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SEAT NO: \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
QUALIFYING ENGLISH TEST**

**SAMPLE PAPER**

Fill in your particulars in the box below.

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**DO NOT TEAR OUT ANY PAGE FROM THIS BOOKLET**

This test assesses your ability to write an essay that expresses your view on a controversial topic.

Your essay will be assessed for its content, organisation and language:

- Content:
  - sophistication of ideas (supporting/opposing arguments and rebuttals)
  - use of information from the reading texts to support ideas
  - acknowledgment of source information according to proper conventions
- Organisation:
  - clarity of overall structure
  - logical development of ideas
- Language:
  - accuracy and fluency
  - grammar and vocabulary

### **Task**

1. Read Texts A to C critically and carefully for ideas to write your essay.
2. Write an academic essay of about **500** words in response to the following question:

*Do you think that the highest purpose of university education should be the achievement of personal goals rather than the fulfillment of national aims?*

Support your views with ideas drawn from the reading texts, your experience and your knowledge.

3. Acknowledge ideas/information taken from the reading texts.
4. Write your essay on pages 7 to 11.
5. Your reader is a university lecturer.

## **TEXT A: The Higher Purpose**

Twenty-eight years ago, the US educator Harlan Cleveland had this to say about the conflicting views of higher education:

“The outsiders want the students trained for their first job out of university, and the academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfillment. The trouble is that the students want both. The ancient collision between each student’s short-term and long-term goals, between ‘training’ and ‘education’, between ‘vocational’ and ‘general’, between honing the mind and nourishing the soul, divides the professional educators, divides the outside critics and supporters, and divides the students, too.”

We still have no consensus on the purpose of higher education. This should not be surprising. After all, the “collision” of values is “ancient” indeed. Writing in the 16th century, Francis Bacon insisted that knowledge should be practical and “not be a courtesan, for pleasure”. More recently, however, John Cardinal Newman took the opposite view. “Useful knowledge,” he said, is a “deal of trash.” Consensus on the purposes of higher education remains a long way off.

Today, most religion-based universities can say with certainty why they exist. Their job is to teach students the values that their religion believes to be the basis of good moral character. However, the decline in religion and the widespread acceptance of moral relativism has made it impossible for British secular universities to provide this prescriptive type of education.

Abandoning their moral purposes has led universities to stress their utilitarian nature □ get a degree and get a better job. Universities and their representative bodies routinely trumpet their economic impact. We have put so much emphasis on this aspect of our activities that the government now believes that universities exist mainly to bolster the economy.

More importantly, I would like to suggest that universities exist to contribute to the creation of a just society by producing graduates who improve social life. The presence in society of a corps of competent graduates is a powerful force for improvement. Lawyers can advance the cause of formal justice, while doctors promote health. Teachers prepare the next generation, while scientists make discoveries that reverberate throughout the world.

University education can also exert important indirect effects. Universities offer counselling, art exhibitions, music and drama performances, consultation on public and private issues, medical, scientific and social research and many other public services. Students learn the importance of public service from their university’s example. Through interaction with academics and their own peers, students learn about freedom of expression, tolerance and responsible citizenship. They then go on to transmit these values to other people who did not attend university.

Adapted from Schwartz, S. (2003, May 16). The Higher Purpose. *Times Higher Education Supplement*. Retrieved March 18, 2010 from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=176727>

## **TEXT B: Making College “Relevant”**

Even before they arrive on campus, students □ and their parents □ are increasingly focused on what comes after college. What is the return on investment, especially as the cost of that investment keeps rising? How will that major translate into a job?

The pressure on institutions to answer those questions is prompting changes from the admissions office to the career center. However, even as they rush to prove their relevance, colleges and universities worry that students are specializing too early, that they are so focused on picking the perfect major that they do not allow time for self-discovery, much less late blooming.

Consider the change captured in the annual survey by the University of California, Los Angeles, of more than 400,000 incoming freshmen. In 1971, 31 percent responded that it was essential or very important to be “very well-off financially,” while 69 percent said the same about “developing a meaningful philosophy of life.” In 2009, the values were nearly reversed: 70 percent identified wealth as a goal, while 30 percent were after a meaningful philosophy.

