



Position Paper 5

International environmental scan of the use of ICTs for community engagement in higher education

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List of acronyms

AAC&U	Association of American Colleges and Universities
AUCEA	Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance
CURA	Community University Research Alliance
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
ITC	information and communication technology
OCW	OpenCourseWare
OER	Open Educational Resources
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
WBL	work-based learning

Introduction

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support the engagement of higher education institutions (HEIs) with the broader community – variously referred to as ‘outreach’, ‘public service’, ‘community development’, ‘civic participation’, ‘community responsiveness’ and ‘community engagement’ – is probably the least well developed of the three core functions of HEIs (namely, research, teaching and learning, and community engagement). Recently, universities around the world have been exhorted to ‘engage more fully with community needs, regional issues and economic development through locally applicable research and teaching [and this] has gained increasing credence and support from community members, policy-makers and many academics’ (Winter, Wiseman and Muirhead 2006: 212). The key issues that drive this movement are of particular interest to those outside academe: ‘grounding academic knowledge in real-world conditions, connecting knowledge to practice, bringing academics and practitioners into closer relationships, improving conditions in local communities, and building democracy and civil society’ (Ostrander 2004:74).

Although ‘community engagement’, or a similar phrase, is frequently used in university mission statements, in many instances only lip-service is paid to the broader interests of the community beyond the boundaries of the academic institution. The ‘engagement’ is often no more than thinly disguised or unashamedly blunt marketing of the institutions’ services, or institutional fund-raising drives. However, universities around the globe have recently been placing more emphasis on their relationship with the broader community, and in some cases even establishing specific university departments to oversee this new enterprise. Winter *et al.* maintain that the ‘rise of a community engagement movement offers a range of possibilities for universities to function as “sites of citizenship” ... [and that] ... these include contributing to community social and economic infrastructure, supporting equity and diversity within higher education, and education for democratic citizenship’ (2006: 211).

This paper provides a brief overview of how HEIs internationally are using ICTs to enhance their engagement with the broader community, and highlights some applications which could be useful for South African HEIs.

What is understood by the term ‘community engagement’?

‘Community engagement’ is a relatively new term, used to describe the relationship between HEIs and the broader community. According to Langworthy and Turner:

The last decade has seen a shift from the concept of outreach to a partnership model. The outreach model featured university extension – experts applying their knowledge to problems they observe or questions they hear from the public. The institution’s role in the past was to use research and educational techniques to identify solutions and then impart that new information to the public ... As the term ‘partnership’ implies, the outreach model is being superseded by a model of community engagement and service learning. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring mutual benefit. This model acknowledges that the learning institution is doing more than prepare students for employment, it is also preparing them to be fully functioning members of the community. (2003: 8)

In their study of nine universities in the state of Victoria in Australia, Winter *et al.* (2006: 220–221) report that the term ‘community’ is ‘remarkably elastic in its deployment, and can refer to regional and local populations, international communities, communities of interest and communities of people (such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities, or academic communities)’.

With reference to the term ‘community engagement’, they reflect that:

Community engagement is often posited as an extension of the historic civic role of universities (Boyer 1990; Ostrander 2004), a revision of 'service' that is more equitable and consultative in purpose. Through strategies such as community partnerships, consultation, and facilitation, it is argued, universities make tangible contributions to the communities around them, and thus to the public good. (Winter *et al.* 2006: 223)

Modes of community engagement

Community engagement activities in higher education (HE) can be broadly categorised into seven distinct types. These are outlined in Table 1, which has been adapted from Winter *et al.* (2006: 214–221).

