

Rethinking university-community engagement: the role of community organisations in educating students

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As Universities around the world continue to undertake curriculum renewal processes, it is evident that there is a heightened importance attributed to ensuring that students develop graduate attributes or skills that will enable them to be more productive and engaged citizens (global and local) who can be active change agents. Ensuring that students have an opportunity to get real life experience in the course of their undergraduate degree - whether through Work Integrated Learning (WIL), service-learning, practicums, clinicals, field work or other forms of curriculum-embedded experiential learning - is of paramount importance. The learning that occurs through these various modes of experiential learning is invaluable, and often of great benefit to the students and community organisations. Arguably, the partnership development and curricular aspects of university-community engagement posit that the university and community could effectively intersect at the point of co-designing and co-delivering service-learning curricula.

Participants will examine and share perspectives on the role that community organisations play in the educational process and explore the challenges experienced by community organisations in the university-community engagement partnership highlighting how community organisations may perceive their role as “educators” who actively “teach” and “assess” students during the experiential learning process. The central point of debate will be - What are the new imperatives for education, teaching and learning that arise when considering universities and community organisations as “partners in education”? The session explores probing questions such as: In what ways can learning activities be designed to tap into the expertise of the universities and community organisations in delivering more effective learning platforms? How can universities and their respective community partners collaborate more effectively in the education process? Can and/or should community organisations play a more active role in designing student assessment tasks?

This topic explores issues around designing curricula and assessment for quality learning. In many ways, the points for debate may unearth the scope for universities to take a more concerted approach towards working with community organisations in efforts to determine how best to not only ensure student learning outcomes are met, but also how to support capacity building for the community organisations hence abiding by the principles of mutual benefit and reciprocity that underlies authentic University-Community Engagement.