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University-Community Engagement in the Asia-Pacific

Christopher Collins and Deane Neubauer

One of the greatest questions surrounding the increase in the college-going population is around the associated costs to governments and individuals. Cost-sharing has been a global trend as societies determine the degree to which individuals, governments, or institutions within the private sector or a balance between these should be the primary source of funding. Although post-secondary education is often seen as a benefit to individual degree earners, it also plays an important role in providing benefits to the public. Such benefits generated by universities for the surrounding communities include the creation and distribution of new knowledge and the emergence of an educated citizenry that tends to participate in civic activities more frequently and requires fewer public resources like healthcare and other forms of government assistance (McMahon, 2009). Accordingly, universities throughout the world are designing and articulating the ways in which their programs can and do influence their various communities. (One can recognize that the idea of a higher education “community” can and does refer to a wide range of groups and social structures that interact with any given higher educational institution very much shaped by the location and particular history of a given institutions, its mission, etc.)

In the United States, as an example of how such recognition can be fostered, the Carnegie Foundation created a specific elective classification for Community Engagement, based on the idea that it is “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (NERCHE, 2015). The

purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

The notion of the public good, of course, tends to differ from society to society and country to country but it is generally defined as a benefit to or contributing to the well-being of society. Articulating the centrality of the public good mission proves to be an easier task than understanding the degree to which the mission is being fulfilled. According to Bowen (1977),

The outcomes from research and public service cannot be measured with any precision, and so conclusions will inevitably be subjective and judgmental. It is possible, however, to describe these activities in some detail. Indeed, a mere recital of them strongly suggests they yield important benefits. (p. 291)

Many hold that higher education institutions need a “larger purpose that underpins their existence” (Marginson, 2012, p. 8). Publicly owned institutions, in practice, are generally more open to democratic policy involvement and are more likely to practice a collective approach (Marginson 2007). However, private institutions can also produce public goods and operate with a community engaged mission. There is an ongoing need to measure the aspects of what is public and to communicate the macro historical impact of higher education that has eluded a clear definition.

One of the most historic forms of community engagement, present in many societies, is the agricultural university and its focus on practical arts. Kasetsart University is an ideal host for the second Emerging Scholars Seminar given its historical role in agricultural outreach to the

community through experiment stations. Today there are many forms of community engagement and an increasing need to articulate the nature of the mission, programs, and impact on society.

This seminar will be based on ideas that participants bring to it in the form of an abstract, an outline and a powerpoint presentation of the idea that each participant wishes to develop into a published paper. Each topic will be discussed and commented on with the seminar faculty working both individually and collectively to bring the ideas underlying these presentations into greater focus and moving each project toward a hoped-for successful outcome.

References

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