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## SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY: PERSPECTIVES OF UNIVERSITY'S TOP MANAGEMENT LEADERS

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### Abstract

Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching described UCE as the “collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their larger communities (local, regional or state, national, and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” Thus the term socially responsible university was proposed by Teichler (2017) which refers to the need for a university to be relevant to the society and that “the university has to pay attention as well that it serves the generally agreed function of generating, preserving and disseminating knowledge appropriately.” However, this function is the least emphasized by the university community and in criteria for promotion. This Article examines the nature of and the factors affecting universities’ engagement with their communities from the multiple perspectives of top management leaders of the university. Specifically, the research sought to access views on UCE and explores cultural and institutional barriers to involvement, and levels of recognition, support, and reward for community engagement. The article highlights the two perspectives from the respondents; their beliefs of what is currently occurring in their universities and their views on what ought to be occurring.

**Keywords:** socially responsible university; university-community engagement

### Abstrak

Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching (*Yayasan Carnegie untuk Kemajuan pengajaran*) menggambarkan university-community engagement (UCE) sebagai “kolaborasi antara institusi pendidikan tinggi (HEIs) dan komunitas mereka yang lebih besar (lokal, regional atau negara, nasional, dan global) untuk pertukaran pengetahuan dan sumber daya yang saling menguntungkan dalam konteks kemitraan dan timbal balik.” Dengan demikian istilah universitas yang bertanggung jawab secara sosial diusulkan oleh Teichler (2017) yang mengacu pada perlunya sebuah universitas menjadi relevan dengan masyarakat dan bahwa “universitas harus memperhatikan dalam melayani fungsi yang disepakati bersama untuk menghasilkan, melestarikan dan menyebarkan pengetahuan dengan tepat.” Namun, fungsi ini paling tidak ditekankan oleh komunitas universitas dan dalam kriteria untuk promosi. Artikel ini mengkaji sifat dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keterlibatan universitas dengan komunitas mereka dari berbagai perspektif pimpinan manajemen puncak pada universitas. Secara khusus, penelitian ini berupaya untuk mengakses pandangan tentang UCE dan mengeksplorasi hambatan budaya dan kelembagaan untuk keterlibatan, dan tingkat pengakuan, dukungan, dan penghargaan untuk keterlibatan masyarakat. Artikel ini menyoroti dua perspektif dari responden; keyakinan mereka tentang apa yang sedang terjadi di universitas mereka dan pandangan mereka tentang apa yang seharusnya terjadi.

**Kata kunci:** universitas yang bertanggung jawab secara social; keterlibatan universitas-masyarakat

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## Introduction

University-community engagement (UCE) is described by Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching (2012) as the “collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their larger communities (local, regional or state, national, and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” UCE is meant 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” (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2012). Thus, the community can leverage on the knowledge and expertise of the university to address the community’s problems or needs while the university, through engagement initiatives, shapes its research agenda and enhances student learning (Alter, 2005). Universities can also contribute to economic growth as well as help improve the community’s quality of life.

As early as in the 1980s, university-community engagement has taken place where the expertise of academic institutions and organizations was sought to help eradicate poverty, referred to as “the war on poverty” by Boyle and Silver (2005, p. 233). Universities were expected to take a bigger role in improving the community and it should not be borne solely by the government. It was then that American universities started to initiate UCE by establishing university-community partnership offices (Barnes et al., 2009). Gaining momentum from initiatives of the American universities and others, UCE is identified as one of the pillars of the Malaysian higher education system, where academics are to serve the economic, social, and cultural needs of the community, locally and globally. Thus, every

Malaysian university introduced plans to strengthen UCE. In the foreword of Universiti Putra Malaysia’s (2014) document, *Industry and Community Engagement: A University Framework*, the Prime Minister indicated that “the responsibility to eradicate social problems within our midst is not the government’s alone; all Malaysians have a role to play” (p. v). HEIs need to put in concerted efforts to demonstrate their social responsibility and responsiveness to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for various community programmes. Teichler (2017) highlighted that university must be relevant to the society and that “the university has to pay attention as well that it serves the generally agreed function of generating, preserving and disseminating knowledge appropriately” (p. 15). Teichler further asserted that a university has to develop a framework based on what is viewed as appropriate and it has to self-assess its activities critically and determine the worth of such efforts. Borrowing from the well-publicised term *corporate social responsibility*, the term socially responsible university is defined as follows:

A university that takes care of the proper functioning of its core functions – irrespectively of how much these functions are determined by the logic of the knowledge system or by the logic of societal expectations can be named as socially responsible. (Teichler, 2017, p. 15).

To be a socially responsible university, the people of the university, both academic and non-academic staff must readily service and ‘give’ through UCE. Although the emphasis on the need to be more engaged in UCE activities and the responsibility on nation-building has been adopted and emphasized by HEIs or some academics, many are still not putting in serious effort into the fourth role of the academic. The roles of academics are always assumed to be in the following order: teaching, research, administration and management, and social

services. The set priorities of an academic's roles was made evident in MdYunus and Pang's (2013) study in which academics were asked to indicate the role that they prioritized most. The findings showed that research is the most emphasized, followed by teaching, administration and management and social services. The order of emphases actually matches the criteria that are weighted most in yearly appraisal and promotion of academics. Among the criteria and indicators used in evaluation of one's promotion as demonstrated by Malaysian public universities are community services, nation-building, consultancy, and industrial linkages. However excellence in research related activities remain the main criteria for considering promotion (MdYunus & Pang, 2013).