The shift in attitudes is reflected in a shifting curriculum. Nationally, business has been the most popular major for the last 15 years. Campuses also report a boom in public health fields, and many institutions are building up environmental science and just about anything prefixed with “bio.” Reflecting the new economic and global realities, they are adding or expanding majors in Chinese and Arabic. The University of Michigan has seen a 38 percent increase in students enrolling in Asian language courses since 2002, while French has dropped by 5 percent.

When prospective students and their parents visit, they ask about placement rates, internships and alumni involvement in job placement. These are questions that were never heard 10 years ago.

There is evidence, though, that employers also do not want students specializing too soon. The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently asked employers who hire at least 25 percent of their workforce from two- or four-year colleges what they want institutions to teach. The answers did not suggest a narrow focus. Instead, 89 percent said they wanted more emphasis on “the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing,” 81 percent asked for better “critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills” and 70 percent were looking for “the ability to innovate and be creative.”

“It’s not about what you should major in, but that no matter what you major in, you need good writing skills and good speaking skills,” says Debra Humphreys, a vice president at the association.

The organization has conducted focus groups with employers before and heard the same thing. With the recession, she says, they were not sure the findings would hold. “But it’s even more intense. Companies are demanding more of employees. They really want them to have a broad set of skills.”

“There’s this linear notion that what you major in equals your career,” Ms. Brooks of the University of Texas says. “I’m sure it works for some majors. If you want to be an electrical engineer, that major looks pretty good. The truth is students think too much about majors. But the major isn’t nearly as important as the toolbox of skills you come out with and the experiences you have.”

Adapted from Zernike, K. (2009, December 29). Making Colleges Relevant. *The New York Times*. Retrieved April 11, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/education/edlife/03careerism-t.html>

### **Text C: Higher Education, Past, Present and Future**

Our policy for higher education is critical in guiding us forward. In particular, for a small city state like Singapore which places a premium on developing our human capital, we deeply believe that education can be the means to help Singaporeans achieve continued success and prosperity.

Singapore believes that every student should be developed to his/her fullest. But this does not mean equal or similar outcomes. We accept the inherent differences in students’ abilities. Thus, our system aims to provide opportunities to the spectrum of different capabilities with varied choices to match strengths and develop talents to the fullest. Our higher education system is also unapologetically closely attuned to the need to make education relevant to help Singaporeans find a job and remain employable. This gives them confidence that the education that they have received is meaningful. At the central level, we have the National Manpower Council where three agencies – the Ministries of Manpower, Trade & Industry, and Education - together review annually the economic prospects for graduates, the medium and long-term demand, and set places in our institutions accordingly. At the aggregated level, our institutions therefore provide 50 to 55% of graduates in Science and Technology.

To add value to their students, our universities must maintain high standards of admission and performance. They must also act as strategic engines for Singapore’s long-term economic advancement. Thus, our universities have developed various programmes to nurture and groom top talents.

Looking forward, with growing affluence, and rising aspirations, it is inevitable that more Singaporeans will seek to upgrade themselves through higher education. This is a good aspiration, and one that the Government will help Singaporeans achieve. The Committee on the Expansion of the University Sector is studying the set-up of a 4th University in Singapore. However, for the full benefits to flow through to individuals and Singapore, we should ensure that higher education remains relevant and adds value.

As a small city state, with limited resources, our strategy to deliver quality higher education to Singaporeans is a simple one. We achieve this by ensuring that every publicly funded institution strives to be the best in class – each must be a gem.

Our institutions must provide learning that is current, relevant and make a difference to their students, industry and the overall economy. They must enhance their international standing by leveraging on technology and international partnerships. If we can maintain this focus on quality, we will be able to provide more opportunities to help our young people to develop their interests and talents to the fullest.

*Speech given by Mr Ng Eng Hen, Minister of Education and Second Minister for Defence.*

Adapted from Ng, E.H. (2008, June 11), Keynote Address at the 6th Australian Universities International Alumni Convention (AUIAC). Retrieved May 30, 2010 from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2008/06/11/keynote-address-by-dr-ng-eng-h.php>

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