

Youth & Teens Series (No.2)

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE:

MAXIMISING YOUR
UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Afolabi Elebiju Esq.



Introduction

Congratulations on your admission to University, Polytechnic or other tertiary institution! You may or might not have read the first of our 3-part series, ‘Yes, You Can: Ten Steps to Scaling JAMB (UTME) at First Attempt’, published in November 2015.

Yes, You Can is an effective study strategy primer that you will find useful even as an undergraduate; it also provides a good background for this current write-up. You may request your free hard copies from the same sources as this one; whilst soft copies are available at www.mentorhouse.net and at www.lalawlegal.com.

“So let us pursue our studies rather than make the idleness of others the pretext for our own. There are always those who listen and those who read. It is for us to labour towards what is worth being heard or printed.”

- Pliny, iv.16.



1

It's a Journey and God's With You

After the euphoria of admission has settled down, the salient question is: *what next?* You need to settle down and realise that admission signifies the beginning of a 'journey', that of your University career. You need to adequately prepare and strategize how to make an excellent success of it. There is no better support point to start from than with your Maker and Heavenly Father – who in preserving you for a higher purpose, has made your admission possible. You need to commit the journey into His hands and expressly rely on Him to see you through. *"Apart from me you can do nothing"* John 15:5; He is the supplier of wisdom and strength (*James 1:5, Isaiah 40:31*), and in His faithfulness has promised *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"*, Hebrew 13:5. He also said *"I will help you"*, Isaiah 41:10. Remember that *"His mercies are new every morning"*, Lam 3:23 and *"with God, all things are possible"*, Luke 1:37.

He will speak to you, counseling, renewing, strengthening, encouraging, comforting, warning, rebuking, guiding, defending you, and more through His Word - the Bible, *the No. 1 bestselling book of all time on strategy, management/governance, business, moral, spiritual, wisdom, and relationship*. Spend time to access His wisdom, grace and insights by fellowshiping with Him in spirit and truth through: His word, prayers, praise, worship, etc. By so doing, *you will have the right attitude, disposition and confidence to take on all the challenges that may come your way in the quest to make your University experience an optimally beneficial one.*





2

Begin With the End in Mind

Stephen Covey, the famous author of *‘Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’*, said in Habit 2, *“all things are created twice; first mentally; then physically. The key to creativity is to begin with the end in mind, with a vision and a blue print of the desired result.”*

Someone also said, *“when the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable.”* You must have a vision that you are working towards, grounded on the realisation that your University experience is to arm you with skills that adequately prepares you for the future, to make you (amongst other benefits), competitive upon graduation. Because it may be difficult to recover lost time, such reality check should keep you grounded and resistant to distractions.

Some people want to graduate with high honours, so they begin to work towards that goal, right from Day 1. *How does your University/ Department's grading system work?* It is your business to know. An example is University of Ibadan (UI)'s new grading system which became effective in 2016/2017 session: <http://ui.edu.ng/news/re-newly-approved-grading-system-and-minimum-units-be-registered-and-passed-students-each-level>.

Most Universities use the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), meaning that your class of degree will be a reflection of the consistency of your performance over your entire University career. Therefore, every test and assignment, every course you take, matters. Some students who are casual and lackadaisical in their first few years often realize (and too late!) that they can no longer significantly improve their



class of degree because their early years' low CGPA, will have an overall chilling effect on latter year results.

Unfortunately, most students do not realise the importance of grades, until they enter the labour market and find that the best jobs, with promising career prospects have minimum requirements: *“only 2:1s and first class degree holders need apply”!* Why would anyone want to be on the wrong end of threshold requirements by employers of choice? In those days, friends joked with getting *“a draw” (2:2)* or *“let my people go” (3rd Class or Pass)*, but as soon as you are in the job market one wakes to the realisation that average or poor grades can be a huge handicap. Clearly, you don't need such handicap!

You should not start the journey with the expectation that graduating with average result will do. Your attitude should be that since it will (presumably) take the same number of years and cost to get a 2:2, a 2:1 or even 1st Class degree, *“why can't I stretch myself to graduate with at least a 2:1?”* Whilst miracles still happen and definitely not everyone will seek jobs that place a premium on high academic attainment, *you lose nothing even if you want to be an entrepreneur in future by imbibing a culture of excellence through focused hard work.* This in itself is an asset that will be of immense competitive advantage for rapid and assured career progression.

