



## THE GROWING ROLE OF THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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University of North Carolina Greensboro. Previously, she served in leadership roles at several universities in the United States and at Western Sydney University and University of Sydney. For her many publications and leadership roles, she has been recognised with scholarly awards in both the US and Australia. She has helped launch many academic journals and organisations, and has served on the National Advisory Panel for the Carnegie Classification for Engagement since 2006. Her current work focuses on designing systems to monitor and measure the diverse impacts of engagement. She earned her Bachelor of Journalism and Master of Arts in Journalism at the University of Missouri, and a doctorate in Higher Education Policy at the University of Maryland. She resides in Portland, Oregon.

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### **THE GROWING ROLE OF THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES.**

First, I propose to you that that higher education, on a global scale, will soon enter a new era of increased public appreciation and support. Community engagement will play an important role, along with other strategies, in creating a new intellectual contract with the public interest over the coming decade. I have been involved in the discourse on community engagement in the Australian higher education sector since 2001, and have studied its concepts and principles since 1990. The idea of community engagement has developed unevenly around the world in terms of uptake. It is appropriate and wise that the University of Melbourne and the Group of Eight organized this Global Summit because it is increasingly clear that community engagement strategies are a vital key to the successful future of the global research enterprise. Now is the time for action.

From the 1950s through 70s, higher ed around the world was widely admired for providing greater access to further education and innovative research that contributed to post WWII recovery, global economic growth, improvements in health, and innovations in technology, to name a few. In the literature of HED (Higher Education for Development) this was an era when higher ed was recognised as a "public good". Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, Vice Chancellor and President of Manchester University, used that term last night, when she said "What are universities for? The answer should be: We create Public Good." Current public and government views suggest some doubt

about how well we fulfill this role in society.

From my vantage point we are already moving on a path to regain regard as a public good. This will require substantial change in academic culture. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to achieve that goal as new generations of academics enter our intellectual workforce in large numbers. Research reveals the different goals this generation has for their scholarly careers, including a strong commitment to contributing to public good. They are already shaping significant changes in academic culture. After 40 years of a relatively stable academic workforce and culture, an appreciation of engagement strategies is one of many changes that are already well under way. Our panels throughout the day will speak to some examples of the role community engagement plays in this exciting change process.

First, let's get clear on what we are talking about. Some of you have asked about defining the term community engagement.

The US-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching worked with many scholars over several years to develop a standard definition of community engagement, released in 2006. This definition has largely succeeded in codifying the core characteristics and principles of community engagement and is increasingly cited in other nations as well.

Community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research describes interactions between universities and their communities (business, industry, govt, NGOs, and other groups) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and

resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The emphasis is on ‘exchange of knowledge in a context of partnership and reciprocity’. Community engagement recognises that communities and other sectors are rich in lived experience and direct observation of community issues and challenges. By working in partnerships, community knowledge contributes materially to the design of evidence-based interventions and strategies meant to lead to change and improvement. The words in this definition matter because they distinguish scholarly engagement from other ways we traditionally ‘engage’ with others outside the academy, such as outreach and public service.

Simply said, community engagement methods recognize that for some of the wicked problems facing our local communities and the wider globe, we must consider both academic knowledge and expertise, AND the knowledge, expertise, and lived experience present in communities and sectors outside the academy.

Wicked problems have several key characteristics: they have complex and often unclear causes, they are widespread and large in scale, they are complex and multidimensional. Any consideration of proposed solutions or responses of these issues are controversial and hotly debated because there are riddled with competing value-laden views and myths. Homelessness, climate change, and food security would be three quick and obvious examples.

These types of challenges require higher education’s attention to the knowledge

and expertise of other sectors. We must apply multiple disciplinary lenses as well as interactive partnerships with other entities across society that are being impacted by these complex issues and work together to identify promising solutions. These kinds of wicked problems “may” be addressed through traditional scholarly methods, but they may often be better addressed by community engagement methods that combine different forms and sources of knowledge.

This approach positions Community engagement as a scholarly method; a method of teaching, learning and research. Thus, it is distinct from the provision of public services. Both are important to higher education performance, but one is scholarly and one is not. As with any scholarly method, community engaged scholarship should lead to refereed research publications, books, and disciplinary recognition, as any we would expect from any more familiar form of scholarly work. When used as a method of teaching, it involves our students in the development of skills of inquiry, research and analysis that equips them

to be actively engaged throughout their lives in the issues of their communities and beyond. By the way, research on engaged learning experiences reveals that such experiences can lead to dramatic improvement in student retention, progress and completion, as well as increases in

faculty research productivity and funding.

The persistent confusion about ‘what is community engagement’ comes largely from three sources. First, resistance comes from some academic staff who don’t want to be engaged and suspect it is an administrative mandate that will increase their workload. This view is incorrect and can be countered by establishing community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research. Academics choose their methods based on alignment with

the research question or learning goal. Engagement methods are not applicable to every scholar’s agenda.