### **Types of University-Community Engagement Activities**

This study focused on four types of UCE activities: (i) service, (ii) outreach, (iii) partnership, and (iv) curricular. Outreach and partnership described two different but related approaches to community engagement. Only undertakings that are scholarly in nature are considered as UCE activities. The term community-engaged scholarship (sometimes also referred to as the scholarship of engagement) referred to inquiries into community-engaged teaching and learning or the forms of participatory action research with community partners that embodies the characteristics of both community engagement and scholarship (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

#### **Service**

In this study, service referred to non-scholarly university-community engagement activities, which included providing help in cleaning the environment and building homes for the homeless.

#### **Outreach**

Outreach referred to the application and provision of institutional resources for community use with benefits to both the campus and the community (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

#### **Partnership**

Partnership referred to collaborative interaction with the community and related scholarships for "the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources" (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

#### **Curricular**

Curricular engagement described teaching, learning, and scholarship that engage faculty, students, and community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address identified needs of the community, deepen students' civic and academic learning, enhance community well-being, and enrich the scholarship of the institution (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

Involvement in UCE activities progresses from informing to consulting, involving, collaborating, and lastly, empowering the community (Figure 1). The identification on the degree of involvement was based on the model of engagement developed by the International Association for Public Participation (D'Ambrosio, 2011) in its Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement and the increasing level of public impact as one progresses from "informed" to "empowered." It is also the basis used by the Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector of the New Zealand government (2011) in determining the levels of community participation in decision-making.



Source: Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector, New Zealand Government (2011, p. 11)

Figure 1. Levels of Community Participation in Decision-Making

### Informing

In informing, the university provides guides to help communities understand issues that need to be addressed. The university shares with the community about a decision that has happened or about something that may occur and provides advice on how to deal with the arising issues.

### Consulting

Consultation with some negotiation allows the university to gain feedback from the community. Deliberation on its needs may bring about ideas for improving something, options to be considered, and views on the consequences of making a particular decision.

### Involving

Involving requires assisting the community in highlighting an issue to a higher authority. This includes planning, implementing or negotiating on how to proceed in dealing with the matter before making a final decision.

### Collaborating

Collaborating involves engaging with the community in decision-making, including searching for alternatives and the best solutions. It requires working together to find solutions to a problem or an issue faced.

### Empowering

Empowering refers to assisting the community in governing the problems faced. This results from an engagement that gives benefit to both parties. The university provides the community with skills, information, authority, and resources to ensure sustainability of the solutions to the recurring problems or issues.

Regarding engagement in UCE activities of Malaysian academics, based on quantitative data collected in 2015, MdYunus et al. (2017) summarized the extent of UCE as follows:

- a) There was no definite trend in the types of involvement by academics. Outreach programmes were predominant at the local or state level, outreach and partnership at the national level, and curricular engagement at the international level.
- b) For all levels of community engagement (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering), the frequency of the academics' engagement was between "rarely" and "occasionally" for local, national or international geographical boundaries.
- c) Academics did know that community engagement was part of their professional requirement, although the level of agreement was moderate. They agreed that university-community engagement should be set out in the strategic plan.
- d) Academics perceived the benefits of community engagement activities in the following order:
  - enhancing the quality of education
  - improving the quality of the environment
  - conserving culture and tradition
- e) Academics did not regard university-community engagement as a way to gain awards or promotions. They were involved

mainly for the benefit of enhancing their network.

## Objectives of the Study

This paper examines the nature of and the factors affecting UCE from the multiple perspectives of top management leaders of the university. The overall aim of this qualitative part of the study was to provide a baseline against which change in institutional management and culture, in terms of making community engagement a more significant role of university life, could be assessed. Specifically, the research sought to access views on UCE and explores cultural and institutional barriers to involvement, and levels of recognition, support, and reward for community engagement. Two perspectives of the respondents are highlighted; their beliefs of what is currently occurring in their universities and their attitudes on what ought to be occurring.

## Method

Qualitative data collection with the top management leaders consisted of semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face individually with Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVC). Apart from the findings reported in this paper, the study had also incorporated focus group interviews with ten mid-level administrators to gain multiple sources of data for triangulation by offering different angles and perspectives for understanding the cases. By interviewing people with different views on the university and its engagement efforts, different perspectives were uncovered. Interviewees representing universities were selected using a purposive sampling approach, sampling with particular predefined groups in mind based on university types: research, comprehensive and technical universities and also polytechnics. Individual interviews were conducted with six DVCs

directly in charge of community engagement activities. On top of that, opinions of ten upper and mid-level administrators who hold management positions related to industry and community engagement activities (i.e. directors of community service related units) were revealed through focus group discussions.

