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Editorial Comments: Nigerian Universities in the throes of authoritarianism

In this edition (No.2) of *The Scholar*, we visit two major crises confronting higher education in Nigeria: one external, the other internal. The first concerns the crisis of under-funding and under-remuneration (the external). The second concerns the rising tide of authoritarianism in the governance of our universities (the internal).

From page 2 through page 15, we present the ASNU Position Paper on the 1998 Budget and Education in Nigeria. Some newspapers have carried the paper earlier in the year; we are reprinting it here for the benefit of members and our records. This is a detailed and careful analysis of the 1998 Budget to see if the rhetoric of hopes raised in the pre-budget statements—especially that of General Sani Abacha—is matched by the cold reality of the figures in the budget. Only 10.1% is allocated as subvention for revamping educational facilities health services, rural infrastructure, and agricultural production. The spending on Defence and Security stands at 15.26%, against 10.27% for education. Some priority! The chance of any funding that will match the depth of decay in the research and teaching facilities is next to nil.

More telling is the recurrent allocation to universities. After several months during which stories of 'New [Salary] Package' (NP) was freely dispensed on our campuses—largely to weaken commitment to the Union—the 1998 Budget has put paid to the lie. Even without discounting for inflation, the (recurrent) allocation for Universities in the 1998 is ***N383.67 million less*** than the allocation in 1996, when we went on strike! So much for NP.

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Of equal significance (in its impact on the future of Nigeria's higher education) is the rising tide of authoritarianism in our universities. From one university to the next, Vice Chancellors are borrowing the power, garb, and tactics of the Dictator. This edition of *The Scholar* carries a selection of articles on some universities: from Bayero University to Ogun State University. These are not the only agents of neo-fascism—the new garrison commanders of the Academe; the pattern is becoming the norm. Those who are expected to be the gatekeepers turn out to be the game poachers, who invite the thief to loot the manor. We suspect that it might not be quite so bad, (at least at the level of the sense of betrayal) if these Vice Chancellors were not beneficiaries of the insistence, of the academic staff, on the democratic rules of governance.

A different dimension of the crisis of governance is the example from Obafemi Awolowo University, where students who had not completed their course and research works for the award of their degrees, were given call-up letters to proceed on national youth service (NYSC). What could justify such disregard for the rules of the University? Again, OAU is only an illustration of a more profound crisis of increasing disregard for the basic rules of the Academe.

As our readers will notice, we have included many of these stories under our *Human Rights/Academic Freedom Observatory* and the *Campus Observatory* sections. We are, indeed, launching what will become annual reports on *Human Rights and Academic Freedom in Nigeria*. These will be published as separate volumes. The reports from University of Benin show the horrendous level of violation of human rights and academic freedom to which our colleagues have been subjected.

These violations and treacheries should inspire us to earnestly fight for the souls of our universities, as we also insist on democratic governance and a humane civil society at the national level. The betrayal of our communities by colleagues who rode on our backs into the Vice Chancellors' lodges should make us more determined to ensure that we are actively involved in the governance of our universities and the choice of those who will lead our communities. Indeed, that is the lesson (and consolation) from University of Benin!