Table 1: Types of community engagement

Type of community engagement	Examples	Possible ICT involvement
Engagement through teaching and learning	Work-based or service learning Curriculum design that meets local needs Formal teaching of civics and democracy	Email communication Learning management systems Open educational resources
Engagement through research	Applied research for national priorities Locally directed research for needs of immediate geographical community Partnered research Research centres	Email communication Websites
Engagement through links with business, industry and professional organisations	Work-based learning programmes Professional input on university curricula	Email communication Websites
Engagement through social and cultural activities	Public lectures Art exhibitions etc Use of university facilities	Email communication Websites E-newsletters
Engagement through partnerships with schools and other education providers	Practice teaching in local schools Use of university facilities and lecturing staff for guest lectures	Email communication Websites
Engagement through economic activities	Local purchasing policy Partnerships with local industry	Email communication Shared databases
Engagement through participation in university structures	Community, business and industry representation on university senates and advisory boards	Email communication

These modes of community engagement reported by Winter *et al* (2006) provide a useful framework for categorising the types of engagement that universities are pursuing worldwide.

The use of ICTs by HEIs to increase community engagement

In the following sub-sections we have used the categories of Winter *et al* (2006) (though in a slightly different order) as a starting point for classifying community engagement activities to categorise the use of ICTs. In each case we have selected one or two key examples to show how ICTs are being used by HEIs to increase their engagement with the community at large.

Engagement through social and cultural activities

We have chosen to focus on this mode of engagement first, as it is essential that communities be aware of what HEIs have to offer and of how this might contribute to the community. As explained by Langworthy and Turner (2003), there is a need to demonstrate how engagement between a community and HEIs might be mutually beneficial. From the HEI's perspective it is important to maintain and develop its public image.

A web presence is generally acknowledged to be an effective way for HEIs to showcase their activities. Although this seems to be accepted by most universities worldwide, the user-friendliness of institutional websites differs considerably. An institutional website is the key interface between the institution and the broader community, and the ease with which an outsider can access information about that institution could be said to be indicative of its general approach to sharing information. In large universities, institutional websites can be of great value in informing members of staff of activities within their own university and possibly in highlighting opportunities for collaboration as well as for avoiding unnecessary duplication or wasted effort.

Most HEI websites include information about a range of current events that are open to the general public, such as public lectures, art exhibitions and cultural productions. While this use of ICTs for social and cultural activities is quite visible, it is essentially a marketing exercise that showcases university activities and does not deliberately elicit response from the public.

Recently some universities (such as Stanford University – see below) have been making use of new Web 2.0 tools to share social and cultural activities.

Stanford University

Stanford University¹ provides a range of activities, services and events that are open to the public. A creative option they use, called [Stanford on iTunes U](http://www.stanford.edu/home/arts/), provides access to a wide range of university-related audio content, including major events, speakers, faculty lectures and music. It allows a user to listen to podcast sound bites online or download them to their computer or iPod free of charge.

HEIs' websites also often provide services such as campus maps, staff directories and tools for searching the website. A few even have a Really Simple Syndication (RSS)² feed, and specialised gateways for various groups such as prospective students, faculty, foundations and alumni. All this information is, however, primarily marketing-oriented and one-directional, flowing from the university to the general public.

¹ <http://www.stanford.edu/home/arts/>

² RSS is a technology for notifying users of updates to content in a website, blog, or Internet TV channel.

Office of University Engagement, University of Western Sydney, Australia

The University of Western Sydney has an Office of University Engagement³ that provides a focal point for activities that engage the community at large in the core business of the university. In addition to traditional marketing and commercial activities – such as providing conference facilities and access to continuing and professional education opportunities – this office specifically supports various outreach and research projects.

Engagement through teaching and learning

Some of the HEIs' engagements with communities through teaching and learning are not easily visible from an analysis of their institutional websites. For example, the influence of business and industry on curriculum development is not public, and one therefore has no way of assessing the role played by ICTs in facilitating the engagement between HEIs and business and industry. It is not always possible to access the details of the curriculum offered by universities, let alone view the comments and suggestions made by advisory boards.

