 subjects.

VNUH offers a wide range of training courses: graduate course, and postgraduate course. The full-time graduate course is the standard course of study whose quality is more and more improved. The sandwich course is supplied to learners at large in 25 Southern provinces. Master course and vocational training course are supplied by many colleges. International cooperation projects to give postgraduate courses haven't been expanded fully enough but their quality is rather high and they have helped to enhance the level of the teaching staff and innovate training methods.

In the past, each college has its own method of organizing its activities and many colleges offered the same training courses with the result that a conservative attitude has made its appearance, however, it hasn't been serious enough to become an obstacle to the process of integrating them into VNUH as a corporate organization for multidisciplinary training and research.

Although there are different opinions about the methods of rearranging these colleges in VNUH but both the leadership and the staff have tried their best to complete this task.

b. Difficulties

- The leadership of VNUH have spent a lot of time and energy on dealing with the inconsistency in targets of training programs drawn up by different colleges and the unreasonable division of resources and tasks among colleges. We want to cite here some problems facing the VNUH leadership:

- Both University of Polytechnic and University of Architecture offered courses in construction techniques.

- Courses in accounting are offered by both Universities of Economics and of Finance and Accountancy.

- Besides University of Economics, Universities of Polytechnic, of Agriculture, and Forestry and HCMC University also give courses in economics, foreign trade and business administration.

- Law is studied at HCMC branch of the University of Law and

at HCMC University as well.

- University of Polytechnic gives courses in industrial design although this subject is related to architecture.

- Engineering technique courses are given by University of Technical Education and University of Agriculture and Forestry instead of by University of Polytechnic.

In general, each university has tried to develop its staff in order to offer a wide range of courses from basic to advanced ones, including gymnastics and sports and military training, therefore the human resources and facilities are scattered. Some teachers of political economics, philosophy, VCP history, scientific socialism... separated from the army of researchers couldn't improve their knowledge.

- Conditions needed for good training and scientific research aren't available in every college. Teachers with postgraduate degrees represent some 20% on average of the teaching staff of VNUH now, that is, this percentage varies from 6% to 30% over different colleges. Dividing teachers into groups according to subjects they teach, in some 10 subjects, teachers with postgraduate degrees represent over 50%, but in other 10 subjects, there is no teacher with postgraduate degrees.

The library of a big college has some 120,000 titles while in small colleges, this number reduces to around 50,000.

As for computers, there are around 650 computers in large colleges but in a smaller one, there are only two or three dozen ones.

In many colleges, the leadership have to rent class rooms outside the campus, or students have to have evening classes or on Sundays because of a shortage of class rooms.

It's very hard to introduce new methods of teaching and managing because of a shortage of modern facilities.

- Limited sources of finance is also a great obstacle to the improvement of the ability to admit more students and of the quality of training and researching activities. The existing sources of finance aren't big enough to support training and researching activities, improve teachers' quality of life and supply more services to students.

3. The Decree 16/CP stated that VNUH is a multidisciplinary training and research center undertaking the following tasks:

- training bachelors, masters and doctors of various sciences and technologies with a view to supplying well-trained experts to the country.

- carrying out techno-scientific researches, supplying scientific information and applying scientific achievements to production.

- supplying expertise to other colleges and universities.

To carry out these tasks, with existing advantages and difficulties stated above, in 20 months after its establishment (making preparation under the direction of the Preparatory Board in some 12 months, and carrying out rearrangement and other organizational work under the direction of the Directorate in nearly nine months), VNUH has solved many problems and determined what should be done next.

4. Tasks completed

a. Taking over the University of Finance and Accountancy from the Ministry of Finance, the University of Architecture from the Ministry of Construction and HCMC branch of the University of Law from the Ministry of Justice, and integrating them into VNUH.

b. Reorganizing nine university members into 10 affiliate colleges providing the public with multidisciplinary training courses.

- Forming the General College by combining basic faculties of Colleges of Polytechnic, Agriculture and Forestry, Technical Education and other departments and schools from affiliate colleges.

The General College is assigned to supply foundation courses in seven disciplines: sciences, techniques, economics, pedagogy, technical education, architecture and law. Advanced courses in these disciplines are supplied by other affiliate colleges when students go on the second stage of their courses of study.

The General College has its own teaching and managing staff and receives help from teachers of basic subjects working in affiliate colleges.

- Forming the College of Maths and Natural Sciences from faculties of maths and natural sciences of the former HCMC University.

- Forming the College of Social Sciences and Humanities from faculties of social sciences and humanities of the former HCMC University.

- Forming the College of Economics by combining the former University of Economics, University of Finance and Accountancy and the Faculty of Economics of the HCMC University.

- Forming the College of Technique by combining the former University of Polytechnic, Faculty of construction of the former University of Architecture and several faculties of techniques of the former Technical

Education University and University of Agriculture and Forestry.

- Forming the College of Law by joining Faculty of Law of the former HCMC University with the HCMC branch of the University of Law.

- Renaming the former HCMC Education University the College of Education.

