



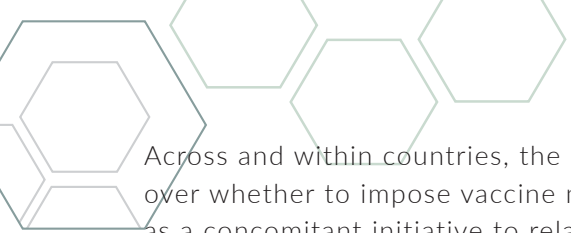
PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Twenty-one months after the Covid-19 outbreak was first recognized in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, the world remains in the throes of the pandemic that ensued. As of this writing, Johns Hopkins University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) has tallied 237.8 million confirmed cases and 4.9 million confirmed deaths with the Philippines contributing 2.7 million to the former and 39.6 thousand to the latter. Vaccinations, the primary public health countermeasure, have been unevenly dispensed both across and within countries: on the one hand, practicing vaccine nationalism, rich countries have hogged most of the still limited vaccine supplies, ordering quantities that are several multiples of their populations; on the other, vaccination campaigns have been slowed by anti-vaxxers and disinformation meant to sow political discord. Our World in Data (ourworldindata.org) reports that

6.5 billion vaccine doses have been administered thus far, which translates to 35% of the world's 7.9 billion people having been fully vaccinated and an additional 12% having been partially vaccinated – estimates that are still far below any possibility of attaining herd immunity, particularly with the more transmissible Delta variant having become the dominant strain. The comparable statistics for the Philippines according to data from the Department of Health are 48.9 million vaccinations, or 21% of the country's 110.1 million people having been fully vaccinated and 24% having been partially vaccinated.

On recent trends, the last two weeks ending in 10 October 2021 saw the world's average daily cases and average daily deaths at 432.9 thousand and 7.4 thousand, respectively, representing declines of 13% and 12% over the previous two weeks, while in the Philippines, the average daily cases are at 13.2 thousand, representing a welcome 30% 14-day decrease, with daily average deaths at 150.0, a 7% decline.



Across and within countries, the debate rages over whether to impose vaccine mandates as a concomitant initiative to relaxing social distancing rules and thereby open up the economy or to extend the lockdowns in places where resurgence has been observed.

Unsurprisingly, the education sector has not been spared. The UNESCO reports that the pandemic caused the largest schooling disruption in human history, affecting as it did 1.6 billion learners worldwide. Between 1 April 2020 and 31 August 2021, for the 210 countries on which data were available, the average duration of school closures (i.e., no in-person schooling was allowed and only remote learning modes were used) was 16.5 weeks; of academic breaks, 19.1 weeks; of partial in-person schooling, 15.4 weeks; and of full in-person schooling, 23.1 weeks. Only in four countries was there no in-person schooling throughout the entire period: Bangladesh, Kuwait, the Philippines, and Venezuela. Sadly, the Philippines was the worst performer with 46.4 weeks of school closures (meaning the country had the shortest duration of schooling) and 27.7 weeks of academic breaks. The comparable estimates for the other countries were: Bangladesh, 59.1 and 15.0 weeks; Kuwait, 53.0 and 21.1 weeks; and Venezuela 58.4 and 15.7 weeks.¹

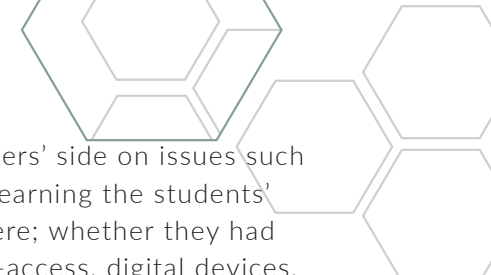
Fortunately, the FEU Group of Schools was better prepared than most other schools in the country to handle the dire consequences of the pandemic. Exercised by a decade's worth of regulatory and legislative impositions and the challenges posed by the onrushing disruptive future for the Philippine education sector,² FEU and its sister schools had already begun their institutional transformation odysseys.

