He is a professor, a lawyer, and an agricultural engineer, all rolled into one. But for the past six years, the UP community has known and respected him for one important role – as president of the country’s one and only National University.

UP President Danilo L. Concepcion, referred to in university circles as PDLC, will headline the 50th UPLB Commencement Exercises on Aug. 6 at the EB Copeland Gymnasium to address the 1,549-strong class of 2022.

The said event also marks the resumption of face-to-face graduation rites on campus, two years after the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted large public gatherings.

Since taking the helm of the University in February 2017 as its 21st president, PDLC has integrated to UP's motto of honor and excellence the virtue of compassion – translated in Filipino as malasakit.

During his acceptance speech as UP president at Quezon Hall in UP Diliman, he said: “Sa susunod na anim na taon na ating pagsasamahan, malasakit ang magbibigay bigkis at buhay ay lahat ng ating mga kilos, sa lahat ng ating mga galaw.”

(In the next six years that we will be together, compassion will unite and give life to all our objectives and all our actions.)

Half of PDLC's six-year term has been characterized by the University's adaptation and resilience to the pandemic. As the UP System sailed through the pandemic, honor and excellence with compassion served as the guiding point in the policies and mechanisms of the Concepcion administration to ensure the continuity of teaching, learning, work, and development in the University. This, while taking into prime consideration the welfare of the UP faculty members, REPS, administrative staff, and students all over the country.

PDLC himself has embodied honor and excellence in his track record, as a student and as a professional and a public servant. He graduated as summa cum laude in BS Agricultural Engineering at the De La Salle Araneta University (DLSAU) in 1979. After four years, he earned his Bachelor of Laws at the UP College of Law as cum laude. In 1989, he obtained a Master of Laws from the University of London, Queen Mary College, as a Chevening Scholar of the British Government.

Prior to becoming the president of UP, PDLC had been entrusted with leadership positions at the college, university, and national levels. At the UP College of Law (UP Law), where he is a professor teaching corporate law, succession, persons and family relations, problems in commercial law, special proceedings, and supervised legal research, he served as dean (2011-2017) and associate dean (2002-2006). He also headed the UP Law Center and the Institute of Judicial Administration of the College.

Concurrent as UP Law dean, he served as the executive director of the UP Bonifacio Global City, which also offers the Juris Doctor program. Prior to his deanship, he had a brief stint as vice president for legal affairs of UP in 2017.

PDLC also applied and honed his leadership skills outside UP and academe. He became the president of his engineering alma mater DLSAU from 2000 to 2002. In the national government, he was appointed as associate commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission (1996-2000), and as chief of staff of the Chief Presidential Counsel of the Office of the President of the Philippines (1996). He also served as a member of the Interim Batasang Pambansa representing the youth sector (1978-1984).

A renaissance man in his own ways, PDLC adds to his multi-faceted career his previous stint in broadcasting at DZMM Teleradyo’s “Usapang de Campanilla,” where he provided free legal advice to the public. (Mark Jayson E. Gloria)

PDLC is speaker at UPLB 50th commencement rites

The road to sably: Making great strides despite the challenges

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For Angelamae Morales, the “road to sablay” is a process taken with meaningful steps, each with value on its own. This dedication led her to finish her undergraduate studies at the top of her class as summa cum laude.

True to her philosophy, Morales makes sure to give her best in everything she does. A Laguna native hailing from Calamba City, she did not have lofty objectives in high school. She was more interested in sports and played badminton competitively as part of their school club. But when she came to UPLB, she decided to shift her focus and take her studies more seriously.

She took up BA Sociology, thinking it would better prepare her for law school. Once in UPLB, she brought with her the determination she honed through her time in sports and maximized every learning opportunity in college.

During the pandemic, Morales was not spared from difficulties in her studies. However, her zeal to do her best in everything did not wane and pushed her to try harder. She reminded herself to be consistent and pushed her to try harder. She took up BA Sociology, thinking it would better prepare her for law school. Once in UPLB, she brought with her the determination she honed through her time in sports and maximized every learning opportunity in college. She joined the UP Alliance of Students Unified for Sociology (UP ASUS), eventually serving as its academic collective head in September 2020. Despite the limitations of the pandemic, she was able to spearhead online review sessions, symposiums, and webinars, and establish the UP ASUS online academic library. She inspired her colleagues in the organization to pursue academic excellence as she continued to implement the academic tracker for their resident members.

She also continued honing her sports skills as part of the UPLB Badminton Varsity team.