The interviews with the DVCs covered topics relating to eight areas: awareness of UCE; views and understanding of UCE, nature of UCE activities; involvement in UCE; types of UCE activities; the impact of UCE on society and universities; levels of recognition given; and UCE strategies and policies. The interviews were semi-structured. This allowed the interest and experiences of the respondents to shape the questions and discussions. Thus the inquiries and the sequence of questions did not rigidly follow the agenda set by the researchers. The interview protocols for the DVCs followed a parallel, semi-structured path of inquiry, covering content areas that respond to the research questions.

All participants were sent an introductory email about the research that was followed up with a telephone call or email to pre-book an interview. The interviews ranged between one and 2½ hours in duration and were tape recorded. One DVC did not give consent for the discussion to be recorded but allowed note-taking during the session. Verbatim transcription was conducted for the recorded interviews, which includes the detailed summaries thus forming the basis of the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The transcription was analyzed using inductive content analysis approach which enabled the identification of meanings as well as pattern recognition and themes through the implementation of open coding (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The constructs and interview questions were used to guide the analysis. Coding and interpretation of the results consisted of reading and re-reading the

narratives and noting emerging patterns related to local community understanding, experience as well as perceptions.

The following section presents the interview results. The discussion highlights emerging ideas, insights and themes that addressed the research questions. In some instances, cross-case comparisons were made to illuminate issues that are common to many institutions, and the similarities and differences across the university types. A selection of relevant quotes is included to illustrate each theme derived from the interview data. However, the quotations are not attributed to any single individual to ensure the anonymity of participants and their professional affiliations. The following section then offers a discussion of the general ways in which the institutions engage with their communities and then draw some conclusions based on the researchers' understanding of UCE practices in Malaysian universities.

## Results and Discussion

### Feedback from Deputy Vice Chancellors

The views of top management leaders are valuable in capturing a sense of how different universities are responding to the community engagement agenda in Malaysia. Although the Malaysian university initiatives on UCE are much governed and directed by the Ministry of Higher Education, it is the reaction of the top management leaders to such top-down directives that may lead to change in the organizational and strategic plans and actions to be undertaken by the institutions.

### Academics' Level of Awareness

The six Deputy Vice-Chancellors were requested to share on their academics' level of awareness on UCE programmes. According to Nifco (2005), awareness is the aggregate of

knowledge, attitudes or belief held by an individual and the lack of it is normally due to a lack of understanding. Respondents from the research universities believe that the level of awareness among their academics is high. They claimed that community engagement activities are both widespread and varied.

We are very active in community activities. Let's say a program is initiated by the faculty. Thus, many people will be involved, from the lecturers to the head of departments as well as the directors and executive officers from the student career development unit.

...everybody here understands and knows what community engagement is all about and leaves (the university) with very community minded. The focus is very much on community, to be more aware of the community around the university. How they (the academics) can use the knowledge for the community ...to be able to be versatile. We are training people, updating them with opportunities ... transforming the people in the university.

The findings also revealed that community engagement was regarded as a sense of duty or responsibility. According to the DVCs, this feeling emerged from the academics' perspectives on the value of higher education.

Awareness on the importance of the value in giving back to the community.

Academics are aware of the element of service to the wider community...the focus is very much on the community, how they can transfer the knowledge to the community...be able to be versatile.

It is the most important relationship when students and lecturers collaborate to transfer knowledge to the community. Academics and student can transfer their knowledge to the community. Their involvement with the

community will give added value to their performance...

Nevertheless, a DVC from a comprehensive university claimed that UCE is a new and growing prominence of the purpose of universities and their third stream activities that fall outside the two core roles of teaching and research. The common theme in the third stream is externalizing the work of the institutions and ensuring that they have greater intellectual, economic, and social benefits. As universities began to evolve and become more outward looking, the culture of community engagement is slowly accepted as part of university life.

The culture [community engagement] is still new compared to research and teaching. These two are the most favorable activities. But community engagement is given emphasis now...it will take some time as with any new changes in the universities, to gain recognition.

### Views and Understanding of Community Engagement

When asked about how they view the community engagement activities in their universities, a clear majority of the respondents did not consider their community engagement activities as satisfactory.

The level of engagement between universities and the community is unsatisfactory. Many activities could not be sustained. An example is the *Bakti Siswa* which is a program carried out to fulfill the requirement of *Bakti Siswa* and the university. There is no follow up to the program, no evaluation.

Arguably, UCE activities are influenced by the different contexts each party brings to the collaboration, such as institutional factors, community needs, and resources. Objectives for collaborating often differ between universities and community members. Goals of the

partnership deemed important to a university may not be understood or necessarily of interest to the community. According to the DVC of a research university, community partners sometimes lack understanding of the university environment. Likewise, the universities especially the academics are oblivious to the needs of the community. It is therefore essential to describe and prepare community partners for the university system (e.g, the length of time to implement processes) and to educate the academics to respond to their communities. He also suggests that the university system needs to foster community partnerships through more 'user-friendly' practices:

The community needs are very different. The industry needs are very different. The university needs are very different. And in the past, the university has always been an "ivory tower." We tend to do things that meet our needs. And we do research that we are interested in. If the researcher wants to do a research, it is a research that he likes. Not what the community needs, or what the community wants.