While aspiring for excellence in education quality, the FEU Group of Schools defined the goal not in the metrics of international research university rankings, but in terms of successful student outcomes and of the students' "user experience" of the schooling process – that, above all, the students' time in the schools would be a capacitating journey for their post-schooling careers and lives; the campuses would be inclusive, accepting, nurturing, and safe spaces conducive for learning; and, not least, the service touchpoints (of admissions, enrollment registrations, graduations and commencement exercises, bookstore purchases, library utilizations, guidance and counseling, and university health services, among others) would be mindful of the students' "customer experience."

To facilitate online registrations, the schools had started their transitions to the cloud-based NetSuite enrollment system, with some having already used the enterprise software for several school years. To organize schoolwork and make course resources accessible anywhere, anytime for both students and faculty as long as an internet bandwidth was available, they had subscribed to the best-in-class Canvas learning management system and complemented the platform with apps such as Microsoft's Office 365 (which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Teams, among others); McGraw-Hill's personalized learning software packages (including ALEKS, Connect, and Redbird); and Cengage's MindTap. To ensure fast and uninterrupted access to the internet, they had installed information-technology (IT) infrastructure in their campuses as well as significantly increased and built redundancy in their internet bandwidths. To complement the

¹ Raw data were downloaded from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures>. Computations are mine.

² The regulatory shock came in the form of CHED Memorandum Order 46 series of 2012, which specified stricter quality-assurance criteria for private colleges and universities; the legislative setbacks consisted of Republic Act 10533 [The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013], which disrupted college enrollment flows for five years, as starting 2016 Grade-10 completers had to detour to senior high school, and Republic Act 10931 [The Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act], which provided for free tuition and other fees in state colleges and universities, causing student migration away from private higher education institutions; and the challenges of the future were the onus on the education sector to help the country maximize its demographic dividend and to prepare students, faculty, and the schools themselves for the disruptive impacts of new technologies on the world of work and life as well as on education delivery in the 21st century.

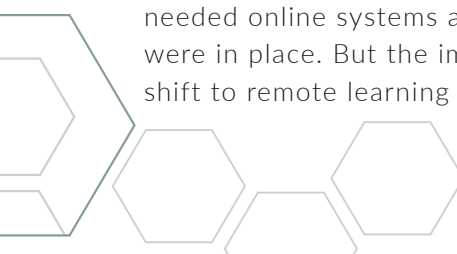


education technology and IT resources, the faculty were provided extensive and sustained training on the features of Canvas as well as on student-centered pedagogies to nudge them into becoming “guides on the (students’) side” rather than persist in being less effective and time-worn “sages on the stage.”

To enhance the quality of the faculty, Far Eastern University (the main campus) and the FEU Institute of Technology turned the adversity caused by the 5-year downturn in college enrollments into an opportunity for the faculty to enhance their academic credentials. A total of 49 faculty members – 41 from FEU and 8 from FEU Tech – were given time-off to pursue their master’s and doctoral degrees in disciplines allied to their academic departmental affiliations.

Seriously thinking through the students’ user experience of schooling, the main campus designed the FEU Learning Journey (FLJ), a one-unit course per semester that all student cohorts had to be enrolled in throughout their college years. Providing a formal structure for mentoring students, the FLJ helps them to (a) navigate their academic lifecycle, (b) develop their inner resources to handle changes and challenges, and (c) articulate and shape their career and life goals. In large part due to the FLJ, FEU Manila was ranked 91st in the inaugural (2020) run of the World Universities with Real Impact’s (WURI’s) Global Top 100 Universities and 19th in the ethical value category.

Schooling in the Year of Cov-Ed



And so it came to pass that in the summer of 2020, with the community quarantines newly imposed, the world plunged in uncharted waters, and the immediate future shrouded in uncertainty, the FEU schools were able to navigate their way and continue to perform their education missions even as government regulations disallowed all forms of in-person schooling. On the side of the schools, the needed online systems and faculty capabilities were in place. But the imperative to abruptly shift to remote learning modes ran into a wall of

unknowns on the learners’ side on issues such as how conducive for learning the students’ home environments were; whether they had the necessary internet-access, digital devices, learning spaces, and other resources for remote learning; and what features of remote learning modes they preferred or would find feasible given their circumstances.