Work-based learning (WBL) is a fairly long-standing mechanism for formal engagement between HEIs and business and industry. According to Langworthy and Turner, WBL has proven benefits to students, including 'ease of obtaining employment, academic achievement, progression and retention, increased starting salaries, improved career progression and development of generic and professional skills' (2003: 1). However, they also note that there is a need to change the current conception of WBL to support a community engagement focus. The challenge for universities is twofold: 'to develop real, effective partnerships with industry, community groups and other organisations, based on appreciation of mutual benefit, and to embrace this wider understanding of engaged scholarship with its requirement for flexibility, adaptiveness and customisation' (Langworthy and Turner 2003: 1).

By contrast, the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement – with a declaration⁴ adopted by academics from a number of universities worldwide – requires the use of ICTs to be able to function. OERs can be defined as 'the open provision of educational resources enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes' (Holotescu 2007). The OER initiative is more recent than WBL and can be seen as a complementary initiative in that the accessibility of OERs can support WBL by making materials available to anyone, whether they are a registered student or not.

MIT OpenCourseWare

OpenCourseWare (OCW) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a large-scale, web-based electronic publishing initiative, accessible at www.ocw.mit.edu. Through OCW, MIT makes its core teaching materials – lecture notes, problem sets, syllabi, reading lists, simulations etc. – openly available for non-commercial educational purposes. OCW publishes those materials for anyone with access to the internet.

In the MIT OpenCourseWare Program Evaluation Findings Report, Carson and Margulies (2004) report that:

- In 2003, the OCW site recorded 718 000 visits between 1 October and 30 November – an average of almost 12 000 visits per day for that period.
- Of the total number of OCW visitors, 45% came from North America (USA/Canada).

³ <http://www.uws.edu.au/about/adminorg/devint/oue>

⁴ <http://www.capetowndeclaration.org/>

- Western Europe was the second-most common point of origin (19%) and East Asia was third (18%).
- The Middle East and North Africa (1.6%) and sub-Saharan Africa (0.4%) represented small but measurable portions of OCW's traffic.
- Numerically, self-learners predominated, representing almost 52% of visitors, with an average of over 6 000 daily visits. Self-learners were most likely to come from North America (they comprised 60% of North American visitors).
- Students represented approximately 31% of visitors, or an average of over 3 600 daily visits.
- Educators represented over 13% of the visitors – an average of about 1 550 visits per day.
- The OCW user base was well educated; almost 70% had a bachelors or graduate degree.

Engagement through research

According to Beth Savan, 'community-based research is often carried out by a partnership of university faculty and students with community groups, non-governmental organizations, or other agencies in civic society' (2004: 372). She points out that 'community-based research has been gaining recognition and credibility over the past two decades' (2004: 372) and that the literature around this area is growing. She reports that community-based research is being encouraged by a number of state organisations, such as the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) in Canada, as well as being supported by funders such as the Kellogg Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Andrew W Mellon Foundation. In 2007, Canada's International Development Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council signed an agreement to invest up to CA \$6.27 million over the next six years to support an international CURA. CURA is designed to facilitate the collaboration between teams of post-secondary institutions and community organisations to 'develop new knowledge and capabilities in key areas, sharpen research priorities, provide new research training opportunities, and enhance the ability of social sciences and humanities research to meet the needs of communities in the midst of change.'⁵

As recently as 29 December 2007, US President GW Bush approved the latest National Institutes of Health (NIH) appropriations bill. This bill requires scientists funded by the NIH to submit copies of their peer-reviewed journal manuscripts to NIH's online archive, PubMed Central,⁶ so that the article may be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication.⁷ Peter Suber, an independent policy strategist for open access to scientific and scholarly research literature and Research Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College, highlights the importance of this bill by noting that it is the first open access mandate for any government funding agency adopted by the national legislature rather than directly by the agency itself.⁸ (The NIH is the world's largest funder of non-classified scientific research, with an annual budget of \$28 billion.⁹)

Table 2 shows a number of national research councils from around the world that adopted open access mandates in 2007.¹⁰

