

HORIZON

University of the Philippines Los Baños Vol. 8



The **UPLB Horizon Magazine** showcases feature articles on research and extension, literary pieces, and information of general interest to UPLB and its stakeholders. Please email your contributions to OPR: opr.uplb@up.edu.ph.

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About the cover

This is a glimpse into the future—from where UPLB executive offices hold fort—of a future-proof university with a fully operational Agro-Industrial Park and Information Technology Park (AIP-ITP). The AIP-ITP is just one spoke on the wheel that will take UPLB to this eventuality but a highly significant one at that.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Philippine higher education seeks to thrive in a tumultuous context that can only be described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, or simply VUCA. It is hounded by disruptions brought about by modern technology, globalization, climate change, and crises such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. This context requires us to be flexible and adapt rapidly to change to maintain the quality of education that is expected of UP.

To cope with these changes, the University implemented several initiatives to ensure that it will be equipped to face the challenges of a VUCA world.

We have tried to capture these efforts through the stories published in this issue. These include the digitalization of university services, the creation of new programs, the provision of infrastructure support, and the expansion of partnerships for the development of Philippine higher education, among others.

These support the vision of Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr. of future-proofing UPLB so that it continues to be relevant amidst disruptions; one that is prepared to confront any challenges that may arise.

These initiatives will serve as UPLB's foundation as it continues to forge ahead, despite the disruptions that await in the future, in pursuit of providing quality higher education, developing relevant research and technologies, and contributing dedicated public service for the Filipino people.



IN BROAD STROKES

Revisiting our vision of future-proofing the University

Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr.

It is more than three years ago today when I decided that 'future-proofing UPLB' as a battle cry would be apt for the times and should be placed front and center in my vision-mission statement as UPLB chancellor.

Then and today, disruption is a specter that looms large over humanity, especially if it means sickness and death on a scale as large as the pandemic wrought on us, climate change and extreme weather disturbances, 'tectonic shifts' in the way we do things, loss of jobs, and so on.

But do we bury our heads in the sand? No. We have the moral obligation to forge through because we are equipped with the capability for wayfinding, and government resources, though limited, have been poured on us to cope with and even to anticipate these disruptions.

The disruptions that we have experienced and are experiencing, such as climate change, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and the COVID-19 pandemic are not going to be the last. We can expect more to come, and we need to be agile and be ahead of the curve for our own survival as a higher education institution (HEI) and as a people.

The past three years have seen us gain headway in this regard. Our future-proofing initiatives included the institutionalization of new academic programs that are inclusive and enable us to increase intellectual capacity building. We have cast our net to a wider area as we network with our international peers to conduct joint undertakings in instruction and research.

At the same time, we are also helping our fellow HEIs cope with disruption by sharing our knowledge and expertise with them.

A future-proofing initiative that I am most hopeful of is our digital transformation with the Enterprise Architecture Plan in place. This will improve our processes and increase our efficiency. Alongside this are enhanced student welfare and teaching and learning programs anchored on the use of technology.

Meanwhile, research and public service will get a boost under AGORA or Accelerating Growth through One Research and Extension in Action, which strategizes our R&E efforts to ensure that we are addressing the most pressing issues of today and the future.

We are also moving by leaps and bounds to realize at the soonest time the setting up of our agro-industrial and information technology parks that will enable us in the long term to invest in buildings, facilities, and equipment. It will also provide a venue by which our students will be able to get industry-level training and our faculty more opportunities to practice their profession.

Over three years ago, I shared a vision of a UPLB that will continue to be a bastion of innovation, knowledge generation, a center for lifelong learning and public initiatives. We are doing this by future-proofing our human resources, lifelong learning and instruction system, research and innovation system, commitment to public good and social welfare, and expanding global engagement. Here is a sampler of these future-proofing initiatives. 📌

Digital Transformation: UPLB's IT Factor

JOHN GLEN S. SAROL

"IT factor" refers to a noteworthy quality that would take one's life to the next level. IT may very well refer to information technology that UPLB could use to make it exceptional in future-proofing against disruptions, one that would make it resilient amidst VUCA or the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the digital age.

UPLB had early leads on this, as evidenced by systems created for the specific objectives of sectors or offices, thus fragmented, but could have been incorporated or interconnected into a broader and efficient system. But the university's efforts in this regard were soon formalized.

In 2021, Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr. assembled a team to craft UPLB's Enterprise Architecture Plan (EAP), a strategic and comprehensive framework or blueprint to guide the university toward digital transformation (DX). It was headed by Danilo J. Mercado, faculty member at the Institute of Computer Science, and Leslie G.

Bolaños, student records evaluator and quality manager of the Graduate School.

