

Pride of Place, Boldness of Spirit  
A Vision Paper for UP Diliman  
(Summary)  
Michael L. Tan  
January 17, 2014

I will start out talking about what UP Diliman should and could be, in terms of spaces, because we cannot talk about projects without a vision of the environment in which those programs can be planned and implemented. I will talk about the need for spaces that are safe, nurturing, shared, connected, and sustainable.

I will then move into a more specific vision that starts with pride of place, and time, grounding ourselves in the past, but able to work on a bolder and more outward-looking vision, setting our horizons beyond our own colleges toward a Diliman perspective, toward a One UP system, to the nation, and into the world. That journey toward and beyond the horizon must use tools of research, transdisciplinary, with varied perspectives and tools.

Finally, I will describe my vision in terms of an academic citizenship that is collegial and informed, just and fair, and ethical, guided by servant leadership.

Pride of place;  
Boldness of vision

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Every day of the week, more so during weekends, UP Diliman has people coming in from all over Metro Manila to jog, bike, or simply stroll. It is a last green refuge in the concrete jungle that is Metro Manila.

I have walked around this campus many times too, as a student dating back to the 1970s, through almost 30 years as a faculty member. As an administrator – 9 years as the chair of the anthropology department and 3-1/2 as dean of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy – the walks have more often been to recharge and to renew and to declare, “This is why I stay. This is the UP I love.”

There are times too when the euphoria turns into dismay, seeing deteriorating buildings, littering and vandalism, loudspeakers blaring away what vaguely resembles music, promo agents giving out free samples of junk food, even, one time, skin “whiteners”.

I have always loved the sunsets in Diliman but now sometimes have a feeling of dread as darkness sets in, knowing our campus has become so unsafe. Despair sometimes sets in hearing of limited budgets for maintenance.

My vision paper is a time to share with you the many insights gathered during these long walks, alone and with friends, many from outside the academe, people I have worked with in civil society, mass media, government, even donor agencies where I have seen what can be done when there is committed leadership.

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Finally, I will describe my vision for the way we can move toward our goals, in terms of an academic citizenship that is collegial and informed, just and fair, and ethical, guided by servant leadership.

## UP Diliman Spaces

I envision a UP Diliman where spaces are safe, nurturing, shared, connected, and sustainable.

My vision of a safe campus takes many dimensions. Foremost, safe means secured, where we can walk around without fear of being held up, of being approached by budol-budol gangs. Security budgets should never be compromised, even as we look for measures beyond guards and CCTV.

Physical security is also proactive, and a major component should be disaster preparedness. Whether in response to crime or to disasters, UP Diliman must emphasize prevention and preparedness.

Spaces must be “safe” too in terms of a campus that is aesthetically pleasing and, in the process, environment-friendly. I envision a campus that sets the pace for healthier living, starting with food service units that understand the dietary needs of all our constituents, from young students, to retired staff, all the way up to incentives for energy conservation, of roads giving priority to people, walking and biking.

Second, we need spaces that are nurturing, meaning spaces where we can grow, learn and thrive. This means giving top priority to infrastructure, to equipment and to libraries, even as we train our faculty and students to enhance the art of mentoring through “old fashioned” ways of listening and teaching-by-doing.

Our bias in UP has tended to be toward the mind, and I would like to see spaces also for the body and spirit. I would like to continue the initiatives started by the current administration for sports development but integrated with other programs such as psychosocial support, all working toward wellness. I envision a tackling of the problem of health financing and insurance, having seen how catastrophic illnesses can ruin the families of our faculty, students and staff.

Third, our spaces must be shared. We must dismantle turfing and territoriality and encourage a sense of stewardship, recognizing UP spaces can never be permanently assigned to anyone, to any unit, and that we need to prove we are worthy of such spaces by exercising responsibility.

I believe students must have learning commons in each academic unit, learning here to include studying, as well as recreation and socialization. Faculty and staff need spaces too for continuing learning and renewal.

UP Diliman was exemplary in opening our spaces to UP Tacloban students and that generosity of spirit must extend to the communities within the campus. Much can be done to improve living facilities of faculty, students and staff, and I would like to address as well the issue of some 70,000 informal settlers. I do not believe in

eviction and would like to work with the UP Diliman community, including the informal settlers, toward containment, with the existing settlers taking on their share in stake-holding.

Fourth, we must have connected spaces. We must continue to expand our connectivity in terms of the new information technologies, but I think of connectivity as well in terms of a constant flow of information among all constituents, so that we are an informed UP Diliman, about each other and about the world outside.

Connectivity means our spaces are porous, and, in an academic environment, that means people able to work across disciplines. It means we develop a research culture that uses different perspectives and tools, making them more powerful in guiding policy and practice.

Finally, our spaces must be sustainable, which means integrating the concepts of “safe”, “nurturing”, “connected” and “shared”. To give just one concrete example, I believe that if we have more public spaces, provided with tables and benches, well lit at night, with WiFi, we will encourage faculty, students and staff to use these spaces for studying, working, as well for recreation and leisure, we will have a safer campus because criminals avoid places where there are people who enjoy life, and who will defend those spaces.