Her leadership and academic performance shone through, and she was inducted into the Pi Gamma Mu and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies.

Through her time at UPLB, she learned the value of being an Iskolar ng Bayan, Para sa Bayan. She became part of various volunteer projects that looked into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the agricultural sector and the challenges in public transportation. She also joined storytelling and book drive projects.

Morales readily applied her knowledge and penned papers on social issues and phenomena such as globalization, imperialism, neo-colonialism, oppression, and urban resilience. From all these, she realized the greatest lesson she learned in UPLB: to be courageous enough to stand up for others and help those in need.

With these experiences, she hopes to become a lawyer for the people. To prepare herself, she is now applying for jobs to gain experience and earn money while she is on her “gap year.”

For students who will continue their studies amidst the global pandemic, Morales tells them, “It’s okay to take it slow and take a break.”

For Morales, students should not be too hard on themselves. “What they are experiencing are not mere personal problems but are rooted in the social ills brought about by systemic problems,” she said.

“I hope that they will not lose hope. I hope that they could find the strength to continue despite the struggles,” she added.

While her “road to sablay” was hindered by various obstacles, Morales’ commitment to excellence and her achievements show that every step forward is worth it. (Juan Paolo A. Aquino)
The Class of 2022 marks the first face-to-face, albeit limited, graduation ceremony for UPLB since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past few years, Iskolars have encountered many hurdles in their “road to sablay,” which is why graduating this year is sweeter.

Iskolars paving the way and sprouting up for greatness

Vic, BS Forestry, is the eldest of five siblings, the first one in his family to finish college. He leads graduates of the College of Forestry and Natural Resources as its summa cum laude.

Vic did not initially choose to take BS Forestry as his course, but he always had an affinity for the environment and natural resources. After looking up the curriculum once he had been accepted into the program, he grew to love forestry, especially after experiencing on-site fieldwork in various regions in the Philippines. His love for forestry and resource conservation drew him to conduct his thesis on detecting changes in the carbon stocks of mangroves.

But once the pandemic hit in the first semester of his third year, fieldwork and other on-site class activities were put on hold and were replaced by online modular learning. The sudden change in the learning set-up made studying more difficult and caused him mental and emotional stresses.

Despite this, he trudged on, fueled by the support of his family and close friends. While he bore enormous expectations from being the first-born child and the first to graduate from college in his family, Vic learned to take breaks and occasionally distance himself from responsibilities to manage his stress.

He dedicated himself to attending his synchronous classes while relying only on pocket WiFi and mobile data. He was a consistent University Scholar and excelled in extra-curricular activities, leading the UP Zeta Beta Rho Honor Fraternity on his final year.

Vic dreams of entering academe or focusing on environmental work in local or international organizations. He hopes that through his work, he can clear up public misconceptions regarding forestry and natural resources, such as the regulated and scientific method of logging, and aid in creating government policies that are rooted in practical and scientific methods and vetted by experts.

As he finishes his studies, Vic gives aspiring foresters some advice. “If you’re interested in the environment and forests in general, pursue your passion. Forestry is a beautiful and holistic course, and it is rewarding in many ways.”

Take the first step, and Sprout Up!

Arvin Joshua P. Barlongo is graduating from the BS Agriculture program with a major in horticulture. Like many of his peers, he had undergone a class in ABME 10 (Foundations of Entrepreneurship), where he was inspired to create an entrepreneurship venture of his own. Where most students stopped after finishing the course, Arvin continued with his idea. He went on to win a P50,000 cash grant from the Kabataang Agribiz Young Farmers Challenge Fund, a financial assistance grant from the Department of Agriculture.

Arvin said that he was not the type to be outspoken in class in elementary school and had only started using social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube when he saw that there was a need for supplementary materials for the youth who are interested in agriculture.

He developed Sprout Up i6111, a business venture rooted in the values of education, science, environment, agriculture, and life. Through his start-up, he was able to sell horticultural crop kits to help beginners and experienced agriculturists and provide both assistance and advice on agriculture even after purchasing the kits.

When asked about the meaning of the number “6111”, Arvin proudly said that “6111” stands for the Bible verse Isaiah 61:11, which ends in the quote “Sprout up before all nations.”

As his venture continues to grow, Arvin persists in balancing his studies with his work as a content consultant for various international companies and his business. Through juggling all these responsibilities, he even experienced a bout of COVID-19 in the middle of defending his thesis.

Despite all these, he persevered through the ups and downs of study and is now graduating cum laude.

