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Creating a National Society for the Enhancement of Indonesian Citizenry: Furthering the Liberal Arts in Higher Education

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Creating a National Society for the Enhancement of Indonesian Citizenry:
Furthering the Liberal Arts in Higher Education

Thank you for inviting me to speak. I am grateful to the Eco Camp staff for hosting our event to launch a society to enhance Indonesian higher education through rigorous study and innovative teaching with the Liberal Arts. I appreciate the many university representatives who are here today with support of this project and its projected outcomes for the Indonesian citizenry. I also thank Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia for allowing me to teach this semester with Professor Chaedar Alwasilah and his amazingly bright and eager graduate students, and I thank Northern Michigan University for a sabbatical leave to work in Indonesian higher education. I am happy to be with you today.

Although he is not with us, I would like to congratulate Joko Widodo for becoming the 7th President of Indonesia. His election is evidence of a strong Indonesian participatory democracy. Indonesians have already seen positive changes for Indonesia under President Widodo's leadership, as evidenced by President Widodo's selection of Anis Baswedan as Minister of Education and Culture, whom I invited to attend our celebration, but the notice was too short. Minister Baswedan is President of Paramadina University in Jakarta and he is a Fulbright Scholar, as is Prof. Chaedar Alwasilah.

This August, I arrived in Indonesia from Northern Michigan University in the United States to work at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia with Prof. Chaedar Alwasilah and his vision of renewing an emphasis on the Liberal Arts in Indonesia. I am a professor and researcher of educational psychology. I currently teach four graduate classes at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia with Prof. Chaedar Alwasilah, including an exciting new S3 'Liberal Arts Seminar'. We teach graduate students and teachers how to be good thinkers, problem solvers, decision makers, and researchers.

We meet today to celebrate Prof. Alwasilah's continued good health and his important focus on and dedication to the study of Liberal Arts in Indonesian higher education. We will launch a group in his honor to further the study of Liberal Arts in Indonesian Education. We will engage in an educational movement for sustainable change, candid discussions, tactical strategies, and potential problem analysis. **Now** is the time to move from paralysis to positive action to educate an Indonesian citizenry with skills for a peaceful, robust, participatory democracy.

Let us think briefly about the history of Indonesian education starting with colonial education of only Europeans and local privileged children and moving to where Indonesian education is now with free public education through 12th grade starting in fall 2015. Let us think briefly about the MKDU of Indonesian general education classes, which began as Liberal Arts classes, only to be whittled down to a mind-numbing series of unsatisfactory courses of boring lectures, resulting in what Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia Professors Ely Setiadi, Kama Hakam, and Ridwan Effendi in 2006 called passive indoctrination (on p. 3 of *Ilmu Sosial Budaya Dasar*). The current system of MKDU courses with its lack of focus on the Liberal Arts and lack of student-centered instruction is **not working**, as evidenced by corruption, fear, and unfettered emissions from exhaust-belching buses, fraud, bribery, rampant cigarette smoking and rising obesity, burning of plastics and rubbish, litter, and undrinkable tap water.

However, Indonesia is poised for change. We can feel the change with the election of President Joko Widodo. Indonesia is the third largest democracy in the world and the fourth largest country in the world. The economy is growing. The country is ready to move toward international recognition for educational excellence.

We gather from around the world and throughout Indonesia to celebrate a vision of Indonesia as an international educational leader. Today we launch a Society for the Enhancement of the Indonesian Citizenry through a rigorous study of the Liberal Arts in the MKDU and student-centered instruction to hone civic engagement, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and debate.

Three processes come to mind when we think about launching a new society for furthering the study of Liberal Arts in higher education. The first is **Excitement**. People who work with the Liberal Arts experience a shared excitement. Students are genuinely excited to hone critical thinking, decision-making, leadership, and speaking skills engendered through classroom study of the Liberal Arts, as evidenced through research on S1 and S2 students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia and Universitas Pasundan: **95.7%** of S1 students and **86.4%** of S2 students are interested in studying Liberal Arts coursework. They want more than narrow preparation in their majors. Lecturers are genuinely interested in learning how to teach with a student-centered Liberal Arts focus, as evidenced by the numerous laudatory emails from S3 lecturers who express eagerness to learn more about “teaching for learning” and engaging students with the Liberal Arts. The society we launch today is ready to advance the Indonesian citizenry to an **exciting** new level of educational excellence with skills for civic engagement through quality “teaching for learning” with the Liberal Arts.

The second process is **Cooperation**. Humans in all occupations cooperate and learn interactively and collaboratively together. A committed group of people can change the course of Indonesian higher education for greater good. Students in the Liberal Arts are able to achieve learning advocated by Curriculum 2013 (#67 and #70) from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Curriculum 2013 requires student-centered teaching strategies, creative innovation, interactive learning, group and community collaboration, and honing of interpersonal and leadership skills, which is exactly what a rigorous study of the Liberal Arts offers. By starting a society for the enhancement of the Indonesian citizenry through the Liberal Arts, we are supporting the Ministry of Education and Culture and creating social outreach opportunities and collaborative networks between universities, communities, and teacher preparation programs for a greater Indonesia.

The third process is **Values and Vision**. We must keep a clear focus on the **value of education**. The current Indonesian citizenry is narrowly educated. My S2 and S3 students lack skills of debate, conflict resolution, and constructive controversy, and they lack confidence in their opinions and knowledge of art, mathematics, and science. I assigned my S2 and S3 students homework to write letters to the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture on an educational issue of their choice. They shared how they grappled with fear that initially paralyzed them to speak up. In an Indonesian democracy, Indonesians have the right to ask for what they want. This knowledge is power. Indonesians first need to **know** that they have the right to ask for what they want, they need to **know** how to use their knowledge to affect positive change and resolve conflicts constructively, and they need to **know** that speaking up is necessary in a participatory democracy (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi, 2013). A rigorous study of the Liberal Arts provides the democratic skills of constructive controversy, debate, logic, and problem solving.

In today’s highly weaponized world, Indonesia’s greatest threat is **to educate citizens narrowly** without knowledge of Indonesian history, ecology, culture, and literature, and without skills of debate, logic, evidence-based reasoning, and problem solving. Indonesians must understand social criticism offered by the arts and the power of music, rhetoric, and social influence to affect human emotion, must apply mathematics and evidence-based scientific inquiry to all aspects of life, and must read the **Great Books of Indonesia**. Our newly formed society must keep its **vision** of a highly educated Indonesian citizenry

with skills to build a peaceful, ecological, cooperative, respectful, and economically fair and transparent, safe society. **These skills are possible only with** a rigorous study of student-centered learning with the **Liberal Arts of Indonesia** to educate an Indonesian citizenry with skills for moral and ethical reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making, and creativity.

In conclusion, we must thank the entire academic community who made this celebration possible, including the Indonesian system of education and culture, EcoCamp, visionary representatives of universities and university students who want to unlock the potential of active study with civic engagement, critical thinking, and the Liberal Arts.

I want to thank everyone in the audience for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here for the launch of the society and enhancement of Indonesian citizenry through a rigorous study of the Liberal Arts in higher education. I especially want to thank Prof. Chaedar Alwasilah who spearheaded this campaign to renew the study of Liberal Arts in the MKDU. His vision, dedication, and determination have provided us a society to guide our collective work to advance the Liberal Arts in Indonesian higher education for the enhancement of the Indonesian citizenry. Thank you for the **Excitement, Cooperation, Values and Vision** that you have provided us today.

Now, let's get to work. We have Special Interest Groups to form, officers to elect, plans to make, and a vision and missions to achieve! Thank you!

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