A respondent from a comprehensive university expressed this point on a quite general term:

Empowerment rather than mere service or charity. Teaching living skills for capacity building especially for the rural community.

Interpretations and approaches to engagement also changed according to different university types. In the research universities, for example, an engagement was viewed as a core feature not only of academics activities but as a means to conduct research or as a research methodology.

Community participatory-based research should be emphasized for CE... (this university) is a part of the big tent and we are now working on a concept of what is actually community participatory-based research. Because it's totally

different where actually we participate with the community together with the community, we do research to benefit best impact of the community. I believe very strongly this should be a part of community engagement.

The evidence thus suggests that community engagement and partnerships result in more 'cutting-edge' research projects and enhance the skill, quality, and relevance of research. They provide opportunities for research to be conducted in an applied context that further increases the knowledge base of the academics involved. Further, the applied nature of the community engaged scholarship presents opportunities for research to inform and influence practice because such research is perceived to be more relevant to the community and thus is embraced more readily. When probed further on this issue, another respondent from the research universities elaborated on this point:

The ultimate goal of the university is to do research to inform better practice in the community, and once we get their [the community's] understanding of what we can do for them and how they can benefit from the research we do for them, they take it on board ... it is the best way to inform practice.

It can be concluded that interviewees unanimously highlighted that the development of an engagement agenda should apply a vision and tradition of community engagement which firmly embeds engagement as a part of research and learning, which is explicitly rooted in academic knowledge. The respondents were then asked to give their perceived definition of community engagement. Despite the looseness, vagueness, and multiplicity of its meaning (Le Grange, 2005; Sandermann, 2008), most of the respondents articulated a general understanding of UCE. Generally, the respondents identified community engagement as a facet of a broader impact agenda and that the sustainability of

universities relies upon academic knowledge becoming relevant and accessible to the public.

Engagement is a form of interaction between university and stakeholders within the university campus (faculty, institutes, centres, department, college, club) as well as stakeholders outside the university campus (industries, communities, NGOs and government agencies) with clear objectives, mutual respect and is productive in order to develop fruitful collaboration. This is spelt in our strategic plan and we also devised the operating principles in our Industry and Community Strategic Plan.

In this definition, community is broadly defined to include internal and external audiences to the campus that are part of a collaborative process to contribute to the public good."

It's not just volunteering work or charity. It is not just services, it is more than that - community development and empowerment. Our concept of community engagement is 'if we teach the man how to fish and he will fish for the rest of his life'.

Nevertheless, meanings of engagement vary slightly according to institution types, discipline and the outlook of the individual university. For instance, the comprehensive universities consider community engagement as:

Traditional forms of knowledge transmission like the 'public' seminars, workshops; university open days; media dialogue with communities and government agencies; and types of school outreach.

A lifelong learning ecosystem, community wellness, it is a relationship building system that the university and the community created. Community engagement is the highest order of partnership.

The research universities' respondents on the other hand rarely deviated from a view of



community engagement as a dissemination activity: reporting on or showcasing research and teaching outputs. As publically funded research universities, community engagement of the research universities is guided explicitly by priorities of the national government including the New Economic Policy and the National Higher Education Strategic Plan. The establishment of high-level position of DVC for Industry and Community Partnership is a major stimulus for strengthening and expanding community engagement programmes. Thus, in a context of one research university, the definition of community engagement is as stipulated in its Industry and Community Engagement Strategic Plan 2010-2014:

It involves collaboration and understanding to develop problem-solving through collaborative governance and asset with the goal of shared benefit with all the stakeholders. The industrial and community engagement initiatives aim to upgrade and empower the three core functions of the university. Through engaged forms of teaching and research, faculty applies their academic expertise to public purposes as a way of contributing to the fulfillment of the core mission of the institution.

This university posits community engagement not as a separate kind of activity but as a focus of the institutions' teaching and research and a strategy for achieving greater quality and impacts in the institution's teaching and research. According to another research university's respondents, there are specific definitions of community and industry engagement which are articulated in her university website. He states that:

...there are a lot of different meanings of engagement. Engagement can mean community services, community outreach, community development...basically it is an element of

inclusiveness, partnership, it is holistic and a win-win situation.

Engagement was also understood as an educational and research initiative conducted through some form of partnership. The resulting collaboration or partnership is mutually beneficial and is likely to build the capacity or competence of all parties. Statements given by two other respondents from comprehensive universities captured the essence of this definition of engagement offered:

Interaction and participation that is purposeful, respectful and productive, between universities and the stakeholders.

Inclusive participation, win-win. It is engaging the community in a two-way process, where the community benefits and the university benefits.

The respondents' perspective is that when there is a partnership, the community needs are addressed, and community capacity is built, but at the same time, the partnership has to serve the university's academic imperative of educating students and fostering research.

A representative from the technical university and one of the research university define engagements as the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the community and industry to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity. In fact, he (the DVC of a technical university) claimed that because they are an engineering-based university, most of their engagement activities are with the industries whereby they contribute to industrial efficiency through innovation and invention regarding commercial activities, such as consultancy and spin-out companies. In this aspect, the academic activities of research and teaching in the technical university and also as highlighted by one of the respondents from a research university, provide direct economic returns.

