



FICCI's 12th Higher Education Summit, November 2016

Report on the Master Class on 'Living in Harmony: Universities & Communities'

Strategies for Successful Community-University Engagement (CUE)

November 9, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education organized a Master Class at FICCI, on November 9, 2016, on the occasion of the 12th FICCI Higher Education Summit. The topic for the Master Class was '*Living in Harmony: Universities & Communities; Strategies for successful Community University Engagement*'. The discussions centered around how to make higher education more socially responsible, and sharing of action pointers on how to realize the same at a practical level. The Master Class witnessed participation by vice-chancellors, professors, teachers, students, independent researchers, who engaged in rich discussions on the topic.

INPUTS FROM RESOURCