

Need to Reform the Teaching Method in the HCMC University Of Economics to Meet the Market Demand

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There is a close and interactive relation between the training system of universities, as of the HCMC University of Economics (UEH) as well: formation of the training system should be based on the market demand in the international integration process and the market demand forces the universities to reform their training systems regularly. The training system of universities should meet the demand for their products. Universities must not supply products that companies couldn't employ for their business activities without spending some money retraining them. Poor harmony between the training process and the demand posed by the labor market will lead to waste of energy, time and money for individuals and the whole society as well. This relation could be expressed in the following figure.

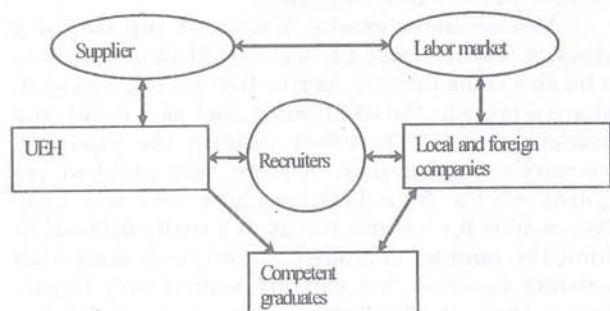


Figure 1: Relation between the UEH and labor market

As a member of the WTO, Vietnam should open all markets and sectors, including the education service, to foreign competition. In the coming years, more and more foreign universities will be built in Vietnam, and the UEH and the whole system of universities will face keen competition. Wide difference in skills and expertise of graduates from local and foreign universities will be a great challenge to the effort by local universities to integrate into the world market. Does this difference come from curricula and teaching methods in use? This difference is a big obstacle to process of training high-quality human resource in Vietnam, and many countries have failed to make their higher education service meet the international standard. This situation forces us to review our training model and system.

We should reform it to integrate into the global higher education service.

Local business persons have also to change their ways of thinking and views on business. Their businesses, laborforce and markets must be developed into global ones in preparation for international competition. Fast and radical changes in the labor market require reforms in training system and model, including ones adopted by the UEH.

At the Higher Education Conference in the South held in the HCMC University of Technology on Aug. 18, 2007, Nguyễn Thiện Nhân, Minister of Education, said that all universities had to say no to training without meeting standards and market demand. This must be the basic guideline for the UEH in the coming years.

In my opinion, the reform in the training system must address the following question: Why can Bachelors of economics from foreign universities find better paid jobs than their counterparts from local universities? Do the training systems of foreign universities meet the market demand better than local ones? Answering this question is no easy task.

In the past three decades, the UEH has contributed a lot to the economic growth. At present, however, when the labor market is experiencing drastical changes and demanding for high-quality laborers, the task of reforming and developing the brand name of UEH becomes more urgent.

Operations of the UEH involve three interrelated parties that determine quality of products it supplies. Success of the reform in the UEH is only ensured when it is carried in all those three parties.

1. Management

In the past few years, the UEH management has made great efforts and regularly reviewed its way of doing business with a view to smoothing teaching and studying activities. To meet the demand for the credit system (a target for the UEH up to 2010) and international integration, in my opinion, changes in the following aspects must be ensured:

a. Curricula and subjects: The UEH must petition the Ministry of Education and Training for greater autonomy in formation of curricula and subjects. The UEH Academic Council and faculty staff should review all of their curricula and contents of each subject in order to reduce overlapping contents

and make contents of all subjects more similar to ones offered by foreign universities.

