

World Maritime University

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9-2-1987

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# The World Maritime University

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## SYNOPSIS

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*The World Maritime University was created by the International Maritime Organization in order to help reduce the shortage of suitably trained maritime administrators, surveyors, educationalists and managers in the developing countries. This paper describes the university in general terms, and reviews the progress it has made in attaining its objectives.*

## INTRODUCTION

For many years, international conventions concerning the safety of life at sea and the prevention of pollution of the marine environment have been produced at the Headquarters of the International Maritime Organization in London and subsequently adopted by national maritime administrations throughout the world. Intentions have been good and the various conventions have already had a beneficial effect, but one of the obstacles to full effect—long recognized within the International Maritime Organization—has been the lack of relevant expertise in developing countries for the proper implementation of such conventions.

There are, of course, facilities for the temporary export of such expertise provided by IMO but the total solution of the problem requires the proper training of personnel belonging to the countries concerned. The World Maritime University was brought into existence by the International Maritime Organization for the purpose of providing this training.

## THE UNIVERSITY

Compared with most other universities, the WMU is very small: it is presently running at almost full capacity with 156 students receiving instruction. It is housed on the premises of a former marine college in the city of Malmö, Sweden, and it operates as an international institution within Sweden by agreement between IMO and the Swedish Government.

Sweden, because of its long-standing record of neutrality and its present policy of non-alignment with Eastern or Western powers, is a particularly suitable country to accommodate a truly international institution such as the World Maritime University. This, and the availability of modern premises almost ideally suitable for its accommodation, together with the offer of this accommodation free of cost, effectively determined the location of the university. I should like to add that the buildings and their furniture were not donated by the Swedish Government (which most generously contributes to the university in other ways) but by the city of Malmö itself.

The university is not an institution for the training of future seafarers and therefore it has no great need of the machinery and equipment that one normally finds in universities and marine colleges. Nevertheless it has a considerable amount, mostly in the form of navigational equipment which has been donated by various manufacturers, and more keeps coming.

The current running cost of the university is about \$5 M per year. About half of this is covered by direct donations of the Swedish Government and the United Nations Development Project, and the rest is covered by other Governments either in

Tom Balmer was apprenticed to Smith's Dock & Co Ltd. and then sailed as engineer officer with Shell Tankers Ltd until 1958 when he joined the UK Department of Trade as an engineer and ship surveyor. His last appointment with the Department was as Chief Examiner of Engineers and he is now on extended leave in order to serve as resident professor at the World Maritime University.

the form of direct donations or in the form of Fellowship grants to particular students. This system of financing the university is working satisfactorily but it is rather precarious and so efforts are being made to establish a capital fund to ensure adequate financing in the more distant future.

## THE COURSES

At present, the WMU is running six two-year courses, each of which leads to the award of an MSc degree. It also offers a short course of English Language which is intended to improve the English of those WMU students who are considered to be in need of such improvement or who wish to take advantage of its facilities.

Of the six two-year courses, the course on General Maritime Administration presently attracts the most students. This course is intended for general (ie non-technical) administrators and much of its syllabus is devoted to maritime law, maritime economics and similar subjects designed to give a broad background knowledge of maritime affairs rather than a specialized knowledge in any particular field.

These subjects are, of course, in support of others having more direct application to the work that the students will be doing when they return to their own countries. For example, the students are introduced to the more important IMO international conventions, given tuition on their interpretation, and guided in the formulation of national legislation for their implementation.

The remaining five two-year courses are more or less evenly attractive to students. Two of them (one nautical and one engineering) are designed for government marine surveyors, two (one nautical and one engineering) are designed for maritime educators, and the remaining one is designed for technical managers of shipping companies. These five courses have much in common since they are all technical in nature and many developing countries cannot yet afford the luxury of having large numbers of highly specialized public sector employees. Nevertheless, each course is different from the others in some ways. Inspection of the published syllabuses

will reveal differences of subjects, and where a subject is common to two or more courses the treatment of it usually differs from course to course.

All six of the two-year courses have a common syllabus for the first semester and, in fact, all of the students on these six courses attend the same lectures. It is only during the second, third and fourth semesters that studies diversify and specialize. Even so, it is not at all uncommon to find students from two different courses attending the same lecture after the first semester.

## THE STUDENTS

About 80 different countries are, or have been, represented by the students of the World Maritime University. Nearly all of these men and women are directly or indirectly employed by the Governments of their countries—as administrators, as surveyors, as superintendents of Government-owned shipping companies, and as educators—and many of them already have considerable experience in their current employments. Most of them hold university degrees of one sort or another and those who do not are nevertheless well qualified, academically, for the work they will have to do when they return home. Their average age is about 35 years and a great majority of the students are between 30 and 40 years old.