To understand the students’ situations, the FEU schools conducted online surveys of students and their parents on their home environments and resources for “schooling in the new environment” as the surveys were dubbed. The results gave the academic personnel invaluable insights on designing learning modes that would be appropriate to their student populations.

For the higher education levels, FEU Manila (including Makati) and Cavite adopted three modes: mixed online learning, which involved synchronous and asynchronous activities; asynchronous online learning, which did not have synchronous activities; and total analog learning, which involved physically sending all course materials to the students in thumb drives. FEU Tech, Diliman, and Alabang, on the other hand, developed the Mastery-based Individualized Learning Enhancement System (MILES), which designed each subject as a series of stepladder online modules for each student to master with the option of calling on the faculty for mentoring sessions in content areas they find to be particularly difficult. Being the more technologically savvy set of schools, they also set up the virtual campus, where all offices of the schools could conduct their business on the Canvas platform for the ease and convenience of students. For its part, FEU Roosevelt set up the remote online learning and remote offline learning (drive-thru) models.

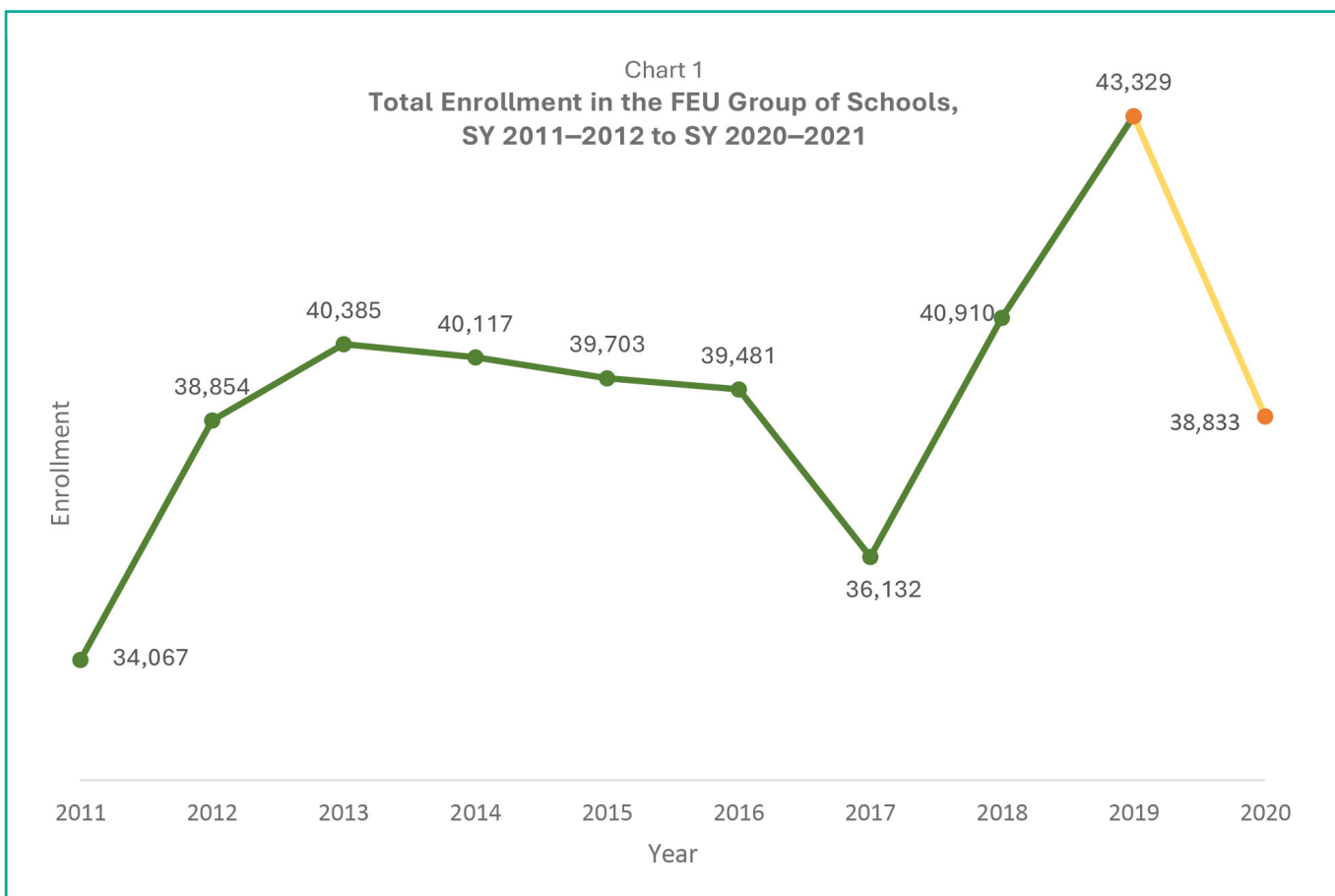
In the senior high school grades, the delivery modes were asynchronous, self-paced learning with synchronous check-in sessions with instructors (FEU High School and Cavite), MILES (FEU Alabang and Diliman), and remote online and offline learning (FEU Roosevelt). FEU Cavite and Roosevelt also used these same