With research universities gaining autonomy and are required to generate own funding, they will become more economically oriented and that the university management will tend to be somewhat more likely to value economic objectives of their engagement activities.

Evidently, the top management leaders refer to community engagement as comprising everything from participatory research, making research available to the broader public through media interaction, to bridging the gap between the laboratory discovery and practice and teaching. Some of the universities are balancing economic engagement activities with those that are concerned with personal and intellectual enrichment of individuals.

Despite the importance of inclusive participation and win-win in engagement activities, there is less evidence of the 'knowledge exchange' or engagement activities that involved a two-way flow of information and an exchange of views. In many instances, community engagement was described as a linear one-way model in which knowledge and skills get translated from academics to others. In particular, how teaching and findings from research might be applied in policy and practice. Only one university cited a range of two-way activities such as community participatory research which is being promoted in the university.

Nevertheless, throughout the interviews, community engagement was depicted as quite structured with relatively accepted understanding, with stipulated definitions in their strategic plan documents. As the Malaysian government policy on higher education promotes industry and community engagement as a core mission of public universities, and recently a criterion for institutional assessment and benchmarking, most of the public universities have included industry and community engagement as one of the strategic

directions for the institutions after teaching and research. The suggestion is that by formalizing industry and community engagement as an activity in the universities subject to evaluation and measurement, with either economic or social significance, it has evolved and is evolving, beyond loose and spontaneous exercise in the past into a more organized and professional expectation of the universities and academic alike.

### Geographical Distribution of University-Community Engagement Activities

Interviewees were asked whether their engagement activities are local or cross-border. Respondents most commonly described their community engagement as of both local and international types:

Target group? It depends on the area, like orang Asli (referring to the natives). Also those people that are affected by disasters in Asia, Aceh, Bandung, Jogjakarta, and those who have been ill-treated for example in Rohingya. As we have students and lecturers from various background or specialty, we can mobilize them for various purposes. Let's say the community needs activities related to health, we will take our student nurses and student doctors to carry out the task. There are many of our programs which are also student-led-meaning the student initiated the project. They prepare a proposal for the project, send to us, we approve. Our cross-border activities were also done in Vietnam based on the local community's basic needs like amenities and literacy programs.

Both. At the local level, we involved many areas such as the local villages, the fishermen in Tumpat, the 'Temiar orang asli' (referring to the natives) in Kuala Betis. Apart from that, the farmers are also our target group. Internationally, we involve the community in Padang, Indonesia and the people in Rhu, Patani, Thailand through

the cross-cultural leadership program; SEED (Social Enterprise for Economic Development).

The top management leader from a comprehensive university insisted that community engagement activities conducted in her institution emphasize the local people:

Mostly local. Our target groups include diverse students learners needs, single mothers, orphans, OKU...local needs are our primary focus of community engagement not only through academic and economic development programs, but also through student service opportunities. Those that address the needs of the community such as mentoring and tutoring, and providing meals to the homeless. We are going all out to serve the local community with our alumni.

But she claimed that they are selective in their focus on international work:

We have MERCY. It's more on international voluntary work, and we bring them here to Malaysia. Inshaallah, we'll work on it more. We have MERCY (university) chapter, and the other one is ADRL-African-ASIAN Institute Relief Fund. We focus on these two.

The universities chosen for the study seemed to have recognized community engagement strategies that contribute to their shared local area. Nevertheless, the institutions have also demonstrated community engagement efforts in varied capacities at the local, state, national and global levels. They strive to meet some social problems and needs at the local level. A variety of activities address social obligations and needs. Most notably is the students' dedication to voluntary work.

According to the respondents, emphasizing on local engagement does not mean that abroad learning experiences are politically incorrect or unimportant. On the contrary, the social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual

education that is available to students who carry out activities abroad speaks to the power of experiential education outside of the students' comfort zone. The opportunities that the students get to expand horizons and familiarity with other cultures and ways of being in the world that is made possible through projects conducted abroad are considered significant by the top management leaders, as evidenced by their popularity.

A proactive leadership attempt by one research university was to initiate a regional network of Asia Pacific universities to promote and intensify programs that focus on community-university engagement in a holistic and participatory way. The network was initiated in the middle of 2010 by the Division of Industry & Community Network of the research university and currently consists of 18 local universities and 18 other universities from 12 countries in the region.

We started APUCEN, I think you have heard about Asia Pacific University Community Engagement Network(APUCEN). We have initiated this network, APUCEN is in line with our university's mission to transform and develop the socio-economic well beings of the world's marginalized groups, the 'Bottom Billion', also to establish the university as a relevant and active partner of the community. It's a project based. Let say, something happens in Japan; the member institutions will come and help. The university in Japan will be the leader and lead us to support them and ensure that the country gets what they need.

Thus, it is important to emphasize that within the current social and political context where universities are under pressure to demonstrate their relevance or usefulness, our findings show signs that the students and academics want to engage in knowledge activities that address global and local issues, and they want to work in collaborative modes.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that in this topic of discussion, there were deliberations about the definition of local, regional and international. For example, a university in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia might consider the northern area as local. This might refer to the three states in the northern part of the peninsular. What is meant by local might also mean the immediate area surrounding the university campus. The meaning attached to different geographic communities should depend upon the person's point of reference.