FINISH

3

Deepen Your Roots, Expand Your Horizon

In preparing for an increasingly competitive world after University, wisdom impels that you employ this mindset: to deepen your roots and expand your horizon. The knowledge you are acquiring must go beyond the surface, because *surface value is usually little value*. Get used to seeking out the deeper, *extra* dimension of things. That way you acquire understanding that makes for a more fitting application of what you have learnt; you become a solution minded person who will always be relevant and an asset to teams.

In practical terms, you should seek out internship/volunteering opportunities during your long vacations. By so doing, you are gaining experience and building your *curriculum vitae*. You are also building a reputation as a diligent steward of time and opportunities. Some Universities have work-study programmes, affording you the opportunity to work, say as a library or laboratory assistant and earn some income whilst still a full time student. That income can go a long way for students of humble backgrounds.

Even if you do not need the money, you need the experience; earning and saving for the future also consolidates your edge. You are also sending a



clear signal to the outside world that you are investing in yourself, compared to your colleagues who idle away their vacations. You need to be more than a ‘triangular’ student (who only divides his/her time between the hostel, lecture hall and library).

Engaging in extra-curricular activities, for example sports (and if possible, making the University Team in some events), also helps. You can gain quality exposure and acquire untold benefits representing your University at national and international competitions like NUGA, WAUG, FASU and FISU. At OAU, I knew students who travelled the world attending competitions and relieved their parents of financial burdens because they were on scholarships or were earning allowances and bonuses that was more than enough to pay for their tuition and upkeep.

Other extra-curricular pursuits could be membership of, and leadership roles in, reputable youth organisations like *AIESEC*, *Rotaract*, *Model UN*, *Faculty/ Departmental/ Professional/Religious/Business Associations*, *Campus Chambers (for law students)*, attending skill or result specific retreats/bootcamps, etc. It is absolutely unimaginative to graduate without being actively involved in non-academic endeavours that could provide opportunities which enriches your developmental journey and experience.



4

Manage, Leverage What You Have/Receive

I will use relationships to illustrate this point, but it applies to other resources. You have or should have relationships – with your lecturers, non-academic staff, your student colleagues, etc. How are you leveraging them? Usually the same resources are available to the 1st Class student and those making 3rd Class or pass grade. It is just a function of how well these resources are leveraged. As Mike Murdoch said, Solomon and Absalom had the same father and mentor, but the Law of Difference kicked resulting in vastly different outcomes for these brothers. Whilst Solomon was willing to learn and be mentored, ultimately becoming the wisest man who ever lived, Absalom felt he had matured enough to usurp his father’s throne, with disastrous consequences.



Having personal/mentorship relationships with some of your lecturers/professors is one way to accelerate your ‘maturity’ as you would have access to extra insights that are not generally available to your colleagues. I know graduates who got jobs because their lecturers informed them of opportunities, or leveraged introductions



by their professors to industry contacts who would otherwise not have been willing to give such candidates face time. Most likely such student will successfully scale through recruitment processes not because he is already used to paying attention to details, exemplified by seeking out mentorship relationship with his professors, which creates a *prima facie* positive impression in the candidate's favour with prospective employers.

To excel in some courses like arts (painting, sculpture, textile design, etc) an “apprenticeship” relationship that supplements academic and theoretical sessions in class with experienced lecturers and professors almost goes without saying.

The extra exposure to the wisdom, experience and knowledge of the 'masters' can only be a bonus, helping to further enrich your education and fast racking your mastery of the tricks of the trade. You can get guidance that draws out and helps develop your unique gifts. Sometimes acting as a 'caddie' to a renowned professor at exhibitions or being recommended/nominated to attend industry conferences as a sponsored student, will do you a lot of good.



5

Know Your University Inside Out

In *Yes, You Can: Ten Steps to Scaling JAMB (UTME) at First Attempt*, we talked about making sure your University is the right fit for you during the JAMB/UTME selection process. You should be able to clearly answer, ‘*why this University and not that one?*’ Other not so ‘academic’ issues could also be relevant – you may want to attend a University in another part of the country in order to experience a culture different from your own or your circumstances may dictate that you attend University closer home.