delivery modes in the rest of the basic-education grade levels, while FEU Diliman opted to use synchronous learning sessions for kindergarten to Grade 10.


Perhaps due to the alignment of their remote learning modes with the students' learning environment and their and their parents' preferences as well as the confidence of various publics that the FEU schools would be able to deliver quality remote learning during the pandemic, enrollment in SY 2020-2021 declined by 10% from the level of the previous school

year, a smaller contraction than what many other schools experienced (Chart 1).

But in order to ensure that the learning modes were being implemented as promised as well as to get feedback on the students' experiences in their new schooling environments, the schools conducted two online surveys during the school year. The remote learning survey looked into the implementation of the remote learning modes³ and inquired about the students' overall satisfaction with their chosen mode. In addition, the same survey delved into how the teachers



³ The students were asked to assess whether the features of the remote learning modes were well-explained prior to the start of the school term and implemented as described with well-planned modules; whether the chosen mode suited the student's learning preference and home environment, and facilitated effective learning; and whether learning resources were made available in a timely manner on Canvas and the course requirements were reasonable.



conducted classes as well as the students' overall satisfaction with their teachers' performance.⁴ Resoundingly, the students gave better-than-expected favorable responses, especially for a first run of the quickly designed learning modes. Nonetheless, the survey results were used to improve the designs of the learning modes in their next implementations.

The second survey explored the internet connectivity of the students, the primary information-technology device they used for remote learning, and their assessment of the adequacy of their internet connection with their study needs.⁵ The survey results provided insights on the disparity between subscribed and actual speeds, the wide range of prices, and the segmentation of the market between national-coverage ISPs and those with more limited and localized coverage. Ultimately, though, only a small percentage of students indicated that they were dissatisfied with their internet service, which meant that internet connectivity was not an insurmountable obstacle in the implementation of remote learning modes.

As the survey data when combined with other data sets (e.g., from the office of the university registrar) provided opportunities to show how digital transformation and data analytics may assist in drawing deeper insights on improving student success, the office of the president conducted sophisticated statistical analyses (using econometric qualitative response models) to explore the factors behind the students' overall satisfaction with their learning modes, their teachers' conduct of classes, and the adequacy of their internet connection for

their study needs. Thus began the digital transformation journey of the FEU Group of Schools that has resulted in the creation of a data warehouse for all sources of data (from different offices as well as Canvas).

The upshot of all these efforts at least for FEU (Manila) was that its WURI rankings for 2021 improved to 79th overall – the only Philippine higher education institution in the top 100 innovative universities for the second year in a row – as well as 16th in ethical value, 42nd in entrepreneurial spirit, and 12th in crisis management. For its part, the FEU Institute of Technology placed in WURI's top 101 to 200 rankings and 24th in entrepreneurial spirit.

