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WELCOME REMARKS FOR FRIENDS REUNION

Speech by Dean Ofelia G. Mana

Distinguished guests, dear colleagues old and new, friends! As the University of Cebu's Vice Chancellor for Business Development and Innovation, I am honored to welcome you all in our FRIENDS Reunion. I express my virtual heart-felt appreciation!

It is my pleasure to announce that our FRIENDS Reunion revolves on the theme of, "Making Connections, Building Friendships." Why has this theme been chosen? - It is perhaps a natural outcome of the past Erasmus+ FRIENDS Project related activities. It centers on the University of Cebu's efforts which redounds to the benefits of our three main sectors: the students, the institution, and the global community.

Through the FRIENDS project, we are training our staff, honing our students, developing multilateral exchange programs, and how proper risk management can be carried out through these programs. With this, the project addresses low student mobility, the lack of intercultural education, and the insufficient institutional soft infrastructure to assist international students and campus diversity.

With the Erasmus+CBHE projects, we delivered curriculum designing for joint degree systems, promoting and creating a proper network among participating universities' international offices. The increasing number of UC's participation shows that we are taking a new approach, with a clear intention to share valuable knowledge and resources to promote understanding of mutual differences and commonality.

I also acknowledge the fact that the intercultural fluency and soft skills development of the students will result from a good network of international contacts that can jumpstart a career in the international arena and true global citizenship. We have friendly relations with Philippine HEIs such as Saint Louis University of Baguio, and Cebu Technological University of Cebu. We also have friendly relations abroad such as Varna University of Management of Bulgaria, Metropolitan University of Budapest, Silesian University of Technology of Gliwice, Poland, Istanbul Aydin University of Turkey, Royal Thimphu College and Royal Institute of Management of Bhutan, Svay Rieng University and Dewey International University of Cambodia, Asia Pacific University

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of Technology and Innovation and Berjaya University College of Malaysia, and lastly, Prince of Songkla University, Payap University, and Mahasarakham University of Thailand.

UC's friendly relations demands that our entry into the global workplace would show how equipped students can bring in the benefits of diversity to the workplace and society, which can become more open and inclusive. Ultimately, such openness to cultures and backgrounds, coupled with the mutual benefits people derive from one another, can redound to peace and order, which are an indirect but desired effect of people living together in harmony. It lies within University of Cebu's core values of ICARE. We value camaraderie and excellence in all its forms.

Further, I would like to emphasize that internationalization has aided in the goal of UC's continuous quality improvement. Our FRIENDS IACD MOOC, FRIENDS Teahouse, FRIENDS Caravan, FRIENDS Community Extension Services, and FRIENDS Job Fair show that we encouraged discussion and knowledge sharing. As a result, it created a positive impact on various accreditation (PACUCUA) efforts as well as opened credit mobility programs, exchange opportunities through the enhanced networks that the University of Cebu through the FRIENDS Project was able to develop.

However, we should also recognize that when the COVID19 in 2020 happened, our dear university was tested, and the effects of it are still a matter of grave concern for many university people. We must bear in mind, however, that the world academia has been in danger of falling into a trap of somber monoculture, leaving at the end of ceaseless running competitions, only a limited number of victorious but tired institutions to shine faintly. Friends, that is at odds with the idea of higher education. The greater the extent to which our universities can develop their characteristics and find ways to coexist without sacrificing diversity, the more opportunities they will have to contribute to making the global community radiantly interwoven; that is the essence of the classical ideas of civilization.

Dear friends, we learned through the FRIENDS project that every university is currently engaged in a quest for a new identity, and for such self-discovery, dialogues across the

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campus border are needed more than ever and of course our dear students, scholars and open-minded administrators are major players in such open fields.

It is my huge hope that holding such a Reunion today will enhance mutual understanding among us, and foster chances to promote valuable initiatives for intercultural competence.

Thank you for your attention. Together, let us make the University of Cebu to become a place #FirstChoice in the #MindsoftheWorld!

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