

# SUCs' budget at all-time high

Acknowledging the vital role of education in nation-building and economic development, the education budget has grown tremendously under the Aquino Administration. The budget of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) actually doubled from PhP23.8B in 2010 to an all-time high of PhP46B in 2016. Comparing the 2016 against the 2015 budget, there is an increase of PhP1.6B or 3.6%.

In yesterday's 2016 budget hearing at the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Chairperson Dr. Patricia B. Licuanan defended the agency's and the SUCs' budgets. Reports on that hearing have been inaccurate. In response to reports that more than 50 SUCs received budget cuts for next year, it must be pointed out that in truth, only 10 SUCs will sustain net decreases in funding with Philippine Normal University (PNU) getting the largest reduction of 19%, University of the Philippines System (UP System) 16%, and the rest single-digit decreases ranging from 0.59 to 7%. In the case of PNU whose 2016 budget of PhP558M is lower by PhP132M from its 2015 budget of PhP690M, the decrease is due to a one-time congressional insertion in 2015 of PhP100M and its low utilization rate.

On the other hand, the 2.2B decrease in the 2016 budget of the UP System, from its 2015 budget of PhP13.7B is due to a one-time allotment provided for medical equipment of the UP-Philippine General Hospital amounting to PhP3.1B. Without this one-time allocation in 2015, UP's 2016 budget actually increased by almost PhP1B. The reductions in the 2016 maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) of Mindanao State University (MSU) and the MSU-Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography are also due to one-time congressional insertions in their 2015 budgets.

While it is true that SUCs in Regions VI (Western Visayas) and VIII (Eastern Visayas) will have the biggest MOOE cuts, their total budgets will increase by 16% and 12% respectively. The noted MOOE reductions are due to the lowering of TulongDunongProgram (Grants-in-Aid) allotments for 2016. The three SUCs without capital outlay (CO) for 2016, Marikina Polytechnic College (MPC), Bulacan State University (BSU) and Cagayan State University (CSU) have absorptive capacity issues and/or need to align their CO investments with government priorities.

Finally, CHED issues a call against disinformation on the SUCs' budget. Since 2010, CHED has worked together with the Department of Budget and Management in crafting an annual budget that incrementally boosts the operational capacity of our SUCs in order to ensure quality tertiary education for young Filipinos.