The students vary greatly in previous experience of their jobs, in their command of English, in cultural background and in almost everything except one thing—their eagerness to learn. This eagerness, which amounts to desperate anxiety with some of them, stems largely from the fact that they are all from developing countries with small maritime administrations with little in the way of maritime expertise. They will therefore tend to be regarded as experts in everything when they return home, and they are aware that the impossible will be expected of them.

This is a problem recognized by the university and steps are being taken to combat it by instituting a liaison link between the IMO and WMU on one side and each ex-student on the other. Thus each ex-student will be able to call for advice when he really needs it, as undoubtedly he will from time to time because no-one can be an expert on everything and it is very difficult to be an expert on anything. There are, of course, many who claim expertise on many things but, in my experience, the more vociferous the claims the less is the true worth of the claimant.

Many of the students are married and quite a few of them have wives, and even young families, with them in Malmö. Some of the children attend school in Sweden and so are learning Swedish at a considerably greater rate than I have managed. Other children are too young to attend school and several have in fact been born in Malmö. The first to be born there was promptly nicknamed 'Srivastava' (after the General Secretary of IMO who is also Chairman of the WMU Board of Governors), despite the fact that she is a girl, and continued to be called that during the time she lived in Sweden. The presence of wives and children from all over the world adds much to the many social functions held by the university.

Being individuals, WMU students also vary very much in their personalities and it would be stupid to claim that each and every one of them is a paragon of virtue. But I do claim that, collectively, they are delightful people to know and I revel in the wonderfully co-operative, amiable and understanding international atmosphere of the university, an atmosphere which stems mainly from the students themselves. I regard myself as privileged to be directly responsible for some of them and closely associated with the rest.

## THE STAFF

The resident academic staff of the university consists of the Rector, eight professors (including the Vice-Rector), three assistant lecturers, two full-time language teachers and several

part-time language teachers. The personnel come from various parts of the world (the Rector is Swedish) and, apart from the language teachers, are of various disciplines in maritime affairs. Nevertheless, such an academic staff would be hopelessly inadequate for the purposes of the university were it not for the support of more than one hundred visiting professors, all of whom are considered to be experts in their respective fields. Further support for the academic staff is provided by the administrative staff which consists almost entirely of locally employed Swedish personnel. The total full-time staff of the WMU consists of 40 persons, and it is worth remarking that nearly all of them appear to share the *esprit de corps* of the students.

Each of the resident professors is responsible for a particular course and it is his job to see that the students on it get the maximum possible benefit from it. To this end he plans the course, books the lecturers and administers the examinations—and enjoys a considerable degree of freedom in the execution of these tasks. However, the university cannot function effectively if everyone is doing his own thing with total disregard of what others are doing, and indeed it is not feasible for a single course to be run effectively without the co-operation of other resident professors because they are needed for some lectures and because some of the visiting professors are needed for more than one course. Co-ordination of academic activity is therefore necessary and it is the responsibility of the Vice-Rector (in addition to the responsibilities he has for his own course) to ensure that the required co-operation exists.

A feature of all courses is field training during which the students visit appropriate establishments either to observe or to take part in practical activities relevant to their future positions. These are also arranged by the resident professors but the logistics of these exercises are taken care of by administrative staff whose main (but not sole) function is to attend to such matters. In case it may be thought that this function is rather trivial, consider the possible difficulties of ensuring that 18 students, split into three groups of six, rotate around four countries for a period of 20 weeks during which they move several times within each country, are satisfactorily accommodated on each move, given the training they went to receive, fed and watered as necessary, then returned to Malmö in good health and spirits.

The language of tuition at the WMU is English and so the university's language teachers have the special task of teaching English to those students who need such instruction. Most of them do not, and those of them who do need only a refresher course and lots of practice. We have at the university a language laboratory donated by the Norwegian Government which seems to be a very effective piece of equipment.

The language teachers begin their work with every fresh intake of students before their professional courses begin and continue it for as long as necessary. There are, of course, language problems for some of the students at first but they are usually resolved before the end of the first semester. As might be expected, students with language problems have more difficulty in expressing their thoughts than they have in receiving information, and this complicates the task of examination since WMU course examinations are not intended to be tests of fluency in English. This means that assessments should not reflect the relative abilities of students in the use of the English language.

The university's administrative staff, which might be regarded as including all of the non-academic staff, has work similar to that of any other university or college. All of the administrative staff speak English fluently and, in fact, most of them are multilingual.