IT or information technology and DX are crucial elements toward future-proofing an organization. DX is the application of IT to improve the processes and efficiency of services. More importantly, DX addresses the most crucial elements in driving transformation: people, policy, and change management.

THE ROADMAP

In the UPLB DX system, EAP outlines the technology solutions, principles, and standards to align IT initiatives to the university's core organizational needs.

Leaders and teams will be trained before the scheme is implemented across the university, and the final stage involves continuous measuring and learning from the developed DX system.

"In collaboration with UPLB's top management and key stakeholders, we envision to come up with a responsive, impactful, people-centric, and future-proof Enterprise Architecture that supports the university's core mandate and future endeavors," said Mercado,

who was also in charge of the infrastructure development and support of UPLB DX.

EAP's transition plan covers all priority applications for development, including IT solutions for academic information, knowledge management, and health and wellness.

THE UPLB DX INITIATIVE

The UPLB DX was created to implement the EAP. It will co-create systems with various university units. Bolaños heads the DX Program and DX Team. He is responsible for monitoring and applying the UPLB DX strategy. He will also oversee the harmonization of existing systems to make them useful and available to other units needing them.

Among these is the Output Reporting System of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Extension (OVCRE), where employees encode their various work outputs. The system currently accommodates scholarly outputs. In the next upgrades it will be able to generate

reports used for merit promotions and annual reports. OVCRE's Research Management System is integrated into the research and extension-related data.

The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs maintains the Research, Communication, and Information Technology (RECOMMIT) Program Automated Loan Processing, through which students apply for loans online using the Office of Student Affairs Management (OSAM) System. OSAM System facilitates the processing of data in the application form and has significantly reduced errors and eliminated the need for data encoders.

RECOMMIT's Automated Student Assistantship (SA) Salary Processing assists the SA Program of the Office of Scholarships and Grants in developing and maintaining an online, automated, and efficient SA salary processing and payment.

Various colleges and the University Library also maintain their own student records management systems. UPLB uses the University Integrated System for human resource management, financial, and administrative processes and the Student Academic Information System for registration and learning-related processes.

According to Bolaños, the DX Program aims to harmonize and unify these systems to enhance functionality while also enhancing data integrity.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

Academic Year 2022-2023 was a sharp pivot point for the DX Team.

Just after beginning its operations in March 2022, they had to release the Academic Management Information System (AMIS) to cater to student registration, in particular, the giving of consent of instructors and the exercise of teacher's prerogative.

It was the team's baptism of fire. "We were still building the foundation systems, and here comes AMIS. It's like building the second floor on an untested foundation. But on the contrary, building AMIS served as a proving ground for the team and the selected technology stack which paved the way for improving the foundation systems even more," Bolaños said.

AMIS provided ways forward for the university. "We were able to extract data that pinpoint the in-demand courses that support the hiring of more faculty members or allocating of better resources," Bolaños said. It also guided them to create an executive information system, a dashboard

that will help university officials monitor their concerns and easily address these.

"We like to be agile. Our method is creating a plan, building the important parts, launching, asking for feedback, and then implementing the suggestions. In this way, we can solve the problems through small parts rather than through grand solutions," he concluded.

Bolaños expects his team to produce guidelines that consist of their operations, coding standards, and best practices that can be passed on to units that plan to co-create their own DX project.

"The solution to VUCA is VUCA as well," said Bolaños. "We can combat VUCA through relevant and real-time information generated through the DX system we will develop. This will create VUCA or vision, understanding, clarity, and agility, which will help us develop the solutions." 🙌

TRANSITION PLAN

2022

- ▲ Enterprise Master Data
- ▲ Service-oriented Architecture
- ▲ Identity Management
- ▲ Quality Systems

2024

- ▲ Financial Management
- ▲ Property Management
- ▲ Facilities Management
- ▲ Human Resources
- ▲ Document Management
- Learning Management
- Learning Support
- Knowledge Management
- Health and Wellness

2023

- ▲ Academic Information
- ▲ Research Management
- ▲ Executive Information System
- ▲ Faculty Service Record
- ▲ REPS Service Record
- ▲ Data Warehouse

2025

- Public Service
- IP Management
- Partnerships
- Public Relations
- Alumni Relations
- Leadership and Culture

▲ Deployed /
Continuously improved

▲ Initiated

Unifying, Strategizing, and Future-proofing R&E: PROACT by UPLB AGORA

How a unified research and extension agenda strengthens UPLB's role in accelerating development in the Philippines amidst volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times.

HARLENE MAY M. VIESCA

A rebranded agenda for research and extension (R&E) at UPLB heeds the call for more effective solutions to real-life problems and a new strategic roadmap toward achieving genuinely inclusive and sustainable growth for Filipinos. It is called the UPLB AGORA or Accelerating Growth through One Research and Extension in Action.