Clearly, your choice should be well informed and based on optimality considerations (and having regard to your circumstances), of which institution can best support your growth aspirations. You should leverage that knowledge to make your University ‘work for you’. It is likely this will lead to a sense of emotional connection to the University such that you are not only inspired by its history, faculty and alumni; you will also see yourself as an ambassador obligated to keep the reputational flag of the University flying higher. In future, such people are likely to want to give back to their Universities after they have achieved career and material success.

6

Form, Expand Strengthen Your Networks

University presents an opportunity to form lifelong friendships and networks that will stand you in good stead throughout your life, post graduation. Pay premium attention developing relationship with your lecturers, leverage their mentorships, etc.

It is never too early to learn a crucial habit of successful people: investing in relationships. It will stand you in good stead all your life, because you are only as rich or poor as your relationships.




7

Keep an Eye on the Outside

I cease not to be amazed when I interview or counsel fresh graduates or final year students who have no idea about the market/business landscape they would soon be entering, works. Many do not see the need to study the market/industry, understand the trends and thereby begin to take steps to make themselves, opportunity-ready. Students exhibiting low interest concerning realities of the outside world will soon realise and get a rude awakening after graduation day, when the ivory tower can no longer be a cocoon for them.

Anyone starting to make enquiries or conducting research about industry opportunities in his field only upon graduation is late, has already lost the initiative and cannot be competitive against colleagues who had made it their business to consistently monitor the external macro environment whilst they were undergraduates.

Recently, a Part 4 Business Education student intending to become an accountant was telling me about his plans: he would do ACCA after graduation. I said that meant he should start working in an accounting/audit firm to optimally combine work experience with the ACCA programme. Moreover, because he was likely to graduate with a 2:2, he was not going to be eligible for consideration by Big Four firms. To my utter shock, he did not know anything about accounting firms, he could not name any of the prominent ones not to talk of any firm at all! My feedback was that I expected him to have researched and made a list of the top 10/20 firms, and read up on them thoroughly (services provided, team and client profiles), etc.



Obviously, when applying to these firms, you will have leverage over other 2:2 graduates/prospective applicants who have not done their home work. Your preparation will help provide clarity on areas you could specialize in, and also identify potential mentors who would be valuable assets in your professional development.

The meticulous, market conscious group are bound to be more confident, knowledgeable, passionate – attributes that position them as potential leaders and enhance their employment attractiveness *vis a vis* their laidback colleagues. Excellent grades are not enough: as between two students with excellent grades, the one who is market savvy will always trump others. The prospective employer will consider him (the proactive market savvy candidate) employment-ready, able to hit the ground running faster and make more contributions earlier than the other fellow who will first undergo a learning curve, or at least steeper learning curve.

It would be too expensive and regrettable to learn at the decision making point that the reason an otherwise good prospect was not employed was that he would require more time or resources to become ready for the job when employed.

Some immediate benefits may also accrue to you as you keep yourself abreast of external developments. For example, you will be aware of scholarship announcements (often with deadlines), to enable you apply for the ones you are eligible for, on time. There may also be other opportunities like business idea contests, essay competitions, etc. Apart from cash and material prizes you could win, such competitions provide fantastic exposure and the mere fact of participation not to talk of winning boosts your profile. Imagine the financial relief for your parents when you become seised of scholarship opportunities and successfully apply for them.



Observe The Law of ‘The Extra’

It is a true axiom that there is little traffic in the extra mile – because average people as a general rule do not like to put in the extra effort. Meanwhile, it is the extra effort that distinguishes the exceptional from the average person. Our Lord Jesus always wants us to do extra: if someone asks for your coat, go ahead and give him your tunic; go two miles if someone asks you to go a mile, *Matthew 5:40-41*.

Some students only read their lecture notes and handouts; others read textbooks in addition; whilst some others go the extra length of reading journals and articles by accomplished leaders in the field. Doing extra research to get additional cases and reading law reports was always going to give an edge to any law student. Imagine if such student also participated in moot competitions and represented his University in national and international moot competitions, winning prizes, and/or was a regular commentator on national issues with published articles to his credit!

