

# Social Conscience, Social Intelligence: What General Education Tatak UP Entails

Bienvenido L. Lumbera

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**M**uch talk has been expended on the controversy between proponents of the Revised General Education Program (RGEP) and its opponents. What has escaped discussion is “for whom” is a UP education. Obviously, a UP education is for Filipino youths of our time. Discussion of General Education (GE) should begin with an evaluation of present-day Filipino youths. Under the existing school system which was designed by American colonialists to pacify Filipinos shortly after these were cheated of their independence that the revolution of 1896 won against the Spaniards, the US was out to fashion the Filipino people in the image of Americans, albeit their “little brown brothers.” The public school system took care of pacification and subsequently, print media, movies, radio and phonograph records took care of the inculcation of American values via entertainment. The process continues to this day when the Philippines has allegedly gained freedom in 1946. Colonial education and commercial colonial culture have gone hand in hand in creating a young population fascinated with the West and looking forward to live in a Philippines that is a hand-me-down second-hand America.

The 1960s was a brief period of a return to the ideals of the revolutionists of the 19th century. The EDSA revolt was a momentary glimpse of genuine nationalist change, but the leadership of the country did not have the political will to pursue the moment to its logical

conclusion—to revolutionary change. The youth movement that was active in pushing for the change lacked the forcefulness to clinch its triumph. Its energy dissipated with the break-up of ranks into reformists and radicals and other splinter groups.

The youth for which the University should be aiming to rally for genuine change has been decimated by desertions, with their former militants absconding to business or government sinecure, and social media and capitalist culture via electronic media further undermining militancy and radical orientation. This is the youth that the University GE program should engage with to rally back to the fold of the revolution.

It is not the GE program that has lost its vitality, causing its proponents to panic into organizing what is tantamount to a supermarket of course offerings to make UP education enticing. It is the youth sector that needs revitalizing and a GE program that answers the need is what is called for. We only need to look back to the UP of the 1960s to see that UP education then produced youth leaders, the likes of Jose Maria Sison, Lean Alejandro, Voltaire Garcia, and Monico Atienza, who responded magnificently to the leadership need of the youth movement of the time for fiery advocates of national independence and democracy.

The table of course offerings designed to appeal to modern-day *iskolar ng bayan* reads like a menu for a smorgasburg dinner, with the trivial appetizer and the intellectually substantial lined up for the delectation of young people who are presumed to be tired of prescribed subjects. Such dining fare is in fact distasteful to a serious student to whom the UP education can serve fewer but more substantial courses. Such courses as would equip him with a social conscience and social intelligence, a consciousness of the needs of the people who are desperate for employment that will give their families dignity and well-being; and social intelligence that will make them see how their intellect can serve their fellow Filipinos. Tatak UP general education program as originally envisioned by its framers sought to provide moral and intellectual

leadership, social conscience being its moral component and social intelligence its intellectual aspect.

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C. M. Recto Hall, Bulwagang Rizal,  
University of the Philippines