

Delays in postgraduate thesis completion loom

BY PATRICK MWANGI

The problem of delays in postgraduate students completing their masters programmes at the University of Nairobi is nothing new. What is surprising is that the university authorities do not seem to have found ways to alleviate the distress students go through before they complete their thesis and can graduate.

This perennial problem mainly affects those students who write thesis for their masters degrees, as opposed to those who do projects. The former have tales of woe, and requested anonymity when interviewed, for fear of victimisation.

One bitter student from the faculty of Arts, who is now a lecturer, questioned the commitment of the supervisors who oversee individual students. She said that the supervisors, who are lecturers from respective departments, seemed to have too much on their hands.

She said that she used to hand over chapters of her thesis to her supervisor to read, but her supervisor only looked at the work the next time she [the student] went to consult.

She said further that her supervisor did not seem to understand the methodology used in the research, and kept "shoving" her between lecturers. She was emphatic that she would not let her students suffer the same fate she had.

A group of three postgraduate students, who also preferred anonymity, blamed the supervisors as the main cause of delays in completing their masters programmes. One noted that he had had to rewrite his thesis anew when his supervisor became available after having left him to do all the work on his own.

He noted that problems of finance hardly ever featured in this saga.

The students noted that the greatest problem arose when the student completed their thesis and submitted three copies of the work to the board of postgraduate studies for external and internal examiners to mark. They said that this was supposed to take two months, but it usually delayed for a year. The students wondered why the board of postgraduate studies did not remind the examiners to complete reading their thesis in time, to ensure that the student did not suffer.

Other students interviewed also said that the supervisors seemed too busy to effectively oversee a



Graduation time at the University of Nairobi: "Those admitted to postgraduate programmes are selected from the top of their class and cannot therefore be academically weak."

student's progress. They said that though there was no apparent malice on the part of supervisors, there seemed to be general laxity and lack of caring. This had resulted in situations where students spent six years looking for a masters degree that should have taken two years.

The students noted that the university selected the top undergraduate students for their masters programmes, thus the students could not be academically weak. Instead, they said, their fellow students who performed less brilliantly and went to universities abroad for their masters, returned to their respective faculties as lecturers while those who stayed were still struggling.

The vice chancellor of the university, Professor Francis Gichaga, is aware of the problem. He said in a

recent interview that the problem was much worse in the early 80's.

The university had then established a committee to look into the problem, and it was at the committee's recommendation that the board of postgraduate studies was formed. It was formed to ensure supervisors provided the required services, and offered students an outlet for their problems, he said.

The vice chancellor said that though the situation had improved dramatically since then, there were still some tricky areas.

The director of postgraduate studies, Professor Njeru Nyagah, said that though students admitted to masters programmes were of high quality, delays in completing their studies could arise from several reasons.

Delays could arise if students

waited for too long to identify areas of research and thrash out a proposal, he said, adding that this would reflect in the processing of the final document. He said that delays could also arise if there was inadequate funding, and a student finished their materials before their research was over.

Professor Nyagah said that some students did not seek necessary supervision from their supervisors, who were oblivious of their [student] problems. He emphasised that it was the student who was studying and thus had to take the initiative to seek help from the supervisor. He said further that students might also feel they "know too much" and be argumentative over corrections demanded by the supervisors, saying that they planned their time well.

Professor Nyagah said that students

are supposed to notify the board at least three months before they submitted their thesis, to enable the constitution of a board of examiners. There are likely to be delays if this was not done, he noted.

He said that a well written thesis would be read quickly by the examiners, while a poorly written one would present a lot of problems. If the thesis was found inadequate, he said, it was returned and the student was expected to revise its content and resubmit it within 12 months.

Professor Nyagah, however, refused to comment on specific cases. In particular, he would not comment on the case of the notorious department of French, which is yet to graduate a masters student since it was started over 10 years ago. He said that he had first to study the situation and see where the problem lay.

He said further that students who went abroad for their masters programmes were likely to complete on time because they had all the study materials and facilities handy, while this was not always the case locally.

Students, however want the programmes to be restructured. They said that the curriculum should be changed from coursework and thesis, to coursework and project.

They further said that during graduation, each department should be called out by name, as some departments which hardly graduated any students "hid" under a faculty mantle, and were covered by those departments with masters graduates.

University yet to set graduation date

BY PAMELLA MAKOTSI

The graduation date for the University of Nairobi is yet to be set, the Registrar Academic, Professor Jesse Mugambi, told the *Anvil* recently.

The Professor said that graduation is one of the events that has to be co-ordinated totally and synchronized with all the other events such as admissions, setting of opening dates and making the timetable. Graduation, he said, should not be looked at in isolation. He also said that there are several factors that must be considered before setting a graduation date, but he declined

to name them, saying he is not the one who sets the dates.

Prof. Mugambi said that this is not the first time graduation has been delayed. Those students who completed in 1974 did not graduate until 1975," he said. He said that the delay should not be seen to mean that the University lacks organization, but rather, that the authorities want to deal with issues properly. "Students should appreciate that we would like to do things properly, effectively and efficiently."

Several students who completed their courses in June last year have complained that the de-

lay is too much. One student told the *Anvil* that she has been unable to pursue a Masters degree abroad because they had demanded a copy of her degree certificate which she can get only after graduation. She said they have been patient long enough. But Prof. Mugambi says that students have a tendency of looking only at their individual cases. He urges them to understand that the university is a large institution and they have to deal with issues systematically.

Some students have also complained that the Examinations department is taking too long to release their transcripts.

Prof. Mugambi explained that examination results have to go through a long process before transcripts are released. But he said that students are usually given provisional results pending approval by the senate. These, he said, can be used for the purpose of soliciting for jobs. He said they want to give students the very best and they (students) should appreciate this.

On graduation, Professor Mugambi said that the university understands that graduation is a national as well as international concern, and as soon as the date is set, it shall be made public.