⁵ http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/cura_idrc_e.asp

⁶ <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/>

⁷ <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-033.html>

⁸ <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/01-02-08.htm>

⁹ <http://www.nih.gov/about/budget.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/01-02-08.htm>

Table 2: Countries which adopted open access mandates in 2007

Country	Funder
UK	UK Arthritis Research Campaign
	UK Arts & Humanities Research Council
	UK Department of Health
	British Heart Foundation
	Cancer Research UK
	Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)
	Chief Scientist Office of the Scottish Executive Health Department
Canada	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
France	Agence Nationale de la Recherche
Netherlands	Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek
Switzerland	Swiss National Science Foundation

Source: <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet/> Accessed 30 May 2008

A number of private funders of research, including the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Maryland, USA, have also adopted an open access mandate.

While open access mandates assume that articles are deposited online, the many other ICT-enabled activities used in research (such as data sharing, communicating with other researchers, analysing data and self-archiving) are not always as clearly identifiable. Likewise, ICT-enabled communication and sharing with communities in community-based research are not easily identifiable, except of course in instances when community research initiatives have been written about online or have documented their engagement online – for example the eYethu Project run by the Computer Science and Education departments at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa¹¹ (Hodgkinson-Williams, Slay and Sieborger 2008).

¹¹ http://schools.coe.ru.ac.za/wiki/Main_Page

Centre for Community Based Research

The Centre for Community Based Research¹² is an independent, non-profit organisation located in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. It has been operational for over 25 years. Their mission is to bring people together to use knowledge for providing real and innovative solutions to community needs. Their approach to research is participatory and action-oriented in a way that mobilises people to participate as full and equal members of society.

Apart from the usual marketing-related information, the Centre provides a searchable database¹³ of their 230 projects. This can be searched according to the name of the project, the completion date, the funder, the project leader, the service area and the research theme.

Engagement through links with business, industry and professional organisations

How HEIs engage with business, industry and professional organisations is not entirely clear. Some university websites (such as the Yale University website¹⁴) provide specialised gateways for groupings that include foundations and corporations, students and alumni, but much of the community engagement of most HEIs is in the form of research contracts, which may involve privately funded research and are embargoed. This engagement is therefore not accessible to the public.

The websites of some HEIs include a list of 'experts' who can be consulted on various issues, but these are generally premised on one-way communication from the so-called expert to the public and do not include ways for the public to respond. For the most part websites merely reflect ways in which universities are changing their institutional and organisational structures as they attempt to turn research outcomes into commercial outcomes, through various university technology transfer mechanisms (Poon and Chan 2007).

La Trobe University

La Trobe University in Australia¹⁵ has developed a wide network of industry and community partnerships designed to address areas of skills shortage and recruitment, as well as research and teaching. Many of their partnerships are commercial, relating to infrastructure, intellectual property and entrepreneurial projects.

The website interface makes it easy to engage directly with the university: anyone is allowed to submit an online query, after which the enquirer is asked how academic staff or students can help him or her deal with problems and opportunities.

Engagement through partnerships with schools and other education providers

Some HEI websites have web pages devoted specifically to engagement with schools and other education providers, while others seem to report only on isolated school-HEI events, on an ad hoc basis. There is a long tradition of engagement between HEIs and schools, particularly in HEI faculties or schools of education which are dependent on their partnership with schools for the professional development of pre-service teachers. However, this long-

¹² <http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/>

¹³ <http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Search>

¹⁴ <http://www.yale.edu/>

¹⁵ <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/community/partnerships/industry-partnerships.htm>

standing engagement is not easily visible from an institutional website, even though it is very likely that that ICT-enabled communication and sharing does happen – in order to facilitate the pre-service teaching programme.

Members of staff and students from education faculties or schools at some HE institutions go out to various schools and engage with learners and teachers in their own environment. Other HEIs invite learners and teachers to work with them on the university campus itself (for example, Rockefeller University – see below) or engage with them electronically (for example, St Hilda's College at Oxford University – see also below).