- Changing the former Technical Education University to the College of Technical Education after transferring its basic faculty to the General College and some basic technical facilities to the College of Technique.

- Changing the former University of Agriculture and Forestry to the College of Agriculture and Forestry after transferring its basic faculty to the General College and some engineering technique faculties to the College of Technique.

- Forming the College of Architecture by combining Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning of the former University of Architecture, and the Faculty of Industrial Design of the former University of Polytechnic.

c. Together with the reorganization of affiliate colleges, each college has started to restructure its system of training courses, its staff and activities.

d. VNUH has started to give entrance examination and give foundation courses to students at their first stage of study.

In 1995, entrance examinations were still given by nine former universities. After that, four of them, have sent 6,000 students to the General College to take foundation courses there.

In 1996, VNUH gave entrance examinations in all seven disciplines, that is, it undertook all workload, from receiving and handling examination applications, giving test questions, correcting tests and announcing results. Over 14,500 student passed the examination and took courses at the General College and five campuses for foundation courses at five affiliate colleges.

The General College is giving courses in programs 1, 2, 3, 4 in technique, technical education, land management and farm management, and program 5 in law to some 6,000 students.

- Campus for foundation course of the College of Maths and Natural Sciences is giving programs 1, 2, 3, in natural sciences and natural science education to some 2,500 students.

- Campus for foundation course of the College of Education is giving courses in program 7 in foreign languages, foreign language education

and Orientalism to some 1,200 students.

- Campus for foundation course of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities is giving courses in program 6 in social sciences, humanities and social science education to 1,536 students.

- Campus for foundation course of the College of Economics is giving courses in program 4 in economics to some 3,000 students.

- Campus for foundation course of the College of Architecture is giving course in programs 4 and 6 in architecture, town planning and industrial design to some 600 students.

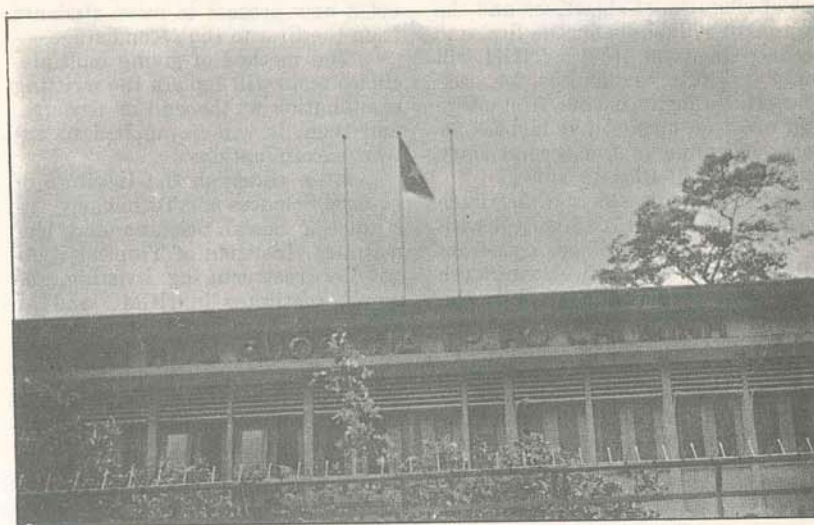
Thus, up to the school year 1996-1997, foundation courses are given by the General College and some campuses for foundation courses appointed by VNUH. Four Colleges (Technique, Technical Education, Ag-

h. Establishing the prep school giving courses in maths, informatics, chemistry, physics and English. This school has come into operation this school year.

i. Cooperating with Tiền Giang Center of Sandwich Training Courses and Đồng Tháp Advanced School of Education to supply foundation courses to learners in provinces in the Mekong Delta and Southern Central Vietnam.

After finishing foundation courses, these learners in provinces will receive certificates and sit an examination in disciplines of the second stage of study in affiliate colleges. Those learners who fail this examination will go to provincial advanced schools or vocational training schools.

j. Organizing the governing and managing bodies of VNUH including:



riculture and Forestry, and Law) don't give foundation courses any more but advanced courses to full-time students at their second stage of study.

e. Forming The Environment and Natural Resources Institute by combining three institutes of natural resources and the environment of the former Universities of Polytechnic, Agriculture and Forestry and HCMC University.

f. Making plan to build VNUH in an 800-hectare area at Thủ Đức and Thuận An (Sông Bé).

g. Making plan to borrow money from the World Bank in order to construct new syllabuses and build certain facilities for VNUH (library, information center, laboratories, etc.)

- The Directorate of six persons directed by Trần Chí Đáo, Director of VNUH, Deputy Minister of Education and Training.

- VNUH Party Committee with its executive committee of 15 members. The committee secretary is Nguyễn Tấn Phát, VCP Central Committee member and Vice-Director of VNUH.

- The VNUH Labor Union was established with its 11-member executive committee directed by Nguyễn Kim Thúy, standing committee member of the Education Labor Union.