Academic Administration, Development, and Services: Unevenly Affected

The management of schooling under cov-ed and the successful outcomes described in the preceding section notwithstanding, navigating through the gamut of problems presented by the pandemic was neither easy nor straightforward. The primary challenge came down to how to transpose to a virtual setting the rich and vibrant in-person schooling experience that students had been used to and craved, mainly because not all activities, processes, and events could be readily moved to cyberspace and even those that could had a different “feel.” But ultimately what stood out was the dedication and commitment of the FEU administrators, faculty, and staff to “business continuity,” i.e., the delivery of FEU's education mission even under the trying circumstances.

⁴ The students were asked whether their teachers (a) explained the modules, requirements, and classroom policies at the start of the school term, and gave a clear schedule of class activities; (b) exhibited an encouraging tone in interactions with students, were considerate of the students' circumstances, and accommodating in answering the students' concerns; (c) displayed mastery of the subject matter; (d) encouraged opportunities for interactions and sharing of ideas with classmates; (e) explained the grading policies clearly, used rubrics, and provided qualitative comments on the students' submitted outputs; (f) used a variety of learning resources and instructional materials to advance the course narrative; and (g) provided challenging tasks to foster critical thinking, draw out ideas, and apply what was learned.

⁵ The students were asked about their type of internet connection, internet service provider, and subscribed speed, which was compared to a speed test when uploading and downloading files to and from Canvas as the student answered the survey. They were also asked about other persons in their home environment who use the internet during the students' study periods and the purposes of these other persons for using the internet, the monthly expense for their internet connection, and the gadgets they use for studying.




Academic Administration

In all FEU schools, the academic units exerted valiant efforts to bring the lively co-curricular campus life online. In FEU Manila, a sampling of these activities and events included the Virtual Activities Supporting Education (VASE) program of the Institute of Arts and Sciences (IAS) and the Undergraduate Studies Cross-Program Lecture Series, Teacher Education Online Forum, and Pecha Kucha on Education Advocacy of the Institute of Education. The VASE series regularly hosted practitioners, experts, and scholars of IAS disciplines to discuss social issues with students; it was also used by the Psychology Department to raise mental health awareness and teach problem-coping strategies. The UGS lecture series simulated master classes, which allowed students of different teacher-education programs and year-levels to engage IE faculty members in discussions as well as to interact with each other. Organized as panel discussions, the Teacher Education Online Forum focused on the theme, *The New Platforms in Education: Responding to the Changing Needs of Society*. The Pecha Kucha, for its part, brought together IE's distinguished faculty members to share their research specializations, interests, and advocacies.

In addition, highlight events in the academic calendar were held online, such as the Alejandro Roces professorial lecture series of IAS and the Teacher Education Summit and Alumni Stories of IE. Held to celebrate the National Teachers' Month, the Teacher Education Summit hosted a series of webinars for teachers, teacher-education students, and aspiring professionals on education issues and was capped by a town hall forum on teachers' welfare amid the pandemic. To commemorate the university's 93rd founding anniversary, Alumni Stories were narratives of fortitude, excellence, and uprightness exhibited by IE graduates, which enabled them to surmount professional and life challenges after graduating from college.

Other notable initiatives were the IAS's and Institute of Law's (IL) schemes to engage students in institute activities. In the case of the former, administrators regularly held IAS Conversations with the IAS Student Council and IAS-based student organizations to develop and disseminate guidelines and policies; in the case of the latter, administrators leaned on the student-led Bar Operations Group to help prepare the institute's barristers for the bar exams using online resources and on the IL Student Council to guide students through the enrollment process made trickier by the special requirements of the Legal Education Board.



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Similarly, the FEU Institute of Technology, FEU Diliman, and FEU Alabang transposed campus life to the virtual space, conducting more than 200 events. These spanned welcoming students at the start of each trimester, holding a student congress, hosting technology webinars, and maintaining the TamBayan TV where students could showcase their showbiz talents and artistic performance skills or simply hang out and “chill.”

