

SDG 4 - Advancing Quality Education through Collaborative Initiatives at the University of Santo Tomas

One of the core pillars of SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. This involves not only improving the accessibility of education but also ensuring that learning opportunities are available to marginalized and vulnerable populations, including those from low-income communities, persons with disabilities, and indigenous groups.

The University of Santo Tomas (UST) consistently demonstrates its dedication to quality education, focusing on academic excellence, professional development, and societal engagement. Through its diverse initiatives, UST continues to uphold its mission of providing high-quality education that responds to the evolving needs of society. Through initiatives such as scholarships for underprivileged students, financial aid programs, and special learning support services for students with disabilities, UST ensures that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to quality higher education. Furthermore, UST has continually worked to improve the diversity and inclusivity of its student body by enhancing its outreach efforts and promoting policies that combat discrimination. By integrating practical solutions with academic rigor, UST ensures its graduates are not only ready for professional challenges but are also equipped to lead in their respective fields and contribute meaningfully to global development. The initiatives outlined below exemplify UST's contributions to ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education for all.

1. UST's Leadership in Translators' Professionalization

On May 18, 2024, UST's Sentro ng Salin at Araling Salin (SSAS) held the Layag Forum on Translators' Welfare and Professionalization, in partnership with the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF). This event, which drew over 200 participants both physically and virtually, emphasized the importance of drafting a Translation Law and establishing a Kasálin Network, a consortium of academic and professional organizations working together to advance the translation profession in the Philippines. This initiative reflects UST's commitment to supporting academic fields that require specialized knowledge and professionalization. The forum showcased UST's role in facilitating discussions that help shape national policies and contribute to the professional development of translators, a key aspect of quality education.

2. Collaborative Knowledge Sharing on Nuclear Science

In line with UST's academic vision, the Faculty of Engineering, in partnership with the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI) and UST's Graduate School, organized the Knowledge Management Assist Awareness Symposium on May 12, 2024. The event highlighted nuclear power's role in addressing global energy challenges. The symposium brought together experts from industry and academia, underscoring UST's commitment to preparing students for contemporary global issues. By integrating nuclear science into its academic programs, UST provides high-level education in emerging fields such as sustainable energy, further demonstrating its dedication to preparing students for leadership in critical sectors.

3. Advancing Food Science and Sustainability Education

The UST Graduate School's webinar series on food science, which covered topics like "Food System Transformation Towards Sustainable Healthy Diets" and "Omics Spice and Everything Nice: The Prospects of Nutrition Omics to Food Science," was an exemplary effort to bring the latest scientific developments into education. These webinars provided a platform for students and industry professionals to discuss sustainable food systems, nutrition tools, and advancements in food safety.

This initiative ensures all learners to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles. The webinar series encouraged students to explore innovative, sustainable solutions to food security, promoting knowledge and skills that contribute to global health and sustainability.

4. Promoting Academic Excellence through International Conferences

In the realm of research, UST faculty members showcased their academic work at the 7th International Conference on Philippine & Asian Studies (ICAPS), held from May 30 to June 1, 2024. This event allowed faculty to share their research on curriculum development, language teaching, and cultural studies. UST's active participation in international conferences enables faculty to contribute to global academic dialogue, while enhancing the university's own curriculum with the latest research and pedagogical trends. The conference reflected UST's commitment to providing students with access to high-caliber academic resources and fostering a culture of scholarly engagement.

5. Strategic Tourism Development for Ormoc City

UST's collaboration with the City Government of Ormoc demonstrates the university's commitment to utilizing its academic expertise for social development. On June 28, 2024, UST's College of Tourism and Hospitality Management presented the Sustainable Strategic Tourism Development Plan (SSTDTP) for the city, which is aimed at guiding tourism growth from 2023 to 2028. This initiative was developed with a rights-based, culturally sensitive approach, engaging faculty, students, and local government in a comprehensive planning process. UST's involvement in this project illustrates how the university integrates academic knowledge with practical applications to create sustainable, community-centered solutions that improve local economies and environments.