## THE TUITION

Most of the tuition at the university is given by specialists. This would not be possible were it not for the fact that the small

resident staff is supported by many visiting professors who, between them, have all the expertise that is necessary to cover the whole spectrum of maritime studies. There is, however, a disadvantage to this heavy reliance upon outside assistance: it is rather difficult to plan and maintain a coherent course of instruction.

Most of the visiting professors are distinguished in their fields and occupy high positions in education or industry. They are therefore busy men and cannot come to Malmö just when we want them to come. Furthermore they provide their services free of charge, except for travel expenses and accommodation, and so we are in no position to dictate terms. However, the system works reasonably well and should improve with time since all of the visiting professors who have lectured at the university have expressed their readiness to return for future courses. They have also become more aware of our requirements and so are better able to fit the deliveries into a coherent course instead of merely contributing a series of isolated lectures.

There is also a problem of repetitive material in lectures given by visiting professors from the same field of maritime affairs, but this can be controlled and a small amount of repetition is quite acceptable. It also has the redeeming feature that it often demonstrates different views on the same subject and thus makes the students more critical of the information they receive.

Classroom studies are supplemented by project work and by field training during which the students visit various establishments in Sweden and elsewhere. Such establishments include shipyards, research centres, shipping company offices, harbours etc., which students of any course might visit. There are other visits which are more relevant to particular courses. For instance, students taking the maritime education courses spend some time in marine colleges of several countries. Similarly, students taking the courses designed for surveyors spend a considerable amount of time surveying ships under the direction and control of various maritime administrations in Europe.

The educational load on the students is heavy, as evidenced by the fact that they grumble a little, but it is evidently not too heavy since the university has not yet faced open mutiny.

## GENERAL

We are now dealing with our fourth intake of students. The first came in July 1983, whereas all subsequent intakes have been, and will be, at the beginning of March. The students have, in addition to the Swedish public holidays, a two-week break in July/August and a main break spanning January and February during which they (but not their families) may go home at WMU expense. Most of the students do go home since there is no place like it, and the Swedish winter provides an added impetus!

The World Maritime University came into existence officially on 4 July 1983 and tuition began the following day. Only two months before that the bulk of the men appointed as Resident Professors arrived in Malmö, somewhat bemused and wondering what to do about organizing educational courses that had never existed anywhere before. We had some broad syllabuses that had been tentatively produced for initial guidance, but little else. Even trivial administrative procedures

had to be agreed and established since the institution was not only new but quite unique. Needless to say we made a lot of mistakes, and are still making some, but gradually we have gained experience and now have things more or less under control. There is, of course, much room left for improvement in all aspects of the university's activities but we are working on it and the education, in particular, is getting better all the time.

However, the university is, as yet, unproved. It is true that some of its graduates have been promoted to high, and occasionally top, positions in their Administrations on their return home or shortly thereafter, but it can be reasonably argued that the men and women concerned were sent to the World Maritime University because they were intended to have such promotions, not that they gained their promotions because they attended the university. Whichever is the case, these promotions do not necessarily reflect the quality of the university's courses because this quality is largely unknown beyond the academic staff and students of the WMU.

The true test of the university is really a test of its graduates' performances over a period of at least several months' duration. If they can satisfy their superiors that they are competent to perform the duties for which they have been trained in Sweden, then the existence of the university is justified. And if they demonstrate, over a long period of time, that they are highly and consistently competent to perform those duties, then, and only then, will the reputation of the university be firmly established.

## THE FUTURE

The World Maritime University is now operating at almost full capacity, and the demand for places shows no sign of diminishing so the immediate future of the university seems to be assured—subject to the continuation of adequate funding. However, the eighty or so States presently represented by the students cannot continue to send students each year for very long because most of them have quite small maritime administrations, very limited fleets and few marine colleges. It follows that the annual intake of the present types of students for the present descriptions of courses is likely to fall in the not-too-distant future as the States it is intended to serve (which include more than the 80 that have been so far represented) become more self-reliant.

It will then be necessary for the university to reconsider its objectives and to modify them as the circumstances dictate. How they will be modified is not yet clear, but I believe that the courses will be designed for students who arrive at the university with a much greater background of relevant knowledge and experience than is presently the case. Such courses will be suitable not only for students from the developing marine world but also for those from countries which have large and well established Marine Administrations.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is my firm opinion that the World Maritime University—with whatever faults or shortcomings it may have—is a worthwhile institution which is not only intended to help solve some of the problems of the developing marine world but is actually doing so, and will do so more and more effectively as it gains experience.