Many of the attributes that employers are looking for, you must use your time in the University to develop them. If you have business or entrepreneurial ideas for example, you can put them to work during your studentship; if you excel at that and your studies you are proving the ability to multitask. There is nothing as empowering during interviews as to be backing up your answers with practical examples of what you have done with opportunities and ideas previously. That is the stuff *demonstrable track record* is made of, and makes you extra attractive to employers.



9

Prepare for, Anticipate Post University Life

Shortsighted undergraduates are mostly focused on University life: how to get good grades and/or enjoy their University years. From a competitiveness point of view, it is almost too late to start making plans after graduation. Your 4, 5, 6 Year Plans for your degree should have post graduation elements.

Many do not know that the NYSC year is a 'bonus year' that can be used to achieve so much! You can undertake professional certification programmes, additional work especially if your NYSC work schedule does not keep you fully engaged, job search initiatives as well as incidental activities like honing your interview/presentation skills, improving your GMAT aptitude ratings, etc. Bottomline is: have a plan for your NYSC year and execute, with God's help!

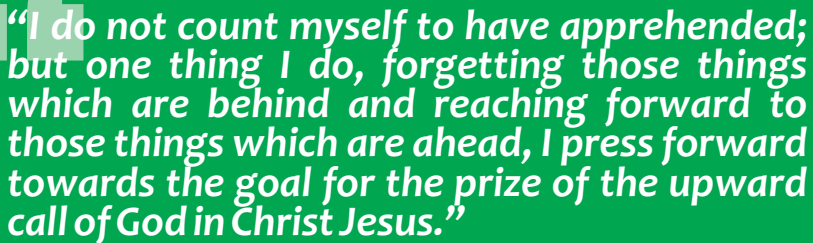
You should be familiar with and frequent leading jobsites for opportunities, engage with recruitment firms that regularly undertake recruitment engagements for premium clients, have role models in your field as mentors or that you are familiar with their footprint, and make sure you track their activities. Be conversant with politico-socio-economic developments (daily read newspapers including but not limited to business news especially of your sector), etc. Not the least important, NYSC affords you opportunity to invest more time into your spiritual life, and participate in outreaches, evangelism and discipling as may be required.

You may also be planning to go for graduate degree programme(s) after graduation; your University grades will have a huge effect on your prospects of admission to the top Universities or for specialised courses, not to talk of winning full/partial

scholarships and/or fellowships in such prestigious institutions. All these take active preparation; some of your experience and activities (e.g. writing articles or working on identifiable projects), helps.

Even the choice of your undergraduate elective courses matters. They are not to be chosen based on how easy you think it would be to get 'As' in them (of course getting 'As' is important) or because your friends are also choosing them, but rather on how well they fit into the grand design of getting you well armed for the future. The better approach is to choose relevant and beneficial electives and then put in the hard work to get the As, thereby killing two birds with one stone!

Also, it is better to work for some time before going for postgraduate study as work experience will provide practical basis for optimising the learning from the postgraduate course.



“I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press forward towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

- Apostle Paul, Philippians 3:13 -14.

10

Be Principle Driven

When you operate on principles, your life is less complicated. In fact, you live an uncluttered life. Issues are reduced to 'black' and 'white', not black, white, grey and many shadows of grey! Confusion is obviated, thereby conferring the advantage of speedy decision making. A 19th Century English judge, Sir George Jessel said, *"I may be wrong and sometimes I am, but I am never in doubt."*

Being decisive helps you 'seize the moment', thereby getting the most out of opportunities; it is an attribute that showcases your leadership potential/ readiness to be entrusted with leadership responsibility to your prospective counterparties – employers, colleagues, subordinates or potential business partners. Being ruled by principles is in effect, operating by 'pre-decisions', so that when situations come, you are ready for example. The fortitude, resilience, discipline and character development that comes with following through on principles boosts your integrity and values.

Like Paul, it is being *"fully persuaded"* about *your choices* (for example that you will not cut corners, or be dishonest), *your friends, your habits*, etc, that makes it relatively "easy" to stand when challenges come or your values are tested. Becoming a high performance employee or high impact individual without integrity and strong sense of values leaves a huge void that can sabotage everything else. Your future deserves more than that.