- To provide assistance to the Directorate, the following departments and offices were established: personnel, financial planning, gradu-

ate training, postgraduate training, scientific research and international cooperation management, political and student affairs.

Under the direction of the Preparatory Board and after that, the Directorate, VNUH has worked out its statutes and submitted to the Government for approval; made and promulgated some documents serving as the legal basis for the activity of VNUH; organized workshops on methods of training by supplying students with credits and methods of evaluating students by multiple-choice tests with a view to reaching an agreement between VNUH governing bodies.

5. Besides completed tasks, coming into operation, VNUH leadership have also realized what should be done next and have set for urgent tasks in the future:

a. To keep on restructuring the training mechanism

- After reviewing, perfecting the set of educational objectives and the system of syllabuses for the first and second stages of study, VNUH will make a list of syllabuses for each discipline taught in the first stage and a list of advanced syllabuses for each discipline in the second stage taught by each affiliate college.

- To assign tasks and distribute resources to each affiliate college with a view to helping colleges cooperate with one another to make the best use of existing resources, especially the army of teachers.

In making assignments and co-operating to develop and make use of existing resources, it's necessary to overcome the repetition and isolation of foundation courses supplied by College of Education and Colleges of Maths and Natural Sciences, and of Social Sciences and Humanities; of basic courses in technique supplied by College of Technique and College of Technical Education; of basic courses in economics supplied by College of Economics and College of Technique and College of Agriculture and Forestry; of basic courses in sciences, technique and economics supplied by General College and other colleges which are good at supplying these courses.

- To overcome the dispersal of the army of teachers of Marxism-Leninism and other basic subjects in most colleges by concentrating them in certain colleges, such as the Faculty of Political Economics at the College of Economics; concentrating teachers of philosophy, VCP history, scientific socialism... in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities; teachers of natural sciences in the

College of Maths and Natural Sciences; teachers of basic techniques in the College of Technique; teachers of economics and law in the Colleges of Economics and of Law... with a view to encouraging pedagogical studies at College of Education and College of Technical Education.

- To set standards and status for lecturers in order to develop and employ the army of teachers.

b. To apply the method of supplying credits to students after finishing a course, and the method of evaluating students by multiple-choice tests.

The method of giving credits after finishing courses has been applied by Colleges of Technique, Maths and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities and General College. This method will be evaluated and applied in all affiliate colleges.

In realizing the method of giving credits, it's necessary to maintain the two-stage training process and work out a new process to move students from the first to the second stage.

The method of giving multiple-choice tests will replace the writing examination at the end of a course, and then, it will be applied to entrance examinations.

c. To establish the Institute of Natural Sciences and Technology, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Tropical Biology by restructuring existing research institutes in HCMC and in VNUH as instructed by the Decree 16/CP.

d. Regarding students, VNUH advocates innovating the training process, improving students affairs department in order to ensure their rights and duties, improve their living and studying conditions. Solutions for this problems are:

- To improve the method of giving entrance examination and take their high-school reports into consideration with a view to exempting excellent students from entrance examination and applying multiple-choice method to the entrance examination.

- To increase tuition fees and at the same time, to grant fee deduction and exemption to students from poor or revolutionary families. Tuition fees ruled by the Ministries of Education and Training, and of Finance in the past were too low to cover training expenditure. Because of inflation and increasing personal income, many families can spend more on education for their children, so it's possible to raise tuition fees and grant fee deduction and exemption as stated above.

- To improve the method of giving

scholarships in order to encourage talent and at the same time, help students from poor or revolutionary families finish their studies better. Giving scholarship is also a way to encourage students to take courses in less attractive subjects such as political education, primary education or agricultural techniques.

- To attract investment from provincial governments and contributions from students in order to improve living and studying conditions for students. At present, five provincial governments (from Kiên Giang, An Giang, Đồng Tháp, Long An and Bến Tre) have agreed to contribute to the plan to build student dormitories in Thủ Đức.

- To enhance the role of the Communist Youth League and the Association of Students in organizing healthy and useful after-school activities.

e. The plan to build the VNUH main campus at the 800-hectare area in Thủ Đức and Thuận An (Sông Bé) must be made carefully, proper attention must be given to the future development of VNUH in comparison with national universities in surrounding countries. For the time being, what should be done are:

- To submit pre-feasibility study and ask for land grant from the Government.

- To complete the following works: building infrastructure, expanding the campus of the General College, building the campus of the College of Law and VNUH administrative quarter by 2000.

During the whole time the building works are carried out, VNUH has to keep on developing its activities, therefore, VNUH advocates maintaining and upgrading existing campuses and facilities.

f. The shortage of fund is a great challenge to VNUH development at present and in the future. Solutions to this problem are:

- To ask for investment from the Treasury in building new campuses and financing VNUH activities.

- To increase contribution from students and organizations that employ graduates from VNUH by carrying out reasonable and appropriate policies.

- To raise fund by supplying scientific services to central and local governments and companies.

- To develop international cooperation in training and scientific research.

- To borrow money from the World Bank ■