INTRODUCTION

Editorial: Institutional engagement – intentional, innovative and rigorous

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Abstract

Around the world, universities are exploring new strategies to improve the quality and impact of their community engagement agenda, thereby strengthening their potential to offer greater value to both institution and the communities with whom they engage, be they local or international. This issue of *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* focusses on institutional-level improvement of engagement structures and impacts, as well as innovative changes in academic culture and partnership strategies. The articles presented here are intended to encourage a growing movement to position higher education institutions around the world as a key resource and partner in efforts to address current global and local challenges.

Keywords:

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Introduction

Around the world, universities are exploring new strategies to improve the quality and impact of their community engagement agenda, thereby strengthening their potential to offer greater value to both institutions and the communities with whom they engage, be they local or international. This issue of *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* focuses on institutional-level improvement of engagement structures and impacts, as well as innovative changes in academic culture and partnership strategies. The articles presented here are intended to encourage a growing movement to position higher education institutions around the world as a key resource and to partner in efforts to address current global and local challenges.

While engaged universities have strived to ensure that engagement with communities is mutually beneficial, the lack of a cohesive and sustained agenda of engagement has sometimes led to mixed results for all involved. The historic academic culture around the world has long valued solo scholar achievements, with some exceptions. To be frank, this focus on individual faculty work has contributed to loss of public appreciation of the roles of higher education in contributing to intellectual and public progress, well-being and equity. In some nations, the government and/or other public voices are skeptical of the value of degrees and, sometimes, of research activity. In our view, the growing interest in universities engaging with their communities is having a good effect on the public's appreciation of universities as valuable citizens.

At the same time, contemporary global and local challenges are complex and fast changing and create multiple and diverse effects in different settings. Climate, health, safety, food security, water, fair employment, migration, housing and many other issues require multiple sources of expertise to develop innovative strategies that will help show a way forward. These challenges are urgent and complex; they require academic institutions to shift their culture and join in the development of effective actions. Every academic institution needs to consider its connection and contribution to public progress through a planned agenda of directing campus expertise and areas of inquiry toward the purpose of productive interactions with citizens, government, business and non-government organisations. Universities around the world must learn to collaborate deeply across disciplines and across other societal sectors to develop new approaches to local and global challenges. There can be no underestimating the difficulty or urgency of this challenge. Indeed, as we prepare for publication, in the USA, where Barbara Holland lives, articles of impeachment are being prepared, while in Australia, bushfires, which started in winter, still rage out of control.

A theme that emerges in this volume is the necessity of addressing, with some sophistication, the often-times competing global and local pressures, which may include disciplinary, technical, bureaucratic and market-driven imperatives. Davis (2017), discussing the Dawkins Reforms to Australian higher education in the late 1980s, notes: 'only with the benefit of distance does it become clear that bold change in fact reinforced an existing model of the university, and spread it still further across the nation' (Davis 2017, p. 85). Rather than establishing a unified national system, the result was a *uniform* national system. Davis's research points to 'a paradoxical conclusion – that competition can lead to conformity rather than real difference', due to a '"reputational race" that drives universities towards the same goals' (Davis 2017, p. 100; citing van Vught).

The question may then become, if not competition, what else? Clearly, this volume of articles suggests, strongly and repeatedly, that collaboration is one key response. Collini

(2017, p. 232) argues that universities 'need to adopt a perspective which is less individualistic, less proprietorial, and less confined to the present generation'. Fortunately, this may well be underway already. New generations of young faculty, many of whom experienced service-learning as students in school or university, are now leading internal cultural and policy change in their institutions to create more opportunities for collaborative scholarship, including community engagement. A new academic culture *is* emerging around the globe, and it will be grounded in collaborative research and dissemination within and beyond academia. The new generations of faculty and staff should give us all a sense of optimism and a new inspiration to deepen collaboration and engagement within and beyond our university borders.

This volume of *Gateways* contributes to this vision of greater public impact through institutional change processes by presenting diverse articles that reveal new strategies for academic organisational and culture change, wider access to academic research, collaborative research models and new views of internal and external partnerships.

