



Community Engagement NEWSLETTER

FROM UNIVERSITY TO “PLUROVERSITY”

The term “pluroversity” was raised at the Service Learning Workshop of 13 March 2015, facilitated by Dr Rene Botha.

Dr Botha recently obtained a Doctorate in Health Professions Education. The title of his thesis was “A Framework for Service-learning in the Undergraduate Radiography Programme in the Mangaung Area” (<http://www.ufs.ac.za>). Dr Botha explained the term “pluroversity” and its connection to service learning and community engagement to the 30 participants who attended the workshop.

The term is affiliated with the concept of the “civic university”, which describes the city as a living laboratory. The idea of the “pluroversity” is supported by survey and case-study evidence. “Pluroversity” indicates a plurality, dependent on and influenced by other extrinsic variables. The concept takes into account the role that higher education plays in developing broad-based, national intellectual cultures; fostering good citizenship; and ensuring the vibrancy of national cultures. In the case of the “pluroversity”, the community’s needs, well-being and proliferation are the main extrinsic factors that assist the academic institution to define and refine its relevance.

This reminds one of the statement made by Ronald Barnett, that the 21st Century is the “age of supercomplexity”. It requires individuals to make sense of the world, individually, as well as the relationships with the world, with each other and the environment. Therefore, a “curriculum evolution” is being experienced. The curriculum must be relevant.

The workshop took cognisance of the relevance of service learning in radiography to communities. A

framework was developed using the Watson Glaser Appraisal Test, a critical thinking test designed to assess a person’s ability to look at situations and understand them from different perspectives – facts are separated from assumptions.

It is the most widely used tool. The Watson-Glaser Appraisal Test is considered a premier tool for evaluating the cognitive ability of professionals. Therefore, it was appropriate to use in this instance- Service Learning. The framework also allows for students to develop additional social and life skills such as patience, deeper understanding, critical thinking and public speaking, amongst others. Reflections after service learning therefore focus on constructivism – gaining knowledge and meaning from an interaction between experiences and ideas.

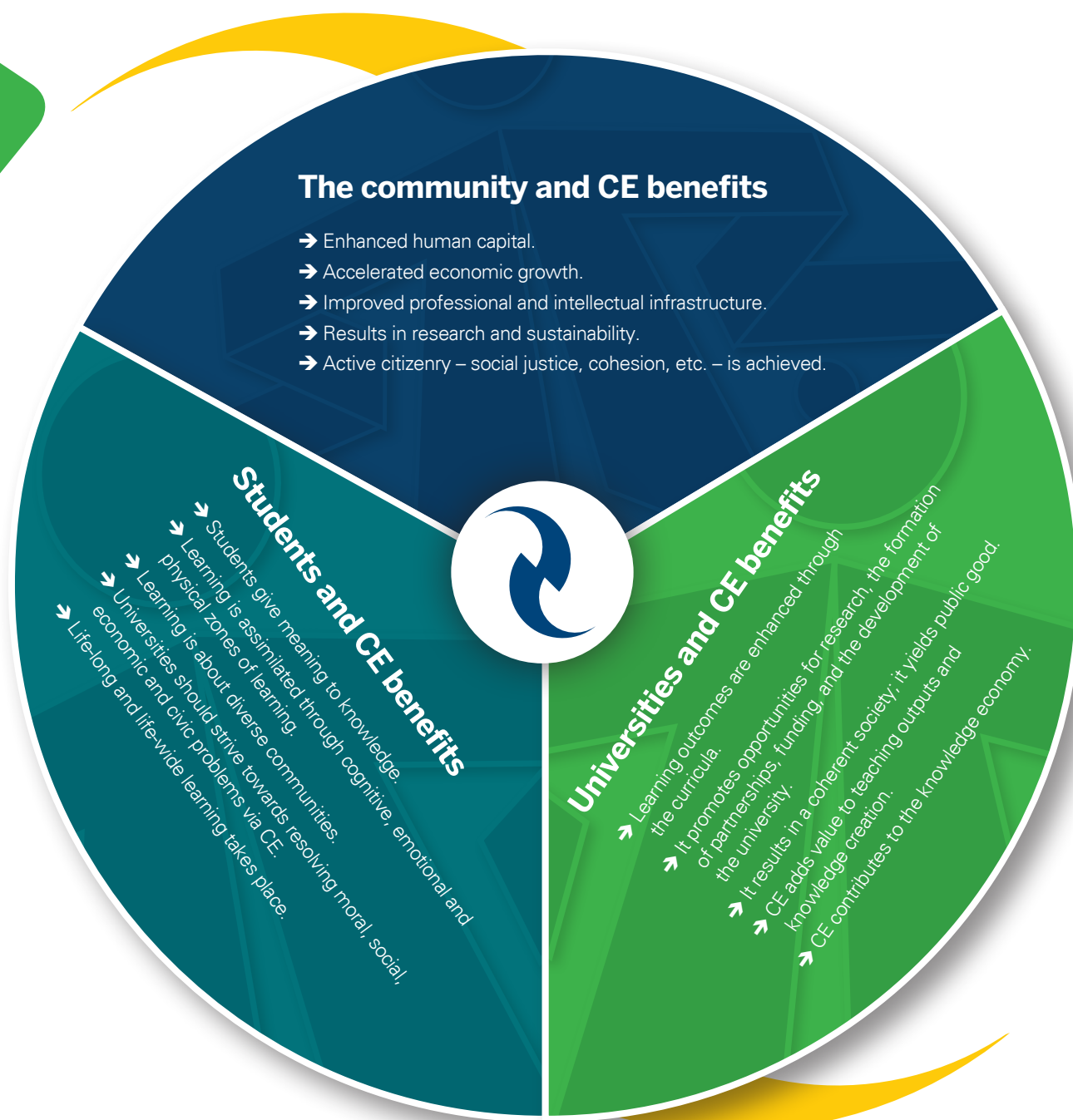
Group discussions revealed the following:

- ➔ Community engagement (CE) is known by many names, and there are differences in the definition of each. Participants felt it is important that graduate attributes are incorporated into CUT’s understanding of CE.
- ➔ CE is not philanthropy or volunteerism; it involves several stakeholders (quadruple-helix partnerships).
- ➔ Furthermore, the definition of community differs from person to person, and depends on the context.
- ➔ There are ethical implications when engaging with communities.
- ➔ Communities and the university have different expectations when it comes to CE. A balance must be maintained between the communities being served and the university. This can be difficult, and therefore community engagement must be conducted with empathy, not sympathy.

Factors to consider during community engagement include the following:

- Resource constraints (e.g. time, infrastructure, transport, funds, etc.);
- To be successful, the community must be the agents of change, and must be recognised and acknowledged;
- Projects must be sustainable;
- The skill level and demographics of the community; and
- Socio-economic interventions, which are important in terms of development.

The benefits of CE are threefold, as illustrated in the graph below:



Monitoring and evaluation/ social contract

- ➔ Monitoring and evaluation is important in the pre- and post-intervention stages of CE.
- ➔ It is essential that a proper, well-devised implementation plan (i.e. the type of activity, resources, anticipated outcomes, etc.) be in place.
- ➔ The social contract between the university and the community must be reviewed continuously.
- ➔ There should be regular, open and effective, two-way communication between the community and the university.
- ➔ The CE project must be integrated into the curriculum.
- ➔ It is vital that the project leader assess time and resources and determine whether needs are met (re-evaluation is important).
- ➔ CE poses risks to the community and students.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that CE contributes to the personal growth of students, the university and the community. It allows one to experience and learn about different values, cultures and needs. The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal is a wonderful tool that allows students to develop their thinking in a critical, broad manner, through the eyes of the “*pluroversity*”, and to make sense of what they learn. Is that not what university education is about?

It is about relevance. “Relevance” has become a key consideration in *higher* education since the previous decade. Students have the tendency to want educational experiences that are directly relevant to their personal and/or professional interests and objectives. Furthermore, it must particularly relate to employability. Practically oriented programmes and fields of study, as well as pedagogical approaches emphasising “real-world” applications, are “popular”. At the same time, it is increasingly important for universities to demonstrate their social and economic relevance to the societies/communities they serve (UNESCO, 2009:103-104).



Dr Rene Botha



Mrs Jeeva Munsamy





Group Discussions

COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING SYMPOSIUM, RHODES UNIVERSITY

The Community Engagement Unit of Rhodes University held a Community Engagement Week from 4 to 6 May 2015. Prof. Lategan and Ms Munsamy both presented papers at the symposium, and a poster presentation was delivered by both Ms Sintiya and Ms Munsamy.

Engaged scholarship? Lessons for the research agenda

In this presentation, “Engaged Scholarship Lessons for the Research Agenda” by Laetus Lategan, the concept of engaged scholarship within the context of a research agenda; in particular the research and innovation value chain was discussed.

This paper will discuss the concept of engaged scholarship within the context of a research agenda, in particular the research and innovation value chain.

The research and innovation value chain is the interconnection of research processes and activities to solve the research problem and question (from problem to solution); to identify a new understanding of the research problem and question based on literature, evidence and results (innovation); and to contribute towards the knowledge economy and socio-economic development of a country (through transfer, incubation and commercialisation).