AGORA, which means “marketplace,” visualizes UPLB as a marketplace of innovative and groundbreaking ideas in the fields of agriculture, forestry, development communication, veterinary medicine, engineering, natural sciences, and social sciences.

Guiding the UPLB AGORA is an interdisciplinary framework, composed of four focus areas: Food Security and Sovereignty, One Health, Resilience and Sustainability, and Future Communities and Institutions. A fifth focus area, Social Justice and Cultural Flourishing, will be launched in 2024.

Under these focus areas are the university's R&E programs that also serve as the university's development thrusts, as they respond to the aligned targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Food Security and Sovereignty produces signature research on smart agriculture systems powered by Agriculture 4.0 Technology like big data, the internet of things, and precision agriculture. One Health focuses on biosecurity and biosafety to ensure that human, animal, and environmental health are resilient against emerging diseases and even future pandemics. Resilience and Sustainability maximizes science, technology, and innovation systems to protect and manage agriculture, forestry,

natural resources, and the environment. Future Communities and Institutions brings agricultural farming schemes to urban and peri-urban systems for the empowerment, capacity-building, and economic development of communities.

To benefit people from this rebranded agenda, UPLB faculty, researchers, extensionists, professional staff, administrative staff, and students must be guided by the fivefold values of compassion, inclusivity, active engagement, collaboration, and science-based recommendation. This will enable UPLB to offer sound and selfless assistance and solutions to pressing societal concerns.

Ultimately, UPLB AGORA envisions economic growth for the Philippines where environment and biodiversity are protected and accounted for in every development effort, different generations can access equitable services and join participatory decision-making processes, and decent employment opportunities are made available.

In a nutshell, this R&E agenda makes UPLB a “marketplace of pioneering and demand-driven research and extension for development and innovation – through systems thinking, solutions-making, and future-proof paradigms.”

HOW DOES OVCRE OPERATIONALIZE UPLB AGORA?

For the past 25 years, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Extension (OVCRE) has been leading the university in coordinating, promoting, monitoring, and evaluating R&E programs. OVCRE also assists in generating resources and establishing

inter-institutional R&E linkages, and coordinating staff development for Research, Extension, and Professional Staff (REPS).

Dr. Nathaniel C. Bantayan, current VCRE, articulates an operationalization of how OVCRE will work and proceed as guided by the UPLB AGORA — with PROACT or Participatory Response to Opportunities for Action. PROACT enables OVCRE to nurture and sustain its collaborations with communities, institutions, and industries, both local and international.

Under PROACT are four key components reflective of UPLB AGORA's focus areas: Refining Research and Innovation Systems, Advancing REPS Welfare, Strengthening Local and Global Linkages, and Intensifying Extension and Public Service.

To ensure future-proof, more efficient, and effective results in R&E processes, OVCRE adapts to the fast-changing technology society by providing and sustaining an enabling environment for innovation and creativity among its staff through improved programs, systems, and processes that are continuously reviewed, streamlined, and digitally transformed. For instance, data harmonization, digital transformation, and streamlining have been done for project monitoring, and analytical capacity assessment for R&E human resources and physical assets.

UPLB's REPS are continuously nurtured through staff welfare initiatives and motivating them to contribute to the vision of a future-proof research university. The REPS Welfare Council, REPS Personnel and Fellowship Committee, and REPS Development Fund Committee continuously develop and implement improved policies, guidelines, and programs that prioritize and safeguard

REPS welfare as well as address their most pressing concerns and problems.

OVCRE also strives to maintain and strengthen local and global linkages by collaborating with other institutions and industries for joint R&E partnerships, academe-industry linkages, and opportunities for staff development. Just recently, the office launched the AGORA Roadshow and met with the Los Baños local government units and higher education institutions (HEIs) to share best practices and challenges and discuss possible areas of collaboration in Research, Development, and Extension.

OVCRE's Quick Response Mechanism Towards Disaster Resilience Project monitors and assesses climate change impacts, develops mechanisms to immediately document natural hazards, and establishes a network of partners and collaborators.

OVCRE intensifies Extension and Public Service through the creation of the joint Knowledge Management and Extension and Public Service Section, where various visits and discussions with communities, local government units, and HEIs are conducted for potential collaborations and partnerships through the implementation of various extension programs and services.

Some of the projects initiated to achieve this objective were: the community needs assessment for UPLB services and technologies and mapping of UPLB R&E project implementation; offline and online promotion of R&E culture; and the development of the UPLB Extension Fund Program.

By establishing a caring community, needs are better understood and addressed, participation is encouraged and fostered, and interventions are more appropriate and realistic.

The UPLB community always faces the challenge of continuously implementing and cascading UPLB's R&E efforts to diverse stakeholder groups toward a nation that is food-secure, healthy, resilient, sustainable, and future-proof, especially in today's post-pandemic era.

Amidst volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times, UPLB will keep its oath to accelerate growth through a unified research and extension—constantly proactive, innovative, pioneering, and future-proof. 🌱



A vibrant and bustling university where robust academe-industry partnerships fuel research and innovation and foster a knowledge development ecosystem. Modern infrastructure, world-class learning facilities, and cutting-edge laboratories that produce a high concentration of talent. Agile and highly efficient operational processes that promote high productivity and efficient management of resources.

These are images of a university that UPLB aspires to be, one that can anticipate and adapt quickly to change and disruptions. Will this remain a pipe dream amid scarce resources? It could, but not if the UPLB Agro-Industrial Park-Information Technology Park (AIP-ITP) comes to fruition.

AIP-ITP is located within the UPLB special economic zone (SEZ) that is envisioned to become a preferred destination of locators in the agro-industry (22 ha) and information technology (7.5 ha) sectors, and for establishing research facilities, start-ups, and business incubators (4.0 ha). It also includes a commercial area (1.5 ha) and green open parks, basic

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An SEZ that caters to agro-industry can help spur the local economy by taking advantage of opportunities, including expertise and technology from UPLB, to bridge the gaps across the agriculture value chain.

systems, and support facilities (9.3 ha) needed in an SEZ.

AIP-ITP is strategically linked to the Manila South Road and the Philippine National Railways through multiple access points and will become more accessible as soon as the South Luzon Expressway Toll Road 4 and the Laguna Lakeshore Road Network are completed.

Apart from fiscal incentives, locators in an SEZ will benefit from the talent and expertise that abound in UPLB, research and technology, and access to facilities such as International Organization for Standardization-certified analytical laboratories.

fDi, a print and digital magazine of the Financial Times, cited anecdotal evidence suggesting that the presence of a university in or near an SEZ is a key factor in its

success, given that the world's top SEZs have universities in them. According to the author, Thibault Serlet, who is also director of research at the Adrianople Group, a business intelligence advisory firm, the presence of young, energetic thinkers in universities guarantees that SEZs remain in touch with current technological trends. Universities also act as magnets for entrepreneurs because of their entrepreneurship programs and start-up events that attract people from the global tech scene.

An SEZ that caters to agro-industry can help spur the local economy by taking advantage of opportunities, including expertise and technology from UPLB, to bridge the gaps across the agriculture value chain. It will also mean an increase and improvement in the quality of employment and more vibrant commerce in Los Baños and surrounding areas. 📌

AIP-ITP will open doors to future-proofing UPLB

JOSEPHINE M. BO

The AIP-ITP timeline

1990s

established as an S&T Park with 3 incubator buildings

2006 - 2014

designated as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

2007

UP AIP-ITP SEZ was initially planned as a mixed-use development with business, residential, commercial uses, and research spaces

2012

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau issued Environmental Compliance Certificate to both AIP and ITP

29 Jan 2015

SEZ proposal approved by UP Board of Regents at its 1350th meeting; 61 ha for AIP and 9 ha for ITP

06 July 2015

Sangguniang Bayan of Los Baños through Resolution No. 2015-105 unanimously approved favorable endorsements of the UPLB AIP-ITP to Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA)

12 Nov 2015

President Benigno Simeon Aquino III signed Presidential Proclamation No. 1164 and 1165 paving the way for the declaration of the SEZ in UPLB; PEZA certified UPLB as the developer/operator of the AIP (CoR No. EZ 16-16) and ITP (CoR No. EZ 16-15)

04 March 2016

PEZA and UPLB signed registration agreement

30 May 2019

Philippine Public-Private Partnership (PPP) through its Project Development and Monitoring Facility (PDMF) Committee approved the support to be given to AIP-ITP

08 January 2020

PPP Center Executive Director Ferdinand A. Pecson and UP President Danilo L. Concepcion signed the Technical Assistance Agreement for the AIP-ITP Project

30 July 2020

UP BOR issued a board resolution ratifying and affirming all actions undertaken by the UP President on behalf of UP in availing the PDMF support for the project preparation and transaction advisory

2020-2021

Activities related to the Feasibility Study of AIP-ITP commenced

April-June 2021

Public consultations conducted

27 June 2021

Project Market Sounding webinar conducted by Sycip, Gorres, and Velayo (SGV), PPP Center, and UPLB for stakeholders

July 2022

Feasibility study completed

29 June 2022

Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) General Manager Jaime C. Medina endorsed UPLB AIP-ITP Project

02 August 2022

Office of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of the Province of Laguna endorsed the UPLB AIP-ITP through Resolution No. 736, s. 2022

17 November 2022

UPLB met with National Economic Development Authority - Regional Development Center (NEDA-RDC) 4A Assistant Regional Director and team for project updates and site visit

February 2023

Project documents submitted to NEDA Investment Coordination Committee (ICC) which required the approval of the Office of the Vice President for Development (OVPD)

7 June 2023

Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr. attended the walkthrough of NEDA-ICC deliberation process where key points for discussion were highlighted

20 June 2023

UPLB endorsed the Project to UP President Angelo Jimenez for OVPD vetting process to ensure that the feasibility study is compliant with NEDA-ICC's requirements

Expanded academic offerings for accessible UP education

JESSA JAEL S. ARANA

As UPLB strives to make UP education more accessible to more Filipinos, it is capacitating its academic units, building supporting infrastructure, and expanding its program offerings. In the past three years, the UP Board of Regents approved several program proposals from UPLB, giving Filipinos more opportunities to pursue higher education at UP.

There is a growing need for higher education institutions in the country to expand their capacity for training and instruction as the country continues to pursue economic development amidst rapid digital technology turnover, globalization, and on-going recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. UPLB has responded to this need by developing new programs based on the requirements and recommendations of industry leaders, alumni, and prospective students.

UPLB utilized its growing expertise among its faculty and researchers to create these programs, which aim to supplement the need for more professionals in key industries.

The most recent and significant of these developments is the opening of microcredential programs at UPLB, following the global trends in universities across the world. Microcredentials can make specific skills more accessible to professionals and address needs in the workforce.

UPLB now has 30 microcredential courses housed under different colleges. These programs focus on teaching practical skills and competencies in synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Learners may earn their certification for a microcredential after completing a set number of modules.

The new bachelor's degree programs in mechanical and materials engineering are envisioned to make engineering

more comprehensive at UPLB, enabling it to train more engineering professionals and address the increasing demands in the industry.

UPLB has also expanded its graduate programs to help professionals acquire specialized and expanded knowledge that can help them in their careers. This is in line with the University's mission to increase the number of experts and scholars who can contribute to national development.

Notably, UPLB instituted several PhD by Research programs that focus on dissertations instead of coursework, allowing professionals to pursue a degree program while undertaking research and development projects, thereby contributing to their field's body of knowledge.

Dr. Jomar F. Rabajante, dean of the Graduate School, said that UPLB's PhD by Research programs are designed for those with sufficient research and technical background and will not need extensive coursework.

Many of these PhD by Research programs are the first of their kind in the country.

The University has also ventured into creating associate degree programs that only take about two years to finish. These programs can equip senior high school graduates with the basic knowledge and skills they need to seek out employment opportunities or continue into a bachelor's degree. It will also enable them to build up their education at their own pace.

According to Dr. Benamina Paula G. Flor, a UP Scientist and a faculty member at the College of Development Communication and the developer of the Associate of Science in Development Communication

“UPLB has also expanded its graduate programs to help professionals acquire specialized and expanded knowledge that can help them in their careers. This is in line with the University's mission to increase the number of experts and scholars who can contribute to national development.

(ASDC) program, associate programs offer a chance to those who could not pursue higher education studies right after high school.

She said that while these programs do not require passing the UP College Admission Test (UPCAT), these still have other requirements that will ensure that its takers can proceed to higher education and are ready for employment.

“Late bloomers may take this opportunity to fulfill their dreams of getting to university despite the hindrances and challenges faced before then,” she said. Associate programs can also help completers of the Alternative Learning System and those who want to professionalize their work experience through formal education.

With these efforts to expand UPLB's fields and levels of instruction, UPLB can contribute more to increasing the country's professional workforce who are equipped to take on the rapidly changing needs of local and global industries. 🌱



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OVCSA future-proofs student programs and services with new management systems

ANGEL JUNICE P. LUMBA & ROGELIO P. PANUELOS, JR.

The past few years, characterized by much uncertainty and disruption, compelled educational institutions, including UPLB, to reimagine their delivery of student programs and services.

UPLB launched future-proofing programs and a digital transformation initiative to catch up and cope with these challenges. Many of these were anchored on technology and technological developments.

It is worth noting, though, that automation began early at the then Student Organizations and Activities Division (SOAD) under the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), the forerunner of OVCSA. The Student Organization Module or OrgsUP, conceptualized in 2011 by former SOAD Head Asst. Prof. Mark Lester M. Chico with former Communication and Information Technology (COMMIT) Head Juan Miguel Carlos V. Abriol-Santos, was the first system designed to facilitate organization-related activities and concerns such as organization registration, activity permits, and narrative reports.

OrgsUP led to the development of the OSA Management (OSAM) System, which has long been in use since June 2012. OSAM is an advanced software

suite with web, desktop, and mobile components aimed at making students queuing up for services to become a thing of the past.

New systems have been developed by OVCSA's Research, Communication, and Information Technology (RECOMMIT) to provide easier access to their services. These systems streamline necessary information and processes through an online system.

One of the new systems is the Student Assistantship and Graduate Assistantship (SAGA) Program, which accommodates services for student and postgraduate assistants.

Launched in October 2021, the Online University Clearance System was developed to make the processing of students' clearances simultaneous across offices and transparent. A clearance application kicks off the process with the system enabling involved offices and the applicant to view and act on it. Both parties can immediately address deficiencies, significantly reducing processing time as the process is simultaneous across the offices.

The Online Dorm Reservation System, introduced on July 11, 2022, on the other hand, accommodates student

dorm applications and guarantees a systematic management of the slots.

In July 2022, the Queuing System was relaunched to make the services offered by OVCSA units more efficient, and shortly thereafter, the SU Logs System, pioneered in November 2022, was launched to monitor the comings and goings of people in the Student Union Building.

The OVCSA-managed Spaces Reservation System is an additional module of OSAM, which seeks to ensure better services and equity in the use of spaces where events are held. Reservation of facilities managed by the OVCSA Main Office will be accommodated in the system to ensure their availability for university constituents as well as paying individuals and groups.

These systems stand as components of the OSAM System being maintained by OVCSA through RECOMMIT. As a modernization project of the office, the OSAM System takes advantage of the benefits of information technology to promote students' growth and personal development.

RECOMMIT continues to ensure the development of needs-based systems that respond to the evolving landscape of the university and higher education. 📖



UPLB LQLG, an edutourism destination

JUAN PAOLO A. AQUINO

Here's one to add to a wanderlust's stops south of Manila – the UPLB Laguna-Quezon Land Grant (LQLG), which straddles part of Siniloan, Laguna and Real, Quezon.

The name does not make it sound like a touristy place, but in all its unburnished glory, LQLG is a gem of a destination for people longing to escape the hustle and bustle of the city.

Located 81 kilometers southeast of Manila, LQLG is said to hold majority of the remaining forest cover of Sierra Madre, making it the last bastion for endangered species of the Philippines.

A visit to LQLG is as much educational as it is relaxing. It brings one into the world of natural resources, flora especially, that should have been conserved elsewhere in the country.

UPLB, which administers LQLG, is developing it into a tourist destination of choice. It does so with the full understanding that whatever is generated from it would fund stewardship activities, including biodiversity conservation.

New amenities and attractions, like the Conservation Gardens and the BINHI Arboretum of Philippine threatened trees, are already up. The Conservation Garden is a 400-m trail consisting of six interconnected gardens of native and endemic plants like medinillas, aroids, ferns and pandans, gingers, palms, and hoyas and orchids. The Hoya & Orchid garden showcases the *Hoya landgrantensis*, a species discovered in the Laguna Land Grant in Paete, Laguna.

The BINHI Arboretum, on the other hand, is a collection of the most threatened trees in Sierra Madre, and also in the Philippines. BINHI is funded by the Energy Development Corp. (EDC) to provide a haven for the long-term protection and survival of trees and to rescue and ensure the propagation of selected 96 premium Philippine threatened tree species across the country.

Another attraction is the jade vine trellis set up between the conservation gardens and with funding from CleanTech Renewables. Jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*) is a perennial vine that has jade-colored, claw-shaped flowers which bloom in huge, showy, pendant, grape-like, clustered racemes drooping to 40 inches long. The flower is endemic to the Philippines and is featured on the country's 5-peso coin. Jade vine flowers bloom from March to July.

One can also go fishing and rafting at the lagoon, mountain climbing, traversing the eco-trail, biking, camping, car camping, and tree planting, or have a photo and video shoot.

Bird watching is another activity that one can enjoy at LQLG, with many of the threatened and restricted-range birds of the Luzon Endemic Bird Area recorded and presumed to occur in the place as per research conducted by Birdlife International.

LQLG will also soon offer accommodations at the guest house, and in the future, in cabins and cottages. With its scenic and lush surroundings and the learning opportunities it provides, LQLG will soon be an edutourism destination that's going up in everyone's list of places to visit. 🌿

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In today's VUCA world, collaboration is king

ALBERT GEOFFRED B. PERALTA

VUCA - Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous. These are accurate descriptors of the world around us today. To keep apace with rapid global changes and disruptions, many of which transcend geopolitical boundaries, organizations must collaborate and partner with other institutions in similar and different fields.

Recognizing this, UPLB has focused on strengthening its linkages and building bridges with new partners. It sought new collaborations with local and international organizations and institutions through which it aims to fulfill its vision of providing agile leadership in higher education (HE).

ESTABLISHING A LOCAL NETWORK

UPLB established the Office for Institutional Development in Higher Education (OIDHE) in September 2020 to create programs and opportunities to connect, collaborate with, and capacitate higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines.

OIDHE has since forged linkages with 80 HEIs—state universities and colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines. These linkages have led to such collaborations as benchmarking activities, dialogues, consultative meetings, webinars, and joint publications and research projects. OIDHE's first director Dr. Greg T. Pawilen said that OIDHE plays a crucial role in identifying UPLB experts who can offer assistance to partner HEIs.

"As the National University, our desire to be at the forefront of evidence-

based practices and grounded research endeavors brings us to our advocacy of mutual gains and benefits between and among HEIs," said Pawilen. "OIDHE takes pride in translating these efforts into tangible programs and projects."

OIDHE seeks to revitalize harmony and teamwork among various UPLB units through efforts that advocate cooperation and benefits between UPLB and partner HEIs. While much has been accomplished since the establishment of OIDHE, relevant and timely programs aligned with leadership, research and development, and public service are in the pipeline.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

International collaborations toward developing HE has been part and parcel of UPLB since early in its history. Its partnership with Cornell University in the 1950s proved instrumental in developing UPLB's facilities and human resources.

The campus hosts international institutes such as the International Rice Research Institute, Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. It is also the location of an Asian Satellite Campus of Japan's Nagoya University. These institutions contribute to the development of HE in the country.

Over the years, UPLB has inked partnerships with HEIs all over the world aimed at knowledge and resource sharing. These have borne fruit in the form of student and

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academic exchange, implementation of transnational and dual degree programs that are administered by the Office of International Linkages (OIL).

From 2020 to 2022, OIL recorded 32 UPLB students sent in person via the Student Exchange Program to host institutions in 13 countries.

During the same period, OIL helped 73 UPLB students gain academic units online from institutions in five countries through its virtual exchange program. In turn, 19 students from Indonesia's Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember and the University of Jember attended UPLB online courses.

OIL reported 68 international partnerships in 22 countries in North and Southeast Asia, North America, Eurasia, Europe, and Africa as of November 2022. Through continued effort and with UPLB's full support, OIL seeks to continue to grow that number.

LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TOWARD LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

OIL is implementing a project that aims to further transform higher education across the country by



leveraging its partnership with the University of Liverpool (UoL), UP Open University, and 18 other private and public Philippine HEIs.

The Transformative Academic Practice for Higher Education in the Philippines or TAPHEP Project with funding from the Commission on Higher Education takes a two-pronged approach in transforming higher education practice.

According to OIL Director Anna Floresca F. Firmalino, these are training and certification of teaching professionals in Philippine HEIs by the UoL and AdvanceHE of the United Kingdom and developing bespoke training modules adapted to the Philippine HE landscape by Philippine HE teachers in collaboration with UK professionals.

TAPHEP participants from UPLB and other Philippine HEIs have completed the Postgraduate Certificate in

Academic Practice programme at UoL. The programme provided instruction on the purpose of university, effective teaching and learning, equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI), the global context of HE, continuing professional development, and communities of practice.

TAPHEP held the International Conference on Academic Practice in Higher Education (ICAPHE) on June 30, 2023 where Philippine HE policymakers, practitioners, administrators, and other stakeholders shared knowledge and experiences toward elevating the level of teaching and learning in today's VUCA world. The ICAPHE also served as the platform to launch the Transformative Academic Practice in Higher Education (TAPHE), a community of practice that would serve as a home for the sharing of best practices and collaborations to improve HE delivery. More than 130 professionals from over

50 institutions signed their commitment to participate in the TAPHE.

In today's fast-paced, interconnected world, academic institutions must proactively build local and international linkages to stay competitive and relevant. Through leveraging these connections, institutions can grow globally, unlock broader research and teaching horizons, and provide their students with invaluable cross-cultural experiences and opportunities. In this way, both the institution, its people, and its partners will be future-proof against potential disruptions that may come their way.

UPLB is intimately aware of this fact and will continue to aggressively build and grow its network of partners both domestically and internationally in the pursuit of creating future-proof, resilient, and sustainable global communities that enrich the lives of its members. 🌱

Efforts to keep up with international standards and maintain high-quality education must be supported by infrastructure. With this vision, UPLB continues to upgrade and expand its facilities to provide learning and interactive spaces for its students.

While simultaneous infrastructure projects in the University are currently in various stages of proposal, bidding, and construction, five infrastructures have been identified to have a huge effect on UPLB services in research and higher education.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AND KNOWLEDGE CENTER (ULKC)

The ULKC had its groundbreaking ceremony at the height of the pandemic in 2020. This unfavorable circumstance has not hindered the construction of the new facility. It is now fast taking shape.