Abbott and Tiffen, from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), make a compelling case that the movement towards open access of university scholarship (research publications) can contribute to greater scholarly appreciation of community-engaged scholarship. The authors give a rigorous and clear description of the traditional academic culture regarding publishing, and how publishers have used that cultural trait to increase profits by raising prices for accessing articles. In other words, because academia tends to reward faculty for publication in 'top' journals, the top journal publishers have developed strategies that make it expensive for the original author, libraries and others to access the material. Ironically, as the internet made it easier to access information, these publishers locked up material behind firewalls and charged more for access. The relevance of these moves towards open access for the future of community engagement is based in the desire to make academic knowledge and research more accessible to the public and to recognise engaged scholarship produced by faculty.

Indeed, the positive, transformative potential of open access is substantial – if unassured. Ibrahim (2017, p. 80) argues that, today, 'two global forces are driving rapid change: the digital information revolution – and perhaps related – the global emergence of seemingly spontaneous peoples movements'. Abbott and Tiffen note that commitments to the 'Plan S' goals of providing open access to publicly funded research by 2021 have been made in Europe and Latin America and by China. Communities, individuals, organisations will soon have unprecedented access to cutting-edge knowledge. As Ibrahim asks of engaged institutions, 'are there ways our global project for universities could harness the strengths and guard against weaknesses of both the IT revolution and 21st century social movements?' (Ibrahim 2017, p. 80).

Abbott and Tiffen give a thorough overview of the development and progress of the open scholarship movement and its contributions to community engagement actions involving students, faculty and communities. Scholars have worked together to start new open access journals – and these are growing rapidly. This journal you are reading is one of those open journals. The authors point out that an important sticking point in creating broad access to academic literature lies in the promotion and tenure policies of every university. All faculty are assessed by multiple measures, but the highest bar for traditional research is typically a one author article published in a highly ranked journal in the author's disciplinary field. This system also affects community engaged scholars who often do research in and with communities, so their publications are not always recognised as research by colleagues and may be labelled as public service. Fortunately, policy changes are being made and faculty performance measures are changing rapidly as many universities seek to demonstrate their

contributions to public good. The authors offer useful strategies for leading cultural change in academia and for engaging the public in accessing data and findings.

The second article by Gusheh, Firth, Netherton and Pettigrew describes the innovative and effective organisational change project undertaken at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) that led to the development of the UTS Social Impact Framework. Early in their article they wisely acknowledge the recent and expanding efforts to integrate measures of community engagement into international ranking systems, an initiative which is well underway, yet not recognised by many universities. Charged by their Vice Chancellor and other senior executives, an impressive and inclusive process of group dialogue shaped the development of a new and more intentional approach to engagement at UTS. Central to their institution-wide change process was the use of established models for guiding collaborative planning processes, such as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros 2003) and Theory of Change (Funnell & Rogers 2011; Rogers 2008). These organising frameworks gave structure to the work sessions involving numerous staff and faculty in highly participatory dialogue meant to lead to new principles and strategies to focus and increase engagement activity.

Such an intentional design process with broad participation is not common in higher education, so this case study will be valuable to many institutions seeking to develop a more intentional planning process to craft new campus initiatives. One goal, among others, was to develop a clearer and more specific agenda for engagement across the whole institution, something few universities around the world have done. Without a central and focused agenda that incorporates clear goals and measures, how can a university measure its impact or know what to replicate or change? This new framework will be supported and implemented by the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, which is also responsible for leading a university-wide mapping project and facilitating campus/community collaboration. The numerous and action-oriented sessions were successful in creating a more common understanding of the context and potential of engagement. Cross-institutional dialogue can also lead to more interdisciplinary engagement. Hopefully, UTS continues to monitor the effect of this more intentional strategy and will share findings and outcomes in the future as they seek to develop a more focused agenda of engagement across their university.

'Activating social and design literature' is an exciting article that reveals new insights into approaches to exploring and understanding collaborative change in communities. The Cincinnati region was an early adopter of a new community organising concept called 'collective impact' (Kania & Kramer 2011). This article by Busch, Jean-Baptiste, Person and Vaughn tells us that this strong framework for inclusive cross-community dialogue and planning is still contributing to Cincinnati's focus on knowledge creation and problem solving through participatory and collaborative actions. The authors report on their search for and analysis of peer-reviewed scholarly publications (across disciplines and countries) to 'identify practices that transcend individual disciplines, sectors, and contexts to achieve collaborative change'. Their analysis of these articles reveals new insights into important factors and aspects of collaborative change research, evaluation and design, abbreviated as CCRED. This article identifies distinctions across those terms and common areas of weakness in application, and also offers insights about the contexts in which these methods of participatory inquiry are used. Given their interest in encouraging full and rigorous use of participatory methods of CCRED, it is not surprising the authors also offer advice on recognising pitfalls and improving implementation. We agree heartily with the authors that this vision for CCRED and participatory community processes needs to be more strongly linked to community

engagement. The connection of engagement and CCRED would strengthen community voice in the development of initiatives that affect their lives and interests.