Academic Development and Faculty Research

Regulatory excellence – meeting the highest regulatory and accreditation standards – is an institutional aspiration of the FEU Group of Schools. Given the history and circumstances of each, however, the schools are at different stages of reaching this goal. As may be expected, the furthest along is Far Eastern University, which since July 2012 has been an autonomous university (the highest category) in the higher-education-institutions typology of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), with CHED Memorandum Order 7 series of 2021, the latest issuance, extending the term of this distinction to May 2023.

The university’s high standard of quality is also substantiated by recognitions of its academic programs by, among others, the CHED; accrediting bodies such as the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA) and the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (PAASCU); and the ASEAN University Network – Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) system.

The teacher education programs of the IE are a CHED Center of Excellence, while the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration of the Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance is a CHED Center of Development.

Almost all academic programs of FEU Manila are accredited by the PACUCOA. The following programs had PACUCOA Level IV accreditation

status (the highest) for the period December 2015 to December 2020 and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have had to undergo their first Level IV Reaccreditation Visit in April 2021 as a virtual exercise, the official results of which are still pending: Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics with Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Biology, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, and Bachelor of Science in Psychology.

The programs with PACUCOA Level III Reaccredited status from January 2020 to January 2022 include the Doctor of Education, Master of Arts in Education, and Master of Arts in Psychology. Those with PACUCOA Level II Reaccredited status from January 2020 to January 2025 are the Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology, and Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management, while the programs with the same status from May 2018 to May 2023 are the Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature Studies, Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, and Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management.

The Bachelor of Science in Nursing is the only academic program in the Manila campus that is accredited by the PAASCU. It has Level III Reaccredited status for the period August 2018 to November 2021.

Three graduate programs have Candidate status. The Master of Arts in Communication and Master of Science in Biology were so accorded by the PACUCOA for the period May 2018 to May 2020, while the Master of Arts in Nursing enjoyed the same status with the PAASCU from December 2018 to November 2020. Their accreditation exercises for Level I status have had to rescheduled, however, due to the pandemic.

In addition, a significant achievement of the university during the school year was the successful hurdling of the assessment exercises of the AUN-QA for the Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, Bachelor of Science in Biology, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, and Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology in November 2020 and for the Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, Bachelor of Arts in Communication, and Bachelor of Science in Psychology in March 2021.

Finally, the Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management program was accredited as a Center of Excellence by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Events Management (APIEM) for the period February 2017 to January 2022.

In the case of the FEU Institute of Technology, four of its academic programs attained the PAASCU Level II Reaccredited status during the school year: the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering. On the other hand, the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering have the Candidate status.

In addition, five of its academic programs passed the Philippine Technological Council Accreditation and Certification Board for Engineering and Technology: the Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering.

That these achievements – in particular, the successful passing of the challenging AUN-QA assessments – were attained during the pandemic, with the exercises made more difficult because they were done virtually and with much of the coordination work among the offices undertaken in quarantine conditions, speaks volumes about the FEU Group of Schools' information-technology resources and capabilities but even more about the commitment of its faculty and staff to showcase the schools' high standard of quality.

A second marker of education quality, which also goes into regulatory excellence, is the faculty research output. For SY 2020–2021, the faculty of FEU Manila published 80 articles – 49 in ISI/Scopus indexed journals, 23 in international refereed journals, and 8 in national refereed journals (Table 1). This was the highest number of publications in a school year in the university's history.

As for FEU Tech, the research output of its faculty consisted of 33 published articles: 28 in ISI/Scopus indexed journals and 5 in international refereed journals.

Also notable was the published output of FEU Cavite Senior High School: 2 articles in international refereed journals and 3 in national refereed journals.

Table 1

Published Research Outputs, SY 2020–2021

School/Institute	Total	ISI/Scopus Indexed	International Refereed	National Refereed
FEU Manila	80	49	23	8
Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance	1	1		
Institute of Arts and Sciences	38	29	4	5
Institute of Education	8	4	2	2
Institute of Nursing	28	13	14	1
Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management	2		2	
Non-Teaching Personnel	3	2	1	
FEU Institute of Technology	33	28	5	
College of Computer Studies and Multimedia Arts	13	13		
College of Engineering	20	15	5	
FEU Cavite (Senior High School)	5		2	3

A third indicator of education quality is the licensure exam results. Unfortunately, in SY 2020–2021 most of the exams were canceled because of the pandemic. But for those that were held, FEU examinees performed significantly better than their peers from other schools, on average (Table 2).