Conclusion

Quoting *Romans 8:31*, Pastor E.A. Adeboye stated that no other person or power can be against a person that God is for, except that selfsame individual. All the empowerment you need to maximize your University experience as a prelude to an exciting future is within you or within reach. Go ahead and fulfill destiny - may your testimony inspire others as you put these tips to work in Jesus name, amen. God bless you; see you at the top!



***“I can do all things through
Christ who strengthens me.”***

- *Philippians 4:13*



Enitoluwafe!

Poem written on 17.06.16

Exactly this day,
Last year,
You joined
The heavenly choir.

We were drained of strength
So you urged us to sing:

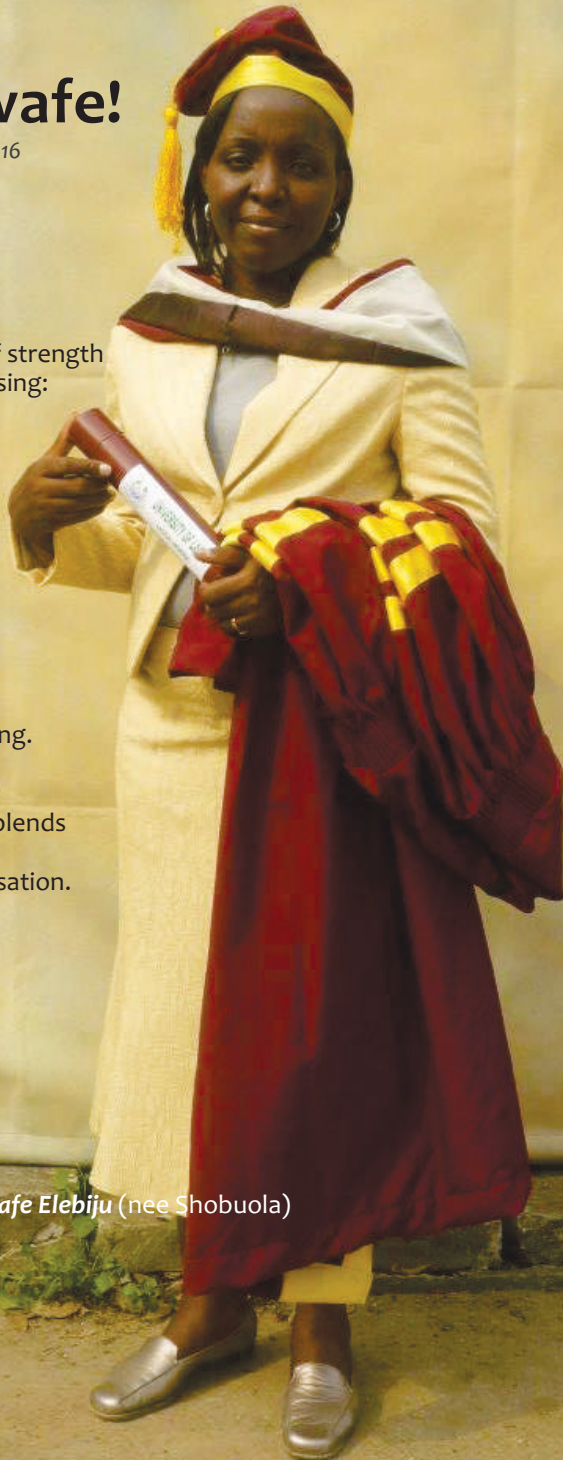
*"All the earth,
Shout His praise,
Sing a new song.
Lift your voice,
Lift your hands,
Give Him glory!"*

We cried and cry,
But we still sing.
We miss you,
But we'll keep singing.

Surely,
When our eternity blends
Songs of His praise
Shall be our conversation.

*"All the earth,
Shout His praise,
Sing a new song.
Lift your voice,
Lift your hands,
Give Him glory!"*

In Memoriam:
Folashade Enitoluwafe Elebiju (nee Shobuola)
25.01.70 – 17.06.15





Folashade
Enitoluwafe
Elebiju
Foundation

Courtesy:
Folashade Enitoluwafe Elebiju Foundation (FEEF).

Hard copies available on request to:

info@lelawlegal.com
or call +234 1 712 0213 -4

Soft copies available at:
www.mentorhouse.net and www.lelawlegal.com

NOT FOR SALE