In keeping abreast with the complex research challenges in the research and innovation value chain, it is imperative that the next generation researchers be adequately trained and developed. The research environment is complex and challenging due to academic, institutional and socio-economic and developmental requirements. Completing a research project requires scientific knowledge (moving from the problem statement to the solution to knowledge transfer), knowledge of the research environment and

its challenges (for example, research funding, research ethics and integrity, the social value of research, contribution to the National Development Plan, and community needs), and knowledge of research practices (for example, formative and summative assessment, publication writing, and the presentation and dissemination of research results). These activities form the basis of engaged research scholarship.

This paper will argue four important implications of engaged scholarship for a university’s research agenda. The following statements reflect these implications:

- ➔ Engaged scholarship implies a comprehension of and reflection on three major communities, namely the regional, national and global community; government; business and industry (the latter two as a collective).
- ➔ Engaged scholarship addresses socio-economic challenges and contributes to socio-economic development if the research contributes to the social community as end-user of all research and innovation activities.
- ➔ Engaged scholarship is based on a two-way flow of engagement – what researchers can contribute to community development and how communities form a knowledge basis for researchers.
- ➔ Engaged scholarship needs to be local, relevant and globally competitive.

Storytelling: Embedding a Culture of Engagement

Jeeva Munsamy discussed “Embedding a Culture of Engagement” based on the following:

Teaching and research within higher education institutions are not effectively meeting the specific needs of the economic and social objectives of communities. It is further argued that higher education should develop innovative, responsive ways of collaborating with different sectors of society. In their opinion, an

innovative way is through community engagement via a broader framework of engagement. The paper dealt with; what is engagement, how do we embed a culture of engagement at universities, the enabling factors to engagement, and the challenges to achieving this culture of engagement?

The emphasis was maintaining a balance between teaching, research and engagement activities.

Poster presentation on Comprehensive Development

Zethu Sintiya and Ms Jeeva Munsamy presented a poster on Comprehensive Development Model. The presentation entailed illustrating the trends of CE at CUT. Previously, it was conducted as Community Services (CS). The change from Community Services to Community Engagement can be attributed to The White Paper 3 of 1997. The mandate of this paper was that all higher education institutions of South Africa need to incorporate community engagement (CE) as one of its missions alongside teaching and learning and research. This was part of the transformation process. In 2004, CUT was subjected to an audit by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), whereby CS was regarded as functioning on a “double-tiered system”, with service learning separately at one end and CS on the other end. It was recommended that CUT ensure the institutionalisation of CE into the three pillars (teaching and learning, research and CE). As a result of the HEQC audit, a shift in the trends of CE occurred. This led to a number of progressive skills in the way CE was conceptualised.

From the analysis of policy documents, strategic plans and other institutional documents, using a desktop review and the content analysis approach, five distinct models of CE were identified.

The analysis across the models shows a shift towards a more institutionalised approach, which aims at integrating CE as a core mission of the university, whilst also enhancing sustainable regional development. This poster examines the CE trends that CUT underwent from CS to CE for the period 2003-2013.

The objectives of the presentation are:

- ➔ Information on the transition that CUT has made;
- ➔ Various models and milestones;
- ➔ Taking cognisance of the National Development Plan 2030; and
- ➔ CE is a spin-out/spin-in from entrepreneurship/innovation/incubation via quadruple-helix partnerships.

My first experience presenting a poster

By Ms Zethu Sintiya

“Experience is a hard teacher, She gives you the test first, The lesson afterwards” - Rian Probo Sakti

My colleagues and I attended a Community Engaged Learning Symposium at Rhodes University in May 2015. I had the privilege of delivering a poster presentation. The presentation was based on the Comprehensive Development Model. This was the first time I had ever delivered a presentation as serious as this one. Yes, I used to present in class, but the experience was not the same.

Having to present for people who have done this so many times, intellectual people with so many degrees and papers they have already presented, while I only have a BTech and has never presented any paper or poster before, was intimidating. The only time I delivered a presentation was in class. I felt very young and not ready for this. I just did not want to disappoint the same people that believed in me and gave me an opportunity to do this. I was nervous. I once read an article that said being nervous about something you are about to do is a good thing, because it shows how much you care about it. I was afraid to fail and disappoint people who believed so much in me; hence, I practiced until the night before the presentation.

Words of encouragement from my family, friends, Ms Munsamy and Prof. Lategan changed how I felt about myself. I did not think I was able to do it, but after hearing them encouraging me I had the *"I CAN DO IT AND I WILL DO IT"* mentality. I delivered the presentation to the best of my ability. Having Prof. Lategan and Ms Munsamy by my side gave me courage. The questions people asked made me realise that I somehow managed to get people engaged. I did not waste their time. I answered their questions to the best of my ability.