From his experience, Arvin imparts tidbits of inspiration to future Iskolars ng Bayan. “Take that first step, because you don’t know where that first step will take you. [It does not matter] how small it is, whether that’s picking up the phone or writing down your ideas.” (Kristel Hope T. Villafuerte)
Over the past six years, the COVID-19 pandemic during the last half noteworthily, President Danilo L. Concepcion (PDLC) has been a regular presence at UPLB. These visits were typified by meetings to update on projects and initiatives that he staunchly supported and championed.

An informal survey of some of the past and current UPLB officials highlights themes of various initiatives implemented in UPLB during the period. Definitely not comprehensive coverage, however, but these give a look-see into how PDLC is as a leader.

Having made a bid for the UP presidency on a promise to pursue and espouse honor and excellence with compassion, it was thus fitting that his programs were hallmark ed by this virtue most in demand in these times.

Compassion

To cushion the impact the health crisis had on teaching-learning, the UP administration provided students with internet connectivity and gadgets, and professors with incentives for course pack preparation. Reading breaks were fitted into the academic calendar to allow faculty and students to catch up, focus, and understand the course learning materials. For the rest of the staff, internet subsidies and hazard pay were provided depending on the work arrangement one subscribed to during the highest quarantine level.

Pre-pandemic, PDLC had already implemented policies and programs that alleviated the financial difficulties of students. One of these was the immediate implementation of the Universal Access to Quality Free Tertiary Education as soon as it was signed into law. This despite there being no directive yet on how the law would be implemented.

He mobilized support for a modern and equipped UPLB University Health Service that would benefit not only UPLB constituents and their dependents but also the university’s neighboring communities. He got the support of PAGCOR for the project to renovate and upgrade the Operating Room complex and tapped donors from US-based UP alumni organizations to support the project.

Broader access to a UP education

PDLC is a firm believer in providing people increased access to a UP education through the offering of short-term undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Under his term, UPLB gave birth to eight new curricular programs. These are Associate in Arts in Entrepreneurship, BS Mechanical Engineering, BS Materials Engineering, MS Physics, Master in Animal Nutrition, Master in Food Engineering, Master in Clinical Nutrition, and PhD Applied Mathematics. More are in the pipeline, including associate degree programs that will give non-UPCAT passers a chance to complete a two-year program that could then give them an option to pursue a four-year degree program.

Some of the proposed degree programs are in UPLB’s traditional fields of expertise and allied areas such as environmental policy, environmental planning, environmental design and management, environmental negotiations and diplomacy, sustainability, resilience, early childhood education, development communication, forestry, data science, accountancy, fine arts, and architecture. PDLC has also been pushing for the creation of the colleges of education and arts at UPLB.

UPLB is also preparing to offer more graduate degree programs at the UP Professional School for Agriculture and the Environment in Panabo City, Davao del Norte.

Institution development and strengthening

With PDLC’s support, UPLB created offices to facilitate internationalization and strengthen not only UPLB but also its partner higher education institutions and allow focused attention on student care as its main mandate.

UPLB elevated the Office of Student Affairs into the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs in February 2020 right before students needed to go back to their homes when the COVID-19 pandemic caused various quarantine measures to be implemented.

UPLB expanded the mandate of the Interactive Learning Center with its reorganization into the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to lead in the development and management of knowledge products and instruction materials that adapt to changing educational environments.

UPLB also created the Quality Assurance Office to facilitate internationalization initiatives, internal assessment, information process development, database management, and documentation. The newly created Office for Institutional Development in Higher Education, meanwhile, is now supporting state, local, and private universities and colleges all over the country in curriculum development, collaborative research, and faculty and leadership development.

Infrastructure projects and budget allocation

In infrastructure development, PDLC contributed in great measure to UPLB from plan-making to sourcing of funds for big-ticket projects. An important lesson that UPLB officials have learned from him is that decision makers/fund sources are more open to listening to a pitch when they see what the project is for, and its features, and know that the budgetary allocation was not taken out of thin air.

Since 2018, UPLB has been coming up with Detailed Architectural and Engineering Designs to allow scrutiny and come up with a realistic estimate of the cost of proposed infrastructure projects.

Raising funds for these projects is work that PDLC has told UPLB officials is his as the UP president. UPLB only has to come up with a clear plan, justify it well, and if approved, he will take care of looking for the needed funds. To date, PDLC has already provided substantial funds for many big-ticket UPLB infrastructure projects.

The PDLC-UPLB partnership is one that has worked well and has accomplished much for the benefit of UPLB. (Josephine M. Bo)