Rockefeller University

Through their Summer High School Science Program, Rockefeller University¹⁶ invites K-12 teachers and high school students, to work in the university laboratories. The teachers and students work alongside college students, technicians, graduates, postdocs, teachers and visiting professors. The programme is designed to help students maximise their research experience by gaining laboratory experience, working with a mentor to gain insight into how and why scientific research is done, and documenting their work experience in a final poster session and research report.

St Hilda's College (Oxford University)

In 2003 an e-mentoring scheme was set up by St Hilda's College¹⁷ as a way of establishing contact with schools which had little or no history of sending students to Oxford or Cambridge. Other Oxford colleges, including Worcester and University Colleges, have since joined the scheme, which involves matching current undergraduates with Year 10 to 12 pupils selected by the schools as potential applicants. Pupils are linked to e-mentors with similar academic interests, and email each other, sharing experiences and ideas, over a period of two months. At the end of the programme, the pupils visit Oxford to meet their mentors, take part in workshops and other activities, and tour the city.

Engagement through economic activities

Although HEIs and their local communities may have special arrangements (such as local purchasing policies and partnerships with local industry), these are generally not reported publicly. It is very likely that there would be ICT-enabled communication or even the sharing of databases of mutually useful information, but this is difficult to establish. There are also initiatives to extend computer networks to communities surrounding some universities (such as Stanford University – see below).

Stanford University

Stanford University runs a Partnership for Internet Equity and Community Engagement (PIECE)¹⁸ project which aims to address 'digital divides' and share knowledge with the community and other researchers. Their particular focus is to close the gaps in internet access, technology control/ownership and computer usage that exist between and within different populations in the greater East Palo Alto district in California. In addition, the project aims to facilitate the use of the internet to empower disadvantaged residents to gain more of a voice in community decision-making. The project runs through the 'Plugged In'¹⁹ programme, which has been operating since 1992. It has a

¹⁶ <http://www.rockefeller.edu/outreach/>

¹⁷ <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/disab/aimhigher.shtml>

¹⁸ <http://piece.stanford.edu/>

¹⁹ <http://www.pluggedin.org/about/>

number of sponsors, ranging in size from big corporate donors such as Intel to small individual contributors.

Engagement through participation in university structures

Lists of public figures involved in university councils. are quite readily available, if not online under HEIs' 'structures' web pages, then in paper-based resources. While this engagement is one of the longest-standing relationships with the community, it is not easy to access information on this relationship, as much of the debate within these structures is kept confidential. Generally, only minimal information about council discussions is released.

Cambridge University

Cambridge University has a strategically written entry in Wikipedia which provides up-to-date information about its Council.²⁰ It includes the names and positions of its members, their terms of appointment, the frequency of its meetings and links to the intranet of Cambridge University, which is password protected.

Yale University

At Yale University the equivalent of a university council, the Yale Corporation, is the senior policy-making body for the institution. On its website it not only lists the members of its Corporation, but provides photographs and short resumes of each fellow.²¹

Organisations promoting community engagement with HE

Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance

The objective of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) is to enable Australian universities to share and create knowledge about community engagement. According to their website, AUCEA is an 'alliance of 32 Australian universities committed to university–community engagement in order to promote the social, environmental, economic and cultural development of communities.' The website continues: 'AUCEA promotes direct and mutually beneficial interaction between universities and communities that is essential for the development and application of knowledge and the shaping of our future citizens.'²² AUCEA strives to be 'the leading inclusive national forum for the discussion and development of university–community engagement, encouraging collaboration, innovation, the exchange of knowledge and the scholarship of engagement.' The AUCEA website further states that 'the process which is developing trust between universities will create an effective centre for dialogue and research into university community engagement and place the scholarship of engagement on the national agenda'. In order to meet this goal, AUCEA has undertaken a national leadership role, to:

- Raise awareness and disseminate best practice in university–community engagement.
- Facilitate collaborative research in university–community engagement between AUCEA members and their communities.
- Promote the integration of engagement into curriculum and the student experience.

