A bad university teaches how to be busy. A mediocre university instructs how to cram answers into short-term memory. A good university infuses cutting-edge knowledge. A great university helps learners develop how to think. Which type of tertiary higher education institution might you attend?

The needs of undergraduates are distinct from graduate students. In continuation of Business Talk’s miniseries on selection and quality of Kenyan universities, today we take a deep dive into how to select and question undergraduate programmes Part 1.

First, try to assess a university’s commitment to instruction. Many universities stick the lowest ranked faculty or adjunct lecturers to teach undergraduate classes. Additionally, some stick graduate student teaching assistants into undergraduate classrooms.
Undergraduates often do not interact with the best leading minds in different fields and get stuck with “lack of depth” instructors.

Interestingly on the other side of the world, many parents in America actually prefer that their undergraduate children attend universities without graduate masters or doctoral programmes so that their students can get the best faculty, facilities, programmes, and assistance without getting relegated to low priority status.

Here in Kenya, prospective students and their parents alike should ask the university what proportion of its full professors teach at least two undergraduate classes per year? What proportion of undergraduate classes are specifically taught by the higher ranked full-time senior lecturer or assistant professor, associate professor, or full professors? What percentage of classes have no missed classes in a semester due to faculty not showing up? What percentage of classes have less than 40 students? The dismally low figures at some universities may shock prospective learners to select a different institution altogether.

Second, continuity and progress prove important for students. Research consistently shows that students with more frequent and higher quality interaction with faculty have higher graduation rates.

Some students get stuck in the system with unavailable or evasive project supervisors at the end of their programme or courses required to graduate but offered so infrequently that degree completion drags on and on. So, students should ask for both graduation and retention rates as well as the average completion times for students to finish their undergraduate projects.

How many full-time faculty are in the college compared to the number of students? Many institutions may blame students’ inability to consistently pay their school fees, but good universities disaggregate such data and can tell you what proportion of graduation delay comes from student fee problems versus institutional bureaucratic frustrations.

Third, good university value and champion diversity. In a global world, bachelor’s degree-seeking students need substantial interaction with people who are different than themselves.

Ask the prospective university what proportion of students come from other counties outside the specific county where the university is located? Does the university value diversity such that no one ethnic group comprises more than fifty percent of learners?

Do international students represent greater than five per cent of learners? These easy to achieve diversity thresholds are so basic that one should not attend narrow-minded universities unable or unwilling to comply.

Utilise the above questions and compare data across campuses. Also, ask universities for external verification reports of figures and facts provided by the institution. Universities who refuse to provide prospective students and their parents with transparent data upfront will typically frustrate learners throughout their degree studies and provide lower quality non-data-driven
education in the classroom as well. Business Talk will continue next week with additional undergraduate criteria in the second part of the miniseries.

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