Good morning....

Allow me start with a THROWBACK....Twelve years ago, on January 21-22, 2005 UP Baguio held a faculty conference that tackled the theme "The University and the Culture of Academic Excellence. The conference had the following objectives:

1. To revisit UP Baguio's vision in the context of the new challenges to academic life and developments in the local, national and international communities;

2. To locate UP Baguio as a constituent unit of the University of the Philippines System;

3. To define the state of instruction, research and extension work in the constituent unit; and

4. To define new terrains in the pursuit of academic excellence, generation of new knowledge through research and creative work, and delivery of extension service to the larger community. It would be instructive and interesting to recall our major recommendations during that conference and reflect on whether we have, or at least we are, currently in the process of accomplishing those recommendations:
1. Improve Instruction at UPB by/through augmentation of the SET with other measures to gauge and get a fuller picture of the quality of teaching, such as peer review, faculty teaching portfolio and faculty contribution to curricular development. Remember that we also agreed to refine the SET instrument.

2. Embark on faculty development through: mentoring, especially one that cultivates a "climate of dialogue" between and among faculty members; explore venues for further interaction and sharing of knowledge among faculty of the different departments and colleges; create venues where teachers can share and exchange notes on teaching methodologies; consider institutions other than UP for further studies to avoid in-breeding; seriously consider the current recruitment practices, meaning, emphasize academic merit.

3. Contribute to the generation of knowledge by doing research, creative work and publishing, and specifically:
   a. Generate/mobilize/source funding for research
   b. Give faculty time to do research (granting of Research Load Credits or RLC)
   c. Provide spaces for research such as research laboratories...an office or building for the Cordillera Studies Center. We also agreed to push for the publication component of CSC and to assist or provide support for faculty publication in refereed journals.
   d. Strengthen the research capacity of the junior faculty through the regular conduct of training and mentoring through team research projects and activities.
   e. Establish a University Ethics committee that will remind researchers on ethical conduct of research.
f. Research dissemination should be practiced within the colleges and in the university.

4. Engage/deliver extension service. We had several recommendations, which were summed up in the following sub categories:
   a. Need for a collective definition of extension work.
   b. Institutionalize extension work.
   c. Define the thrust, focus or prioritization for extension work.
   d. Establish mechanisms and define policies towards the sustainability of extension service.

I am sure that you agree with me that to a large extent, UP Baguio has been able to address and achieve milestones in each of the above-mentioned recommendations towards nurturing a culture of academic excellence in UP Baguio...although perhaps unevenly so, across disciplines, departments and colleges. It is of course easy to draw generalizations, opinions and perceptions on the degree to which we are achieving or not achieving academic excellence. That is why there is a need for us to define and agree on indicators and measures of academic excellence, which is the main objective of this faculty conference today.

As emphasized by the former VP for Academic Affairs Dr. Serena Diokno in her talk during the 2005 Faculty Conference, which I quote: "Let us face it: assessment measures are a fact of academic life. We assign weights to aspects of student performance and the grades we give, no matter how imperfect, are our principal measure of student progress. By the same token, we faculty also live by standards that are translated into concrete measures. Of course these measures carry implicit biases, which is why they should be the object of constant review. What is important is that the biases are not unreasonable, which in our profession means they make academic sense."
These points remain relevant up until today. Academic Assessments, quality assurance or whatever label or term we want to use to measure academic excellence is really about the dynamic interaction of two pillars: on one pillar are the technical matters, which are the indicators, measures, bureaucratic processes and documentation. But we know that quality assurance is not just about technical matters. It is ultimately about our collectively defined VALUES, which constitute the second pillar of quality assurance or academic assessment. Implicit in this consideration are our relations, teaching and learning conversations and even personal experiences. In some instances, these two pillars might result to tensions and contradictions. But it is really up to us, the faculty, in conversations among ourselves, with our students and other publics, to ease and avoid those potential and actual tensions and contradictions. This is why we should start with self-assessment processes...wherein we look at ourselves, based on our declared institutional vision, mission and goals. At the same time, we self-assess vis-a-vis other external perspectives and ever changing contexts. Over the long haul, we should also be ready to subject ourselves to assessments or evaluations by external quality conversation networks, such as the ASEAN University Network. These processes will surely be very demanding in terms of time and resources, but it is imperative that we embrace them, IF we are to sustain the culture of academic excellence in the University of the Philippines.

Thank you and good morning again to everyone.