The past and future as present

Having described my vision for spaces, I would like to talk about how those spaces can be used to move toward honor and excellence.

First, we need to ground ourselves in the past. At UP, and in Diliman particularly, we tend to look back, pat ourselves on the back, and declare, “Ang galing galing natin.”

Well and good but let us not rest on our laurels. We need a more active pride in place, “place” here not just being geographical, but of the mind as well. My vision acknowledges that our rich past is present. But we often forget that there are still many aspects of our heritage that we do not know of, waiting to be unearthed, rediscovered. UP Diliman plays a lead role here through archaeology, history, anthropology and linguistics, the arts and humanities. Other units are translating the rhetoric into action, tapping into and applying indigenous concepts for various endeavors, for example, in architecture.

Second, while our past roots us, as Filipinos, we need to move forward. We often hear that as a nation of islands, we tend to become insular and parochial, certainly an issue that has plagued us in Diliman, where we have become like an archipelago. But I would like to think, too, that as a nation of islands, we have boldness waiting to be tapped. People who live in islands look out to the sea and wonder what’s beyond

the horizon, eventually daring to set out to find out. That combination of curiosity and courage must characterize our own quest for, and journey to the future. Given this perspective, ASEAN 2015 and K to 12 2016, should not be do-or-die deadlines, but horizons.

That challenge of the horizon is perhaps more daunting for UP because we have the advantage of being able to stand on the shoulders of the many wise women and men of UP who came before us. We see more, and therefore must dare more, of the future.

Horizons allow us to be more outward-looking. My vision is of a UP that takes its place as a national university, a place to nurture not just brightness but diversity. UP Diliman must show the way in transdisciplinary initiatives in teaching, our graduates grounded in the liberal arts, able to see and appreciate the poetry in mathematics, as well as the mathematics in poetry. They should also be students who understand how the liberal arts come together to shape the “liber”, the free, so vital in UP’s history of defending freedom.

We must respond to the accusations of Diliman imperialism, which often becomes empty arrogance. We can still take a lead role in many areas, but must prove ourselves by being able to work with other units in system projects.

We must take up the challenges of being the national university, starting with our backyard, able to work with local government, from the barangay to city hall, before we talk of building and transforming the nation.

It is not enough to be bold. We must be wise too, navigating rough and treacherous waters with tools that I have referred to earlier. The transdisciplinary perspective will yield insights and solutions, not just guiding policies but allowing us to constantly monitor and evaluate projects and programs so we do not repeat our mistakes, and instead move forward using good practices.

### Academic citizenship

As we build spaces and our pride of place, as we tap into the past for the future, we need now to look at how we might embark on our long journey toward a transformed UP. I use the term academic citizenship to refer to the way we need to work together.

First, we must give meaning to collegiality, which is often confused with parochialism. I am a fierce defender of autonomy and independence, of departments and colleges, precisely because I dislike parochialism. If we are secure in what we believe in, we will be ready to talk to each other – within and across departments, within and across colleges and institutes, within and across UP campus units.

Collegiality's foundation is consultation, but there too we need reforms. We have had too much of endless talking and debate. Consultations must lead to consensus building, based on respect for each other's views, and a willingness to sacrifice one's own self interests for the common good.

Second, justice and fairness must guide us in all we do. That starts with institutionalizing a meritocracy, where we are evaluated by what we do and accomplish not by our connections.

But justice and fairness must not stop there. Our campus must set the pace fighting discrimination in all forms, whether based on gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. And class. I look to a future where UP Diliman can take in more students, especially from lower-income households and disadvantaged regions. It is not just a matter of expanding quotas, but of looking for ways to identify promising students from public schools even when they are still in high school, and to find ways to mentor them, and to support them if and when they enter Diliman.

Finally, academic citizenship must be ethical. UP, especially UP Diliman, has always shunned hard rules and regulations, sanctions and threats. We need to remind ourselves ethics is, in the simplest terms, a respect for each other and for ourselves. This is why I emphasize spaces so much: how can we tell the world we excel, when our Diliman spaces are the way they are?

Ethics, too, boils down to kindness. There should be no room in UP Diliman for faculty, students or staff who bully their colleagues. We must rid ourselves of the notion that kindness is a sign of weakness; in fact, our tradition of activism springs out of compassion and caring for others, of taking a tough stand, being firm, maybe even raising one's voice when the unkind and the unjust need to be chastised.

Let me summarize my vision paper:

I envision UP Diliman in terms of safe, nurturing, shared, connected and sustainable spaces. I envision UP Diliman moving toward honor and excellence in those spaces, rooted in the past while looking to the future with boldness, guided by transdisciplinary tools of navigation.

Finally, I envision a UP in terms of a shared culture of academic citizenship built on collegiality, a sense of justice and fairness, and ethics.

Let me say, too, by way of ending, that I am a firm believer in servant leadership, one who does not lead by walking ahead of others. It is in this spirit that I extend you my vision, someone ready to work with you side by side, as *kasama*, *kaibigan*, *kapanalig*.