Aldersey, Abera, Mzinganjira, Abebe and Demissie document the history and analysis of an innovative partnership between two universities, one in Canada, the other in Ethiopia. This is a strong and creative example of the growing global connections across higher education. Universities around the world share similar challenges, as do our communities, citizens and environments. The more we collaborate and exchange effective discoveries and new strategies, and share skills that support those actions, the better for people and for the planet. This article describes a 10-year partnership that is distinctive in its focus on reciprocity and mutual benefit as opposed to historic models, which the authors describe as activities planned and funded by 'Northern actors' without much input from 'Southern' communities. The authors share with us the factors that created a greater sense of equity and valuable exchange in the process of building and sustaining this specific partnership between Queen's University (Canada) and the University of Gondar (Ethiopia). This collaboration is based on a connection between the two institutions' expertise in working with people with physical disabilities, including teaching innovations at bachelor, master and doctoral levels, as well as shared research and practice on new techniques and equipment for enhancing mobility.

The partnership is funded by the Mastercard Foundation. The authors report that this partnership has been successful in creating networks, improving student learning and building new skills. For Queen's University, an international partnership leads to international experiences for students and faculty, a greater appreciation of diversity in scholarly interests and perspectives, and the opportunity for their campus to host Ethiopian students. For Gondar, the partnership has contributed to modernising curricula, learning new techniques, and the opportunity for their students to get an advanced degree at Queen's. Be assured, this is no ordinary partnership. The authors are straightforward about the challenges and benefits, but the outcomes to this point are felicitous for all. The frequency and depth of interaction, the shared discovery of new interventions, the new skills developed to work with people with a wide range of disabilities … tell us this partnership is making an impressive impact. The benefits for staff, faculty, students and communities are clearly positive on both sides. That said, there are also persistent challenges regarding different bureaucratic systems, management structures, time zones and government requirements. This article is an excellent case study of the realities, challenges and benefits of distant international partnerships.

The final article in this volume reports on a study of the Science Shop movement in Europe. The authors, Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini, have written a facinating article that reveals the impact that has been created by Science Shops. Science Shops began in the 1970s in the Netherlands and expanded over the years to about 65 shops across Europe (and we note there are several in other countries around the world). For those not familiar with this concept, the authors describe them as: 'Science Shops are not "shops" in the traditional sense of the word. These shops are small entities that carry out scientific research in a wide range of disciplines – usually for free – on behalf of curious citizens and local civic society'. These entities are usually linked to a university, and generally run by students. In this article, the authors report on two different research projects concerning the Science Shops. The context for their reflection on the research results arises from the authors' concerns for the viability of community engagement endeavours in the context of dramatic changes in the economy, politics, regulation, and other troubling trends. In this article, they consider how community engagement, as a form of teaching, research and public service, can endure in the contemporary environment. The Science Shops are an amazing, yet relatively simple

idea: create a convenient public place where clever students and supportive faculty can meet with curious community members who have questions about a wide variety of topics. The quantitative evidence of community participation and interaction with the Shops is impressive. The analysis of the two studies of Science Shops leads to a set of recommendations for durability of such partnership services and other forms of community engagement.

Each article in this issue is unique, but they all share a rather positive outlook for the future of higher education and its role in an ever-changing world. We share that view as well. What they emphatically make clear is that high-quality, sustainable and mutually beneficial engagement with communities does not represent any kind of turning away from the core principles of scholarly, evidence-based and open-ended inquiry. Rather it signals an expansion; akin to Boyer's vision of a more 'capacious' scholarship. Alfred North Whitehead, writing not long after the end of World War 1, with its horrors still fresh in mind, argued eloquently for a 'make-weight which balances the thoroughness of the specialist intellectual training'. He goes on, 'When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset. There is no substitute for the direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its own actuality. We want concrete fact with a high light thrown on what is relevant to its preciousness' (Whitehead 1975, p. 236). With this in mind, we hope that you, the reader, will learn much from these articles, and perhaps acquire some new strategies to strengthen community engagement programs and research in your own institutional context.

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