Besides reforming contents of subjects, some new subjects common among foreign universities must be introduced to the UEH. For example, the UEH must make students accustomed with the business ethics in order to help them understand that doing business doesn't only mean making profit. In addition, exams and graduation ceremony must be held in June every year in order to allow more chances to find jobs for graduates.

b. Library: With 25,000 students in various courses and programs, the system of libraries in the UEH seems too small. The total area of libraries is some 1,365 square meters and reading rooms occupy only 721 square meters out of this area. These reading room can house 500 students at most while some 3,000 students visit there every day before the exams. If the UEH wants to reduce the class attending hours with a view to encouraging students to do studies by themselves, the facilities for studying, especially libraries must be enlarged.

c. Size of a class: This is a precondition for reforming the teaching method and enhancing the service quality. At present, there are from 100 to 150 students in a class. This big size hinders ability to communicate and absorb new knowledge. Teachers can't pay attention to all students and they can't concentrate on lessons. This situation leads to a passive way of studying: teachers want to finish their lectures while students try to take notes of what teachers say. The obsolete method of teaching and studying can't produce graduates who have ability to adopt new ways of thinking and doing business. The management should deal with this problem as soon as possible.

d. Estimate of study record: The current system of estimating students' study record on a yearly or semester basis is reasonable and similar to ones adopted by foreign universities. To make this system more objective, exact and scientific, it must be re-examined.

At present, teachers usually give marks to students through: roll-call in class, presentation by group, semester exams, homework, etc. This way of estimating the study record is not exact and scientific enough because it lacks preconditions and bases.

- Roll-call in class: This method is not appropriate to the current

situation because it is not rational. When teachers give marks to a student because he/she is present in the class, he only encourages students to come to the class for roll-call or have a friend announce their names during the roll-call. In addition, when the management wants students to spend more hours studying by themselves and take more than one course, it's unreasonable to force them to be present in the class all the time. In other words, this method prevent students from doing studies alone or taking many courses in a semester. In short, giving marks by doing roll-call fails to estimate students' ability to do studies.

- Presentation: This is a good method common among international universities but it seems inappropriate to the average size of class in the UEH. With a class attended by some 100 or 150 students, they could be divided into at least 10 groups because in a big group there should be students who don't contribute much to the presentation but they receive the same marks as their friends do. If they are divided into too many groups, there will be no time enough for all groups to present their studies in the class. This situation makes the marks given in this method are not fair and exact.

- Mid-semester exams: With a so big size of a class, a teacher can't supervise well their students who sit exams because four or five students have to share a table in the exam room, and as a result, the marks given don't reflect exactly the students' knowledge and ability. Solving this problem requires efforts from both teachers and the body responsible for lecture-rooms. It's really difficult to limit the number of students to 80 for a class with existing facilities, but this measure is very important to the task of enhancing the service quality because it allows teachers to apply modern methods to encourage students to do studies by their own or with their groups.

2. Teaching staff

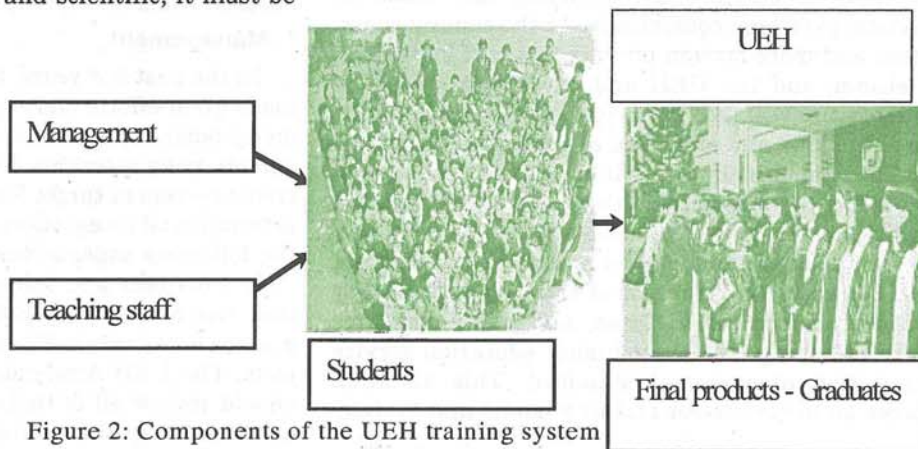
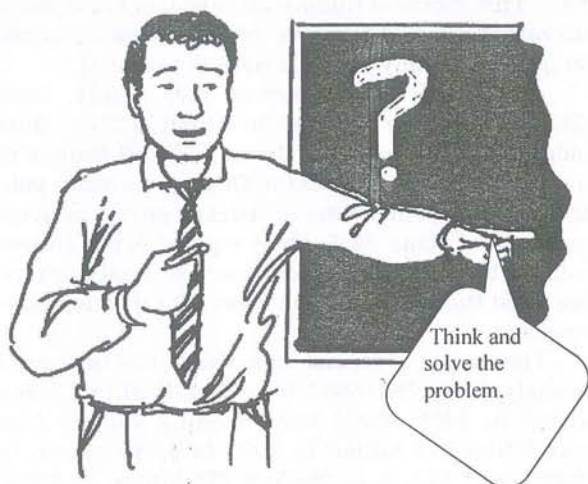
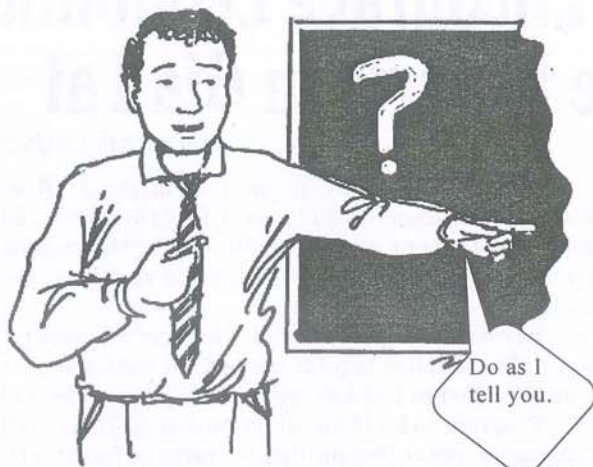