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_University:_Council

²¹ <http://www.yale.edu/about/leadership.html>

²² <http://130.194.156.169:8080/traction/permalink/Website0>

- Promote the recognition of the scholarship of engagement as a valid pedagogy.
- Collaboratively develop resources that support university–community engagement.

AUCEA hosts an annual conference (the most recent was in July 2008) and publishes the proceedings, a mailing list, and an open access refereed e-journal (*Australian Journal of University Community Engagement*) designed to promote and develop the scholarship of community engagement. It also produces a bi-monthly e-newsletter.

Association of American Colleges and Universities

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)²³ is a strong proponent of promoting civic engagement as an essential foundation for learning, through its Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement.²⁴ Civic engagement is understood to be ‘thematically linked learning communities, community-based research, collaborative projects, service-learning, mentored internships, reflective experiential learning and study abroad’.²⁵ The AAC&U works with HEI campuses to develop curricular and co-curricular programmes that help staff and students connect scholarship to public questions, consider alternative frameworks for judgement and action, draw meaning from experience, critique theory in the light of practice, and evaluate practice in the light of new knowledge.

One of the AAC&U’s key projects, Diversity Web,²⁶ hosts a website which is intended to provide a comprehensive compendium of cross-campus practices and resources for HEI practitioners who are interested in placing diversity at the centre of the academy’s educational and societal mission. It lists new publications, upcoming conferences, calls for papers, and new positions across universities. The publications are downloadable and include relevant articles (such as ‘Partnership in teaching and learning: Combining critical pedagogy with civic engagement and diversity’ by José Calderón).²⁷

The AAC&U runs other national projects, such as Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility,²⁸ Bringing Theory to Practice,²⁹ and a transatlantic partnership with the Council of Europe.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe³⁰ is one of the leading proponents of the HE reform process in Europe. One of its key contributions has been the Declaration on the Responsibility of Higher Education for a Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability.³¹ One of the key tenets of the declaration is for academic, administrative and technical staff, students, and other interested parties to work for programmes, policies and practices by taking action in their local as well as in national and global communities to put reform principles into practice.

Specifically, the declaration states that ‘[d]emocracy cannot exist without strong institutions and sound legislation, but it also cannot work without being based on democratic culture. Education and schooling are decisive forces shaping the democratic development of

²³ <http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement/index.cfm>

²⁴ http://www.aacu.org/civic_engagement/index.cfm

²⁵ <http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement/index.cfm>

²⁶ <http://www.diversityweb.org/>

²⁷ <http://www.diversityweb.org/DiversityDemocracy/vol11no2/calederon.cfm>

²⁸ http://www.aacu.org/core_commitments/index.cfm

²⁹ http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/index.cfm

³⁰ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/default_en.asp

³¹ <http://dc.ecml.at/index.asp?Page=Declaration>

societies; and universities, in turn, are strategic institutions for the democratic development of schooling and societies.' HEIs are encouraged to review and sign the declaration. By signing, an institution commits to taking action in their local, national and global communities to put the principles of democracy, civic responsibility and citizenship into practice.

Conclusion

From the brief overview and the selected examples presented in this paper, it is clear that, while there is evidence of ICTs being used to facilitate HEIs' engagement with the community, ICTs are primarily used in a marketing context for advertising HEI events and services to the community. It would appear that very few institutions use the interactive affordances of ICTs to enhance the interaction between HEIs and the community. Although there is some support at an international level for deepening engagement with local communities, these ideas are variously implemented by individual HEIs.

A key trend that seems to be emerging, at least from Australian HEIs, is the raising of the profile of community engagement to a level at which it is the responsibility of a pro-vice chancellor, alongside research and teaching. Although many universities engage in numerous different ways with their local communities, it is difficult to judge the extent of these activities since the information is not always easily accessible and, in general, materials do not make use of open dissemination models that include some kind of alternative licensing arrangement.

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