### The Scope of Community Engagement

All the universities named several areas of scope for community engagement ranging from education, social enterprise, economic, Islamic, business development, health, to culture and environment. The respondents revealed that the majority of their programs fell into the categories of education, economy and social services and mainly in the form of volunteer service.

Volunteer service seems to be the most frequent activities for student community engagement. Some rely primarily on students volunteering service. As a result, for many of the institutions, curricular integration is less emphasized. In other words, students' community engagement is not equated with the pedagogy of service learning or internship.

The respondents did imply that many of their academics and students equate community engagement with volunteerism. They acknowledged that their universities need to demonstrate that community engagement activities should also be scholarly which should be integrated into academic courses, in conducting community-based research and applying research findings to community needs.

Other scholarly activities such as advisors in decision making and policy, involving important stakeholders in the development of

medical curriculum and teaching, working with the Ministry of Education to shape curriculum, sitting on advisory boards and others were mentioned as some of the activities conducted by the academics in the surveyed universities.

### Extent of Engagement

To be engaged with the community means that it is more than just consulting. Community engagement includes informing, consulting with, involving, collaborating with and empowering the community. Different circumstances will require varying levels of engagement, but all levels of engagement are equally important. The respondents were therefore asked to identify and define various levels of community engagement based on categories developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model (D' Ambrosio, 2011): Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower. Most of the respondents reported that their engagement activity is mainly at the levels of inform, consult and involve. The emphasis has been on developing relationships with one or two organizations in their community and to collaborate in the activities. Some quoted activities with schools and disadvantaged groups within the local community, but the emphasis is on student volunteerism as a way of giving services (relief services) with the aim of nurturing caring citizens. While some gave examples of activities that emphasize educational goals, aiming to help develop communities' skills (e.g.. Green Rose Project by one of the research universities), they were not sure whether the goal of empowerment was achieved. Besides, many of the activities are based on short-term project and therefore are mostly to the extent of informing, consulting and involving the communities. One particular university claimed that one of their engagement projects is about empowerment:

We carried out a project called Congress Warisan Melayu in collaboration with

PERDASAMA, Persatuan Pedagang Melayu Malaysia. It took us one year actually from the inform stage inform to empowerment stage. Firstly, we inform them of what we are doing; then we teach them on how to do branding, strategic marketing, packaging and so on. These people are mostly from the rural areas such as Kelantan and Terengganu. So, they take advantage of the university. So, we conduct courses for them. It was quite a big project. It was also with the involvement of various ministries. We had a lot of hands-on activities for them to apply the knowledge that they received. For me, the measurement of success is their involvement with our academics.

Although the terms “empower” and “empowering communities” came up a lot in the discourse of the top management leaders but it was often used when referring to mission and goals of community development and community capacity building initiatives. That is, “empower” sits at an operational level rather than a decision-making level, as many of the universities engaged with local communities in this way.

### **Impact of Community Engagement on University/Society**

The benefits of community engagement are not always easy to measure. This is concluded from the discussions above since the level of empowering the community was not reported as the universities’ main emphasis on community engagement. The perceptions of those who have participated in community engagement will most likely serve as a reasonable assessment of community engagement activities. The study does not attempt to quantify the success or benefits of community engagement activities at colleges and universities. However, the survey did focus on the perceived benefits of community engagement to the institution, student, faculty and the community.

Given the diverse approaches and strategies in increasing community engagement, the respondents commonly stated that there are mechanisms in place to evaluate the success or effectiveness of their community engagement practices. Among the approaches used include survey feedback, exit feedback, impact survey, a set of criteria and Standard Operating Procedure and documentation.

We gain feedback through survey. Every time we carry out an activity, we do the first survey. It is called entry survey. When we finish the activity, we do the exit survey where the community fills in a questionnaire. It is for us to find out if they are satisfied or not. Then we will find a way on how to improve it.

This private university practice is similar to the one used by a research university:

Each engagement project by the university and community is based on research. Thus pre and post-study must be carried out to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention program. Also, a survey of effectiveness prepared by us must be administered at the end of each program.

It is clear that the evaluation procedure is aimed at the effectiveness of the activities rather than the actual impact of community engagement. Formalised events were evaluated using feedback forms such as questionnaires. It is noteworthy to state that few of the institutions systematically measure the impact of community engagement. According to the respondents, there is no formal mechanism yet for evaluating the impact of community engagement activities that the university participates in:

We have SOP (referring to standard operating procedure) for all our community engagement activities. We have SOP for project grant. We have our measurement form, and we have evaluation form. So far we haven’t come out with any formal mechanism with specific

criteria to evaluate impact (referring to impact of community engagement activities).

Another respondent stated that they relied on feedback that was anecdotal:

I think the fact that people keep coming back and asking us to do things is positive, but we don't always measure our impact.

Thus, the impact of community engagement included positive feedback from the community, more interaction with students and community leaders. Most institutions regard the continuation of collaborative efforts or partnerships as an indication of successful community engagement. At present, the universities surveyed seemed to focus efforts on classifying and counting to meet key performance indicators, and they are still in the process of searching for effective generalizable metrics to indicate impact.

