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WMU: Apex of the 'training pyramid'

Erik Nordström, rector, describes the WMU's achievements

In July 1983 the World Maritime University (WMU) opened its doors for the first time, marking the beginning of a unique global venture in institutional training. Six years on, the WMU thrives.

One might describe the STCW Convention as the foundation of the maritime training pyramid, with the WMU representing the apex. The university's task is to train individuals who are destined to hold the most senior positions in maritime administration, shipping companies, port authorities and, of course, the world's maritime training establishments.

The WMU is an unusual university. It has a small student population — just 200 — but this is by design, rather than necessity. Most students are in their mid-30s and have already proved themselves. Perhaps the most striking aspect is the sheer spread of nationalities represented. It is a true mix of cultures. Indeed, it would be difficult to expand the student population beyond 250 without eroding the sense of "global identity" which results from its atmosphere of intimacy.

A wider understanding of the shipping industry's international character is a crucial objective if there is to be efficient global implementation of IMO conventions. WMU graduates have a role to play in this process. They have already taken their place in the national delegations attending IMO committee and sub-committee meetings. At next month's IMO Assembly, for example, we expect some 30 WMU graduates among the member state delegations. It is pleasing to note that the strong bonds forged at the WMU show no sign of weakening over the years. In the long-term, the results can only be beneficial.

Personally, I have no doubt that WMU graduates will have a profound impact on the development of future maritime law and regulation, at both national and international level. A sense of common purpose means greater uniformity in the way in which nations deal with safety and pollution issues.

However, the WMU is still a young institution. It would be quite wrong to present it as a "magic wand", poised to solve the world's maritime problems at a stroke. Yet, its influence is cumulative. Each year, 100 graduates return home to take up key positions; their significance transcends mere numbers.

Pointers to the future are visible in the careers of graduates WMU. They are already advising decision-making

within their national administrations. The influence of other graduates is also emerging in the decisions of port authorities and shipping concerns, especially in their approach to major investment decisions. In some countries, the expertise required for sound economic appraisal is now available "in-house" for the first time.

It is important to monitor the progress of our graduates — a task made easier by their enthusiasm for keeping in touch. Graduates are asked to report on their career development at regular intervals. In the summer of 1987, we tried something new — a detailed survey of the WMU's first 200 graduates.

Developments

As a young establishment, the WMU continues to evolve. One major change involved the division of the Administration MSc into two distinct courses which better serve the needs of developing countries. We now offer the General Maritime Administration course, which has a governmental orientation, while a second course concentrates on Ports and Shipping administration. In addition, we have seen the steady development of the content of other courses dealing with the nautical and engineering aspects of maritime safety administration, the technical management of shipping companies and nautical and marine engineering education.

Other developments include the establishment of 10 WMU branches. The branches provide more than 30 short courses geared to the specific training needs of regions around the world. The subjects range from search and rescue and firefighting to teaching methodology.

The formation of the branches was a personal initiative of C P Srivastava, IMO secretary-general and chancellor of the university. Their function is to ensure that the short courses — linked to STCW Convention requirements — are delivered to optimum effect. The operation of the branches is possible due to funding from Norway and the support of the many guest lecturers.

Shipping has undergone very rapid change, in almost every respect, over the last decade. It is essential that maritime education closely follows these developments in order to prepare the ground for future maritime training needs. The WMU is careful to monitor these changing needs and our close links with the 10 branches will help us adapt to new circumstances.

Visiting professors and lecturers also play an important role at Malmö, by outlining how they deal with the many problems facing all shipping nations. From the first, the WMU decided that students should be exposed to the broadest possible spectrum of views. We do not teach "right and wrong ways", we encourage students to reach their own, carefully considered conclusions.

Field trips and hands on training underpin the structure of WMU courses. Here, we are fortunate to have developed excellent relationships with many shipping companies and other interests; they are happy to give our students the opportunity to gain a practical understanding of modern commercial, technical and administrative practices. Contacts made in the field prove valuable to both sides and reinforce the interplay between developed countries and emerging shipping nations.

Competition

Competition for places at the WMU intensifies year-by-year. The criteria for selection exercised by the University rests largely on academic ability and background. Those seeking to join the technical courses are often master mariners or chief engineers, while those applying for administration courses must possess excellent degrees. We also demand proficiency in English.

The allocation of fellowships and the selection of candidates becomes more challenging as each year passes. Some countries may field up to 20 candidates for the WMU in a given year, yet the maximum number of places allocated to any one country is only three.

The level of interest and support for the WMU reflects the quality of our course professors and lecturers.

However, the University's financial position requires prudent management. The WMU's annual budget is in the order of \$7M, with the Swedish Government contributing one-third of the total sum. Other regular contributors include UNDP and the governments of Norway, Finland and France. However, fellowships are provided by many governments, organisations, foundations and individuals. While too numerous to list, their generosity is the breath of life to the WMU. In financial terms, our major concern is long-term security rather than the cost of daily operation. The solution, without doubt, will emerge as the maritime community becomes more aware of the WMU's true significance. ◊