Figure 2: Components of the UEH training system



This party has direct effects on the product quality and its improvement. In my opinion, teachers should change (1) their teaching methods and facilities; and (2) contents of their lectures.

a. Teaching methods and facilities: Besides supplying basic knowledge of the subject, teachers should teach students in ways of thinking and solving problems. They had better act as guides who help students absorb new knowledge and take part actively in the teaching and learning process.

Besides changing the teaching methods, teacher had better make the best use of information technology. This method allows teachers to use various languages (texts, images, charts, and statistics, etc.) to present their lectures more attractively and informatively. Students are also required to pay more attention to the lecture and do more homework. In addition, facilities for studying will be used more effectively and economically.

b. Contents of lecture: At present, teachers tend to present all contents of textbooks, which makes student feel content with these textbooks. In my opinion, students should break away from this manner of study and start discussing the lecture. Cooperation and discuss between teachers and students can make the class and lessons more attractive and useful, which helps students understand the lessons in class and form their working methods. Moreover, this approach helps teachers estimate students' ability more exactly.

3. Students

Graduates are special products supplied by universities to the labor market because they can create and improve their values and quality by themselves. They play an important role in the process of enhancing the product quality carried out bu universities. At present, UEH students should pay more attention to the following aspects:

a. New ways of thinking: Requirements from recruiters and standards for laborers have changed so much but students' ways of thinking are slow to change. Many students fail to invest more time and energy in studies at universities and lack ability to do studies by their own. In my opinion, the UEH should equip them with progressive and active thoughts about their study. They should understand that knowledge is needed for their intellectual life, their employment opportunities in the future, and progress of the whole society. A large army of well-trained and skilled laborers is an inevitable condition for economic growth and industrialization, and this army is determined by the education service.

b. Learning method: many students keep following old learning methods they knew in high schools. They tend to learn everything by heart and work hard enough to meet requirements posed by teachers instead of learning ways of discover and handle problems. Good practices at school will help them gain success in the future, but many of them are not aware of this simple truth.

To encourage students to work harder on their studies, the UEH could charge different tuition fees for different courses and subjects because it is a law in the market economy: the most wanted commodity will be sold at very high prices.

After more than thirty years of development, the UEH has become a brand name. To prepare itself for foreign competition in the coming years and meet the demand of the labor market better, the UEH must carry out radical reforms in all operations and parties who take part in, and determine, its development and product quality. ■