A second challenge that can confuse community engagement is the many other ways that universities tend to use the word ‘engage’ toward many ends that involve the public. For example, you may engage



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with local government to expand campus parking, you may engage with donors and alumni to seek their gifts, you can create active learning strategies that increase the engagement of students in the process of learning. We use “engage” a lot in higher ed.

The third challenge relates to higher education ranking schemes. The historic culture of aggregating statistics based on individual scholar productivity and impact has never accurately or equitably ranked institutions on either performance or impact beyond the disciplines. There is a persistent belief that community engagement does not contribute to rankings. However, please note these two points: 1) As a method, community engagement contributes directly to research productivity, funding and publications; 2) Several of the most prestigious rankings have begun discussions on how to integrate community engagement measures into the ranking profile.

Community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research is a form of rigorous scholarly work. It is reviewed, disseminated, assessed and replicated just as other methods, but it is enhanced by collaboration with external sources of knowledge and lived experience. As a scholarly method, it is transforming academic culture, and subsequently, the public’s view of the value of higher education. Therein, lies the promise of a return of the public’s recognition and appreciation of our role in creating public good. Over the last 20 years, a vast body of literature has been developed regarding research on the methods and effects of community engaged scholarship on academic staff’s performance. There are

refereed journals, international academic societies and academic awards offered across every discipline. All the familiar features of excellence in scholarship exist for the recognition of engaged scholarship. Because community engaged methods involve partnerships (internal and external), success requires some investment in institutional leadership and infrastructure – now commonly co-located in research support units.

More recently, there are emerging instruments to capture descriptive and analytical data that helps universities track their footprint of engagement and measure aspects of its outputs and outcomes in terms of impacts on research, teaching and learning outcomes, and community outcomes from the community’s perspective. The focus on measurement systems has grown because of the value of data in attracting funding, disseminating replicable outcomes, recognising success and achievements, and the evidence that it will be integrated into various rankings or reviews of higher education institutions. There are also emerging schemes (such as the Carnegie Elective Classification for community engagement) meant to develop national/international data bases on engagement performance that might help inform benchmarking.

Note well that whether a university wants to collect activity and impact data for internal planning and assessment or for participation in external reporting and recognition schemes, it is essential to develop a focused agenda of engagement. Random work is hard to track and measure. As a method of teaching, learning and research, engagement can be effectively applied in any discipline as part of

individual or collaborative scholarly work. Data on the outcomes of such activity needs to be systematically collected as a way to ensure an accurate record of the institution’s work and organize connections between activities on similar questions, populations, locations, etc. Today, university leaders are moving to develop more focused agendas of community engagement, often aligning with global challenges. Today in this Summit, we will discuss one model of the focused agenda: The Grand Challenge model.

The goal of engagement of course, is to discover knowledge that will inform improvement in future outcomes. So perhaps it is not surprising that the greatest interest in engagement is being driven in part by new generation academics entering your university workforce. Today, most of your universities have four generations of academics, and many of you are likely already at 40% or more of academic staff identifying as Gen X. Research conducted by Cathy Trower shows these new generation faculty see the world through a collaborative lens ... teaching and research are related; research questions have multi-disciplinary aspects; they want their scholarship to inform the wicked problems that face our world; they want their results to be reviewed and disseminated widely and openly ... to both scholarly and public audiences.

These new generation faculty are already moving into leadership roles and changing academic culture. Many of these scholars experienced community-engaged learning as students, so in a way, we are producing engaged-oriented future academics by our use of engaged teaching and research methods.



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More broadly, approaches to research are becoming more collaborative and multi-disciplinary, and increasingly integrated into teaching and learning. Around the world, students are concerned about the future of our planet, and they seek to connect learning to action. Some US research unis, such as Cornell, Duke, Stanford and the University of California campuses, among others, are expanding undergraduate research opportunities by integrating research and community engagement into the curriculum. Attention to local and global challenges is clearly

exciting to contemporary university students and is contributing to learning outcomes. Engagement can be integrated into curricula both through classroom instruction and experiential learning. In my work, I have seen that involving students in the culture of research can enhance the overall performance of a research university. Integration of material about wicked problems, and content that helps students recognize quality research may help create a more informed public audience for research going forward.

I have been fortunate in my academic career to have the opportunity to do research on change in higher education and to lead change initiatives as a university executive in the US and Australia. Community engagement is a transformative strategy that gives new energy to research and academic productivity in a context that values shared intellectual work. Change in higher education is not an oxymoron ... it is well underway. Much of that change process has been associated with community

engagement as a form of scholarly work that leads our academic staff to a vision of a new and more dynamic, contemporary academic culture. The keys to success are straight-forward: professional development support regarding community engagement methods in teaching and research; a strategic plan and quality framework for engagement; supportive infrastructure; and a plan for tracking and measuring both outcomes and impacts. We will discuss these strategies throughout this summit.

Community engagement is not the entire story of the coming renewal of public appreciation for higher education's role in contributing to public good, but it is a proven strategy that warrants your deep attention going forward.

