An hour with an accomplished academic cum administrator

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INITIALLY I thought four weeks of time would be good enough for me to do all things that I planned for before departing for Australia. Soon after arrival, office, computers and internet connections were made available at a lightning speed. While week days were spent in the office, weekends were overloaded with invitations to food parties and visits to places. With about two dozens of our graduates working for postgraduate degrees in the Gippsland School of IT, weekends appeared to be much less than required. Still I had to pay a weekend visit to my city of Abode Adelaide - the city of churches. After a quarter century I could visit the first of the three Alma Maters that so generously offered me the opportunities for education that I so indifferently avoided to capitalize on. The four-week period is about to conclude at the end of this weekend. Pro Vice Chancellor of Monash University's Gippsland campus, Prof. Harry Ballis invited me to a courtesy dinner that I failed to attend due to a preoccupation. Then a photo session was planned on the 9th with all Bangladeshi students. Professor was ready in time, but not so the rest of us. Official cameramen were ready. Harry looked quite choosy in selecting sites he would be photographed with the Bangladeshi community. In one occasion he himself placed behind the camera to be convinced of the quality of background, and then allowed the cameramen to proceed. There were some 15 Bangladeshi students for the session. After that he invited all students on the spot for lunch, guided them to the cafeteria and requested the person in charge to provide them whatever lunch they will be satisfied with. Then Professor Ballis guided me and Dr Manzur Murshed to his office where lunch was ready for us. I thanked him for his contribution in increasing graduate population of Bangladesh, and cited how he inspired the community by staying with them for the whole day on our Victory Day and spontaneously participating in kite flying, and generously supporting the event financially. Professor Ballis also took the opportunity of extending Monash's educational cooperation to Bangladesh. In fact some of our private universities appear to go for 2 + 2 dual degree programs. The time we had been engaged in lunch Professor Ballis proposed a visit to Bangladesh and China, and it was immediately chalked out with Dr Manzur Murshed, and the piece of paper he wrote down the schedule on was immediately handed over to the secretary for organizing the trip mentioning the name of members of the entourage. Although I fully engaged myself in dining I did have an eye on the agenda of the academic administrator. He did not lose a single moment. I also thanked him for inviting the students to the lunch on the spot to which he mentioned that these small acts matter and inspire students to do the right thing. These acts always pay dividends adequately. I came to learn that his school of humanities, communication and social sciences was almost dying down about 7/8 years ago. He proposed for revival and by now strength of faculty members have doubled and there is ample life in the buildings and corridors. He did not forget to mention that last year the school published 64 research papers. In spite of the fact that he is the Chief Executive Officer of a university campus having around 5,000 students he has been currently supervising 7/8 doctoral students whose chapters are lying on his table along with important administrative documents. The professor swaps between his academic responsibilities and that of the administrator. In times of social evenings they do not forget to be around staff of all levels down to (oh, actually in these countries nobody says down to) cleaners. Professor Ballis is also capable of pronouncing names of students of different countries without error. This must impress upon foreign students. He is also a prolific author publishing several books on his field of research.

I have the same experience with Dr Graham Farr, Head of Caulfield School of IT at Monash's Caulfield campus. He invited me to learn about how I supervise my students at home- an invitation I shall never get in my own country, nor any of the actually accomplished supervisors at home. At 3 pm more than a dozen supervisors of different ages gathered at the tea room. With a generous introduction he invited me to speak a few words, which I did with my bad accent and staggering sentences. The amount of interest with which the academicians listened to a teacher of Bangladesh was really amazing. There was no dearth of interest as revealed through many of their interesting questions. I am sure some of them will possibly try out some of the options I discussed there. In advanced nations academicians need to learn throughout their life for survival. In our case things are different. Once we obtain the highest degree nothing more is there for us to learn. We are supposed to deliver only or be served.

My stay at Monash, where I could deliver the same lecture in 4/5 seminars with significant portion of the audience being the same, has been indeed a session for learning.