Table 2

Licensure Examination Results, SY 2020–2021

Academic Program	Date	First Time Takers			All Takers			National Passing Rate
		Examinees	Passers	Passing Rate	Examinees	Passers	Passing Rate	
Nursing	July 2021	17	16	94.1%	29	27	93.1%	64.7%
Medical Technology	March 2021	193	162	83.9%	201	167	83.1%	59.1%
Medical Technology	January 2021	123	111	90.2%	126	112	88.9%	67.7%
Architecture	August 2021	5	5	100.0%	5	5	100.0%	66.0%

Student, Extension, and Other Services

Among all the services provided by the FEU schools, the most unevenly impacted by the pandemic were the student and community extension services. On the one hand, fun activities (e.g., esports in FEU Roosevelt schools and concerts for students and employees), milestone events in the school calendar (e.g., commencement exercises), guidance and counseling programs and services, and health consultations could be readily moved online. On the other, library services; textbook procurement and deliveries; the standards-based achievement tests in English, mathematics, and science for basic education students; student-discipline investigations; and extension projects with partner communities were more difficult to implement.

In addition, the health protocols – from having to adapt work-from-home and report-to-office schedules to the constantly changing quarantine restrictions to monitoring and tracking Covid-19 cases in the FEU community and implementing safe office spaces (e.g., deep cleaning areas that Covid-19 patients had been in and ensuring that air flows reduced transmission risks) – meant additional work for the Human Resources Division, University Health Services, and Facilities and Technical Services.

Designing a vaccination plan for the FEU schools also weighed heavily on the team involved. A survey had to be quickly designed and implemented to understand the employees' views about the vaccines and vaccinations. A vaccination campaign had to be undertaken to overcome vaccine hesitancy. A registry had to be developed to keep track of the employees' vaccination status. And arrangements had to be made with other parties to procure vaccines and administer them.


The response of FEU to these challenges is perhaps best captured by one notable extension activity that deserves special mention as it serves to underscore FEU's preparedness for and can-do spirit in facing the pandemic. Early in the school year, the CHED called on FEU to participate in the commission's Hi-Ed

Bayanihan Project, which aimed to quickly train college faculty in the pedagogical and education technology requirements of online flexible learning modes that would have to be adopted with in-person schooling being disallowed. Over 300 faculty members from different colleges and universities nationwide participated in the FEU project, which enabled them to be better prepared for the new teaching and learning environment brought on by the pandemic.

What I personally would like to highlight is that all of the adaptations and additional work were done not only capably but with grace and distinction, which are at the very heart of FEU's corporate character and culture.

Concluding Remarks

Beset by the Covid-19 pandemic that still continues to rage, SY 2020–2021 will possibly be remembered in the education sector as the watershed year when schools were compelled to finally drop the one-size-fits-all in-person schooling model that had not changed much since its invention as a concomitant development of the industrial revolution in the late 1700s. Luckily for the FEU Group of Schools, regulatory and legislative interventions of the past decade had pushed the schools to a quality-transformation journey, thus enabling them to be better prepared than most schools to deal with the stresses brought on by the pandemic. Their journeys are not complete. Their management of schooling under the pandemic can still be improved. But even now the words of praise President Manuel L. Quezon gave to FEU founder Dr. Nicanor Reyes Sr. can be said to ring true: "Dr. Reyes, I am proud of your university! ... I do not mind telling you that I believe your university to be the best non-sectarian institution in the country. ... I congratulate you!"⁶


Michael M. Alba
President
October 2021
Manila

⁶ Nick Joaquin, *Mr. FEU: The Culture Hero That was Nicanor Reyes* (Manila: Far Eastern University, 1995), 11–12.