6. Student Excellence and Achievements

UST continues to produce top-performing students who excel in national licensure examinations. In the June 2024 Architect Licensure Examination, UST achieved an impressive passing rate of 88.82%, well above the national average of 62.14%. Notably, two UST graduates ranked among the top 10—Jarvis Lyle Espiritu Cal Ortiz

(6th) and Basilio Jose Uri Carolino (8th). In the Professional Licensure Examination for Teachers (Elementary Level), UST achieved a perfect passing rate of 100%, with Jovelle Domingo Salamanca securing 1st place. These outstanding performances highlight UST's dedication to ensuring its graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in their chosen fields.

7. Research Excellence and Faculty Recognition

UST faculty members continue to gain recognition for their scholarly work. Assoc. Prof. Veronico N. Tarrayo of the Faculty of Arts and Letters was awarded the 2022 Dr. Matthew A. Eichler Memorial Fellowship Award for Excellence in Research by the Asia-Pacific Consortium of Researchers and Educators (APCoRE). His contributions to research on English language teaching and gender issues exemplify UST's ongoing investment in research that expands knowledge and fosters societal change. This recognition underscores UST's role in cultivating an environment that encourages research excellence, benefiting both students and the broader academic community.

8. Commitment to Building the Next Generation of Filipino Leaders

UST's educational programs and initiatives extend beyond classroom learning. By fostering a culture of research, professional development, and community engagement, UST is shaping the next generation of Filipino leaders. UST's dedication to quality education is evident in its investment in faculty development, student support services, and industry collaborations, all aimed at creating an environment that encourages academic excellence and social responsibility.

9. Scholarship Programs: Ensuring Access to Quality Education for All

University of Santo Tomas demonstrates a strong commitment to improve the diversity and inclusivity of its student body through its robust scholarship and financial assistance programs. Through its strategic use of both university-funded and external scholarships, UST has helped students break free from the constraints of poverty, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in society and contribute to national development. These scholarships not only make education more accessible for students from low-income families but also empower them to pursue academic success and break the cycle of poverty.

10. Expanding Access to Education

Achieving SDG 4 requires not only improving the quality of education but also expanding access to education across geographical, social, and economic boundaries. This includes ensuring that education is available in rural areas, as well as to working adults and other groups who may face barriers to traditional education pathways.

UST's commitment to expanding educational access is exemplified in its ongoing efforts to establish new campuses in strategic locations, such as UST Santa Rosa and UST General Santos (GenSan). These campuses serve students in regions outside Manila and provide access to quality education in fields like agriculture, health sciences, and business, with special emphasis on local needs and industry collaboration. For example, UST GenSan is slated to become a key institution for agricultural technology education, which is vital to supporting the region's agrarian economy and addressing food security challenges.

Through these efforts, UST is not only enhancing its reach but also building localized ecosystems for learning and innovation. By fostering connections between the university, local industries, and government agencies, UST is helping to create educational pathways that are directly aligned with the economic and development goals of the region.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation of Educational Quality

To ensure continuous improvement, regular monitoring and evaluation of educational quality are essential. UST, like many higher education institutions, has adopted rigorous mechanisms for assessing and enhancing its academic programs and research outputs.

Through initiatives such as accreditation by national and international agencies, the University ensures that its programs meet high standards of academic excellence. UST is also involved in international networks like the AUNQA, which fosters peer reviews and knowledge exchange to ensure continuous development.

The internal assessment processes within the University also involve feedback from students, industry partners, alumni, and employers to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs. This data is used to improve curriculum design, teaching methods, and overall educational quality.

The University of Santo Tomas likewise shown a consistent commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), maintaining its ranking and improving its performance in recent assessments. This marked a significant achievement as it highlighted the university's ongoing efforts to enhance educational quality and accessibility. The university adapted by implementing online learning solutions and promoting inclusive education practices. The university's focus on innovative teaching methods, research initiatives, and community outreach has contributed positively to its standing.

UST has implemented several initiatives aimed at enhancing quality education:

1. **Curriculum Development:** The university continuously updates its curriculum to include sustainable development topics, ensuring that students are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills for the future.

2. Research and Innovation: UST promotes research that addresses educational challenges and fosters innovation in teaching methodologies, contributing to improved learning outcomes.

3. Community Engagement: The university engages with local communities through outreach programs that provide educational resources and support, particularly to underprivileged groups.

4. Digital Learning Solutions: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UST has expanded its digital learning infrastructure, ensuring that all students have access to quality education regardless of their circumstances.