

# FORUM

*Discussing international education*

## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

GLOBAL COMPETENCY IS NOT ENOUGH  
MOVING BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER  
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING  
OFFSHORE ACTIVITIES: WHAT ABOUT THE STAFF?

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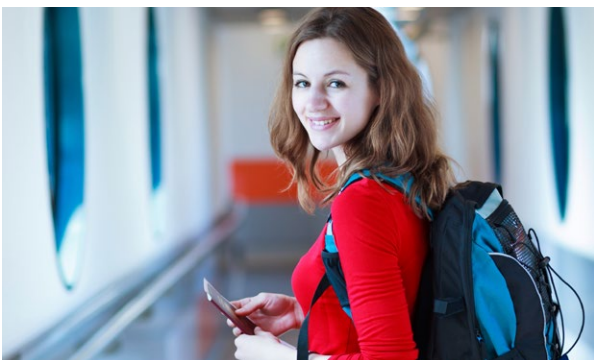
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FERNANDO M. REIMERS





# MOVING BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER

*An exploration of the growing  
global movement towards  
greater social responsibility in  
higher education. ▶*

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*Talloires Network, USA*

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In universities around the world, something extraordinary is underway. University professors and students are streaming out of their institutions to directly tackle pressing community problems. They are mobilising their human energies and expertise to combat poverty, improve public health and restore the environment. Through these efforts they are consciously rejecting the conventional model of the ivory tower and embracing a new ideal, that of the ‘engaged university’. Brick by brick, in all parts of the globe, the engaged university is replacing the ivory tower.

Activities that define the engaged university approach include student volunteer

Scott Cowen notes, “We have dismantled the image of the remote ivory tower and replaced it with that of an engaged and dynamic community of learners and doers.”

Second, the scale of civic engagement and social responsibility work is far greater than it was even a decade ago. A sizable fraction of the 150 million university students across the world participate regularly in social responsibility and community service activities.

Third, institutions of higher education in virtually all regions of the world, operating in dramatically different contexts are embracing very similar visions and strategies for their civic engagement work.

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### BRICK BY BRICK, THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY IS REPLACING THE IVORY TOWER

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programmes, service-learning, applied research and policy development, joint projects with external groups, and socially responsible institutional policies. While the individual elements of this trend are familiar and not particularly new, several things make the engaged university phenomenon new and important.

First, the combination of various community engagement and social responsibility programmes and policies in individual institutions of higher education is achieving greater impacts and also elevating the institutions’ public service missions. For example, in the USA, in response to the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Tulane University dramatically expanded student volunteering, developed service-learning in multiple disciplines, made community engagement a degree requirement for undergraduates in all fields, and took on major responsibilities for redeveloping and operating primary health care services in New Orleans. Tulane has become a significant anchor institution in its home community. University President

Just as the ivory tower model transcended regional differences, today the engaged university model is universal. The community and social responsibility programmes of Stellenbosch University in South Africa and the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina look very much like those of Charles Darwin University in Australia and the Autonomous University of Madrid.

Fourth, this global trend is generating three major kinds of impacts which are reinforcing one another. Engaged universities are educating leaders for change, moving the needle on community conditions, and as a result of the first two, building support for higher education.

Fifth, we are starting to witness a fundamental reorientation in how institutions of higher education are conceptualising their civic engagement and social responsibility activities. Until quite recently, the dominant approach was to think of public service as a separate ‘third mission’ (and one that was distinctly third in the level of attention that it received, in comparison with teaching and research).



Photo: Courtesy of Tulane University

Tulane University prides itself on its volunteer programmes for students

Currently underway is a decided shift toward thinking of, and implementing, public service as an essential part of the two primary missions of teaching and research. A growing number of academics see community-engaged teaching and research as a pathway to higher quality teaching and research.

#### DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Why is this trend building momentum? Several factors are driving this movement. Leadership – both top-down and bottom-up – is a major influence. The current generation of university vice-chancellors, rectors, and presidents includes many for whom university civic engagement is a major priority, a central piece of their agenda. Compelling leaders of the Engaged University model include Sharifah Shahabudin, Vice-Chancellor of National University of Malaysia; Janice Reid, Vice-Chancellor of University of Western Sydney in Australia; Rafael Velasco,



Rector of Catholic University of Cordoba in Argentina; and Lisa Anderson, President of American University in Cairo.

At the same time, growing numbers of university students are inventing and building new community service initiatives. Today's students increasingly aspire to be 'practical visionaries', people with bold ambitions for social change and also with the concrete skills needed in order to get things done. From Brazil to Canada, more and more of them come to their universities having done community service in upper primary and secondary school.

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### TODAY'S STUDENTS INCREASINGLY ASPIRE TO BE 'PRACTICAL VISIONARIES'

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They expect social responsibility activities to be part of their university experience and they expect their universities to help prepare them to be practical visionaries. In response to student interest and demand,

Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico, for example, and other universities, are focusing greater attention on defining and measuring student learning outcomes.

In this period of tight financial resources, constituencies outside of universities are increasing their expectations that universities contribute directly to societal priorities, to address unmet societal needs. Furthermore, over the past two decades, the movement beyond the ivory tower has generated a growing number of proven models. There now exists an expanding set of programmes that have a track record of concrete achievements. Witness Puentes UC (Bridges UC), a well-established programme of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, involves a partnership through which each year, teams of faculty and students complete major projects requested by 10 municipalities in greater Santiago. Addressing transportation, health and community development challenges, Puentes UC teams have helped to improve community conditions, and in the process, advanced the development of thousands of UC students into practical visionaries – citizen engineers, citizen economists and citizen businessmen and women.

#### UNIVERSITY COALITIONS EMERGING

As individual universities on all continents are scaling up their civic work, new coalitions of universities have emerged to support and strengthen these activities. These alliances foster exchange of best practices,

build the capabilities of their member institutions, and organise collective voice in interactions with funders, government agencies and the mass media. The South African Higher Education

Community Engagement Forum, which was established just a few years ago, recently completed a series of capacity-building workshops for its members, all 23 public universities in the country. In 2012, the National University of Malaysia launched AsiaEngage, a multi-country coalition for exchange and collaboration to elevate university engagement in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines, and elsewhere in the region. The Latin American Center for Service-Learning annually convenes universities and K-12 representatives, and provides training and technical assistance to universities' community engagement programmes throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. In Ireland, Campus Engage fosters mutual learning and joint action by several institutions of higher education. And across the Middle East, the Ma'an University Alliance for Civic Engagement connects and augments the work of institutions throughout the region.

What will be the future of the movement to dismantle the ivory tower? With continuing effort and international cooperation, the engaged university can become the new gold standard in higher education. Current trends suggest that more universities will plan and act as anchor institutions that have a lasting impact on pressing community problems and that, through their social responsibility programmes, they will educate leaders for change. **E**

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The Talloires Network is an international coalition of universities committed to strengthening their civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education. Since its conception in 2005, the Talloires Network has grown to over 300 member institutions in 71 countries. The Network facilitates exchange, makes seed grants to members, provides training, and awards annual prizes for outstanding community engagement programmes.