The comments I received from people after presenting were all positive. A colleague from Rhodes University made a comment about my confidence – she even said that she wished she had so much confidence! She saw something different from how I was feeling deep inside. In everything, having people that believe in you

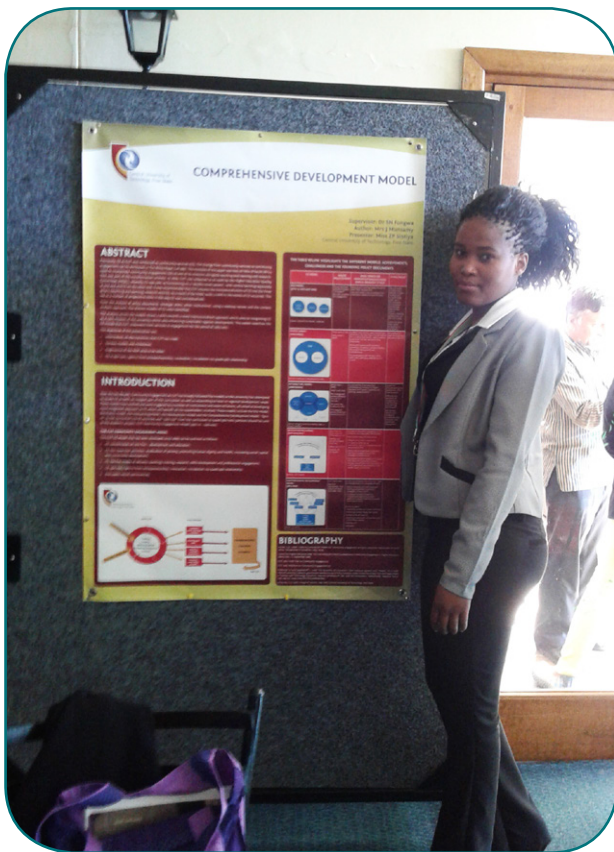
and support you is very important. I had a very scary, but well-needed experience. This is shaping me for the future. One day I will look back and say that, if it was not for the experience I received from delivering the presentation at Rhodes University, I would not have known what presenting is all about.

What I learnt is that it does not matter how good your topic is or how nice your slides are. If you do not have presentation skills, people will be bored. Strive by all means to have a presentation that will engage people. Do not include too much content on the slides. Always have a way to get people to relax and listen. Speak with confidence. Your voice should be loud enough for people to hear you, and portray confident body language. Yes, you will be nervous, all of us are, but try not to show it to the audience.

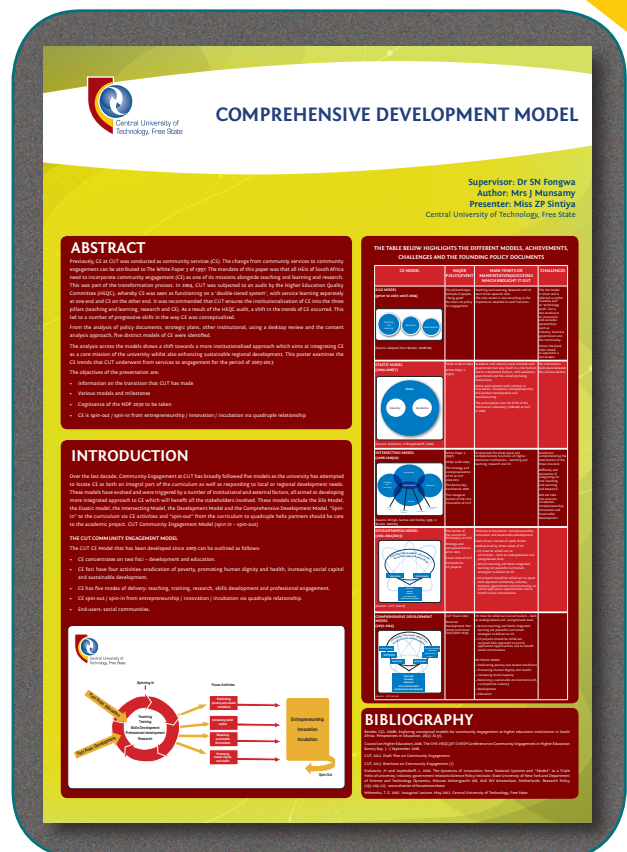


Left: Ms Zethu Sintiya. Right: Ms Jeeva Munsamy and Prof Laetus Lategan





Ms Sintiya, first presentation



Comprehensive Development Model Poster

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the following needs to be taken into account for CE to be successful:

- ➔ All CE projects must be linked to the curricula;
- ➔ Departments are required to co-operate in CE projects.
- ➔ The curriculum is of a multi-, inter- or trans-disciplinary nature; therefore projects can work across disciplines/faculties;
- ➔ Students' involvement and engagement is vital for learning.

At CUT, one can be proud of the fact; that from the presentations attended, CUT is the only university where CE includes the complete research cycle (research, technology transfer and innovation) by Prof Lategan.



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