### **Recognition of Community Engagement Work**

The way institutions give recognition and create meaning which portray their institutional culture are important considerations when assessing engagement-oriented academic and student behaviour. The interview includes questions on whether there are any forms of acknowledgement given to academics that excel in community engagement work. The respondents reported that their universities give an annual faculty excellence award in community engagement service that includes a stipend.

Each year we choose a faculty member from nominees from all of the faculties and Institutes to receive that award.

The best Community Engagement Award for academic staff plus a holiday package with two options; to Mecca or to China. For students, they get the award and certificate.

One of our yearly awards given to academics, non-academic staff and students are the Community Engagement Awards. If I can share with you, the criteria that we have listed for the award include the level of engagement, the impact of engagement, the impact to targeted community development and the program's or activity's potential for sustainability.

We have Community Engagement Award and an award for Industrial Engagement. So we set the criteria. The awards are not just for academics. We also have one for administrators and one for supporting staff.

When talking about rewards for community engagement, majority of the respondents discussed the inclusion of community engagement works in promotions criteria. Many respondents viewed that consideration of such work in promotion is a mechanism through which community engagement could be formally rewarded at their universities. Admittedly, community engagement criteria are included in the yearly appraisal and promotion but the weight given is small, which is between five to 10 percent. The low weight given for formal recognition was often cited by the respondents as a barrier for them to be more involved in public engagements.

Not a high weight is given to community engagement compared to research and publication.

The respondents agreed that rewarding academics through promotions is a good way to reward community engagement formally. Further questions were raised with respect to whether community engagement should be included in workload allocation and academics' job descriptions. Overall, it was viewed that including community engagement in promotion criteria would give recognition to those that do a

lot of it, but measurement of quality was not mentioned by the respondents:

It is very difficult to measure the quality of engagement. How would they measure a good idea or what would constitute a good engagement compared to an average one? Normally, if an academic does the stipulated amount of community engagement or service, we give them full marks.

The respondents' views indicate the complexity of this issue. Three main concerns with the promotion criteria emerged: what public engagement activities would be included, how quality as well as the quantity of output would be measured, and what fair weight is be given to such activities.

Interestingly, only one respondent raised on the approach in dealing with time and promotion. She highlighted the need to use an integrated view of faculty work, where what professors do as teachers, researchers, and service providers is viewed interdependently. Her view of faculty work is grounded in the scholarship of engagement, as a means to tie faculty disciplinary expertise to campus and community needs and to integrate the different aspects of faculty work.

Industrial and community engagement must be integrated with research, education, and service. As a research university, we have set our division of work based on a formula of 50 percent for research, 30 percent for education and 20 percent for industrial and community services.

This particular university has recently increased the weight given to industry-community engagement contributions in annual performance appraisal to a maximum of 20 percent, from what was initially five percent. These figures include engagement with industry and community at all levels across the area of research and teaching.

However, it was discouraging to find no other examples of revised recognition and reward systems for evaluation and promotion that see service as a continuation of research and teaching. A standard response in the data was that institutions encouraged faculty to include community engagement scholarship in the service category, but that traditional scholarship (research and teaching scholarship) was the real requirement for promotion and tenure.

### Policies and Practices

Institutional policies and practices to community engagement have a positive effect on engaged scholarship (O'Meara, 2002). Also, good administrative support for service results in greater likelihood that academics will participate in engagement initiatives (Hinck & Brandell, 2000).

The findings show that the university policies have a substantial impact on university-community engagement, mainly through their strategic plan which requires students to complete a specific amount of community service (minimum of 2 credits) and make community engagement an agenda in decision making processes concerning funding and academic role. Two respondents highlighted the importance of policies as an effective implementation system:

As a Vice President, I do QBR (Quarterly Business Review). We want to become the university of choice, to produce moral and ethical graduates. With our clear vision, we translate the university policies into actions and activities by the Community and Industry Director or even the students. The policies set up by the top management are challenged to the middle management managers to be implemented. For example, we define what GEMS is then we translate the mission to

specific corporate social responsibility activities for the industry and the community.

Through our strategic plan, our action is to build clusters of community engagement. So we have clusters that take care of capacity building and community engagement projects. There is another cluster called cluster 3C, corporate social responsibility. So we also engaged with the industry and community. Our triangle regulation is very strong university, community, and industry. And the last one is called SME, a model to help the local Malaysian small medium enterprises (SME) to set up and accelerate their business. So we provide them with consultancy and everything at very low cost, because we are trying to raise our own local industry and this is what we call the launching of the big multi-national company.

A top-down approach to cultivating engagement was seen to be preferable by majority of the universities. This is evident by the creation of a position of Deputy Vice Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnership in 2010 at five national universities (four of those are research universities). This appointment results in the creation of the new university-wide office for industry-community partnership, coordinators and deputy deans in all faculties to systematically implement the policies and coordinate the practices:

The Deputy Vice Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnership works systematically in the mode of mutual support with the Deputy Vice Chancellors for Research and Innovation, Academic and International Affairs and Students Affairs and Alumni. The efforts and initiatives are directly supported by the three officers; the Industry Liaison Office, Office of University-Community Partnerships, the Chancellor's Foundation, as well as the Heads of Industry and Community Partnerships

at 13 faculties and 14 institutes in this university. This is to ensure all the policies and action plan on community engagement can be implemented extensively at all levels. We abide by the operating principles which are drafted in the Industry and Community Engagement Strategic Plan 2010-2014.