The new building was designed to house the University Library, the Information Technology Center (ITC), and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL), among others.

As the new building of the University Library, the ULKC will house valuable

learning materials and services with the goal of making them more accessible and a safe place for students with the dormitories just next door.

It will also feature common-use facilities such as a cafeteria, lounge, study areas, and communal meeting spaces.

Putting the ITC and CATL in the same building as the University Library will facilitate the provision of their services. The ITC can easily monitor internet connection and database accessibility while students and teachers can use CATL's online services and facilities to create and access training and teaching materials.

AGRONOMY, SOILS, AND HORTICULTURE BUILDING, CROP PROTECTION WING

The new building of the Institute of Weed Science, Entomology, and Plant Pathology (IWEPP) has long been a dream for the institute, which shares its roots with the founding of the UP College of Agriculture in 1909.

Through the decades, it has steadily become a leading research and

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With these new infrastructures to aid its pursuit of national development, UPLB will become better equipped to face future challenges amidst rapid and complex changes in society.

academic institution that has built knowledge capacity in the agricultural and industrial sectors and biodiversity conservation.

With this in store for IWEPP, the new building is envisioned to support its growth and enable it to pursue its vision of becoming a globally recognized institution for higher learning in entomology, plant pathology, and weed science.

The new IWEPP building will house a conference room, an auditorium, a lecture hall, 12 teaching laboratories, 9 entomology research laboratories, 9 plant pathology research laboratories, 5 weed science research laboratories, and a plant pest diagnostic laboratory, preparation rooms, rooms for decontamination

Halls for the future

JESSA JAE S. ARANA



and instruments, and a central laboratory. These will be used for classes and will also accommodate the institute's research projects.

FOOD PROCESSING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

With the consistent growth of its student and faculty population in the past decades, a dedicated facility for the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST) has been long overdue.

The IFST has offered the Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Science, and Bachelor of Science in Food Science and Technology for almost five decades, but dedicated laboratories and lecture halls for these programs remain wanting.

Lotis E. Mopera, former director of IFST, said that they had been relying on facilities of other units at the College of Agriculture and Food Science to implement their programs for around 450 undergraduate and 50 graduate students per semester.

IFST faces mounting pressure with the addition of the Master in Food Engineering program, approved by the UP Board of Regents in July 2021, and more programs in the pipeline, including Masters in Food Safety and in Culinary Science.

Thus, it is with great relief that the Institute welcomed the construction of the Food Processing Research and Development Center.

The new five-story building will house a food processing plant on the first floor, in addition to the pilot plant in their main building. The second, third, and fourth floors will have lecture and laboratory rooms, while the fifth floor will have a 200-people capacity conference hall. It will also have faculty and student lounges as communal meeting spaces.

Aside from accommodating the internal requirements of the Institute, these facilities will also benefit IFST's stakeholders as they envision using these to increase the volume of their production processes and to hold more training programs.

NEW BUILDINGS AT THE GRADUATE SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL COMPLEX

UPLB has a diverse demographic, with its students not only coming from different regions but also from neighboring countries. These different cultures and backgrounds all come together on campus, potentially producing various perspectives, critical discourse, and novel solutions.

Recognizing that not all learning happens within the confines of a formal class, the Graduate School (GS) has prepared facilities that can become spaces and avenues where students, teachers, and researchers can freely exchange ideas.

Dr. Rhea L. Gumasing, assistant college secretary of the Graduate School, said that their unit's transfer

to the new buildings will also greatly improve GS's service, especially as they migrate to having more digital transactions.

GS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND CULTURAL CENTER BUILDING

This new building will become the headquarters of the Graduate School offices where student services will be handled. It will also house dormitory rooms with living amenities and recreational areas for international graduate students and visiting faculty and researchers.

Its academic facilities include a student and faculty lounge, meeting rooms, a reading room, and computer rooms.

The new GS building had its soft launching on Dec. 12, 2022, in time for the Graduate School's 50th anniversary.

DORM FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

As the University continues to attract students who want to pursue their graduate studies in UPLB, it has also expanded its amenities to accommodate them.

The new GS Dormitory is a six-story building that can house up to 200 students. Its common amenities include a lounge, a fitness gym, seminar rooms, and a view deck. It is also open to visiting faculty.

Since its establishment, UPLB has grown exponentially and expanded its role as a cultivator of leaders and a producer of relevant research, technologies, and programs.

With these new infrastructures to aid its pursuit of national development, UPLB will become better equipped to face future challenges amidst rapid and complex changes in society. 📍



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