We have Director of Industry Engagement and Director of Community Engagement. So, my directors have contract administrative staff. We don't have enough money to pay for permanent staff, so we employ contract staff.

Nonetheless, one relatively new comprehensive university claimed that the university does not have policies related to community engagement and is in the midst of drafting the strategic plan.

We are a relatively new university, so we are in the process of developing policies for community engagement.

In all the universities, funding was seen as a determining factor in the frequency of engagement activities. The universities make use of the allocation provided by the Ministry of Higher Education. Majority of the universities use the money to invest significantly in supporting the community engagement projects.

Under the Social Enterprise for Economic Development (SEED) program, approximately RM150,000 was given by KPT (the Ministry of Higher Education). We also get funding under the Knowledge Transfer Program (KTP).

We have a special grant. To get the money, academics and students will have to write a proposal. We will evaluate the proposal, plan the budget, and look for funding.

We use research university's funding to support community-research based. We also



allocate some portion of the research university funding for university-community research.

We actually have grants. As an APEX (referring to the Accelerated Programme for Excellence) university, we have APEX grant. We have money to do community engagement. Some work may not be academically scholarly, but we research on community-engagement project.

One respondent highlighted on the use of the funding to hire staff that are in charge of organizing and supporting community engagement projects:

Actually we have only one permanent staff, so we hired a contract staff. We cannot have many contract staff, as we used our budget from BJIM. This budget which comes from the university is originally from the Ministry. It is given to us on a year to year basis based on our performance. We need to showcase our work, and then we can ask for more staff.

Two respondents highlighted that their funding also came from the industries:

KITA gained some funding from the industries and our alumni, especially those alumni who work in big industries. Then the government has also promised us that for every ringgit that we get from the industry, the government will give one ringgit too. Now, we've collected around RM50 million, so we should be getting from the government RM50 million to help the MDAB program.

We use our proceed grants from CIMB [Bank] to do community engagement project. There are a lot of companies that can provide grants to us, such as CIMB and Motorola. We also get grants from UNESCO for our *Sungai Sedim* clean water project. BJIM (referring to the Industry-Community Network Division) helps to monitor the progress of the project and

the fund management to ensure the university maintains its good reputation for doing quality work.

## Conclusion

The research set out to explore the nature of and the factors affecting universities' engagement with their communities from the perspectives of university's top management leaders. More importantly, it aims to provide information that can help to improve and strengthen UCE. For the vast majority, the mission statements of the university include community engagement. They support programs that are quite similar and provides guides on how to conduct community engagement works, volunteer services, applied research, and community development projects with more conscious attention to the social than economic impacts of their practices. They maintain staff officers that are responsible to organize and support the community engagement programs. Some institutions invest funds in supporting the programs but none invested in building and supporting the capabilities of their academics to carry out scholarly community engagement activities. The participating institutions have also demonstrated a spectrum of engagement at both the local and cross-border levels. The spread of experience in community engagement is evidently pragmatic. The evidence also shows that government policies have had a substantial impact on the institutions' community engagement policies and practices through transformation mandates, incentives, and research funding.

In summary, community engagement at the selected Malaysian higher learning institutions has been flourishing with good strategic institutional and government support.

Nevertheless, there is much scope to stimulate greater levels of activity, in particular activities that focus on empowerment, to better coordinate existing activities and to develop and share best practices. Developing a culture of scholarly UCE at the institutions where public engagement is a highly valued activity for academics and students is also vital, but this will require time. However, this seems a timely opportunity for the institutions to begin to address some of the barriers to engagement, such as developing formal structures to recognize, support and reward community engagement work and how to sustain partnership for collaboration.

When considered together, five significant findings from this study reveal a conclusion worthy of serious consideration for policy implications. They are (i) understanding and conception of community engagement; (ii) integration of engagement into students' curriculum and academics' teaching and research work (scholarly engagement); (iii) formal time allocation and promotion structures; (iv) sustaining collaboration; and (v) assessment of impact. Below are some suggestions that can be included in policy recommendations that are directed at policy makers though some may relate more to the internal management of institutions.

- Conceptual understanding of community engagement regarding who are the members of the community, who are the geographic community (such as local, international, regional), business and industry sectors.
- A proper balance between the scholarship of community engagement activities and voluntary or social service work.
- Expand the scholarship of engagement to related activities and achievements that incorporate the research, teaching, and

service functions of the academic role and demonstrating how the selected activities contribute both to the mission of higher education to serve the public good and to scholarship.

- Support and opportunities for knowledge and skills development for implementing course-based community-based learning.
- Fundamental research must be followed by application research.
- Require/encourage community services/engagement as part of the outcome of research in research proposals as a condition for approval.
- Develop assessment mechanisms to evaluate the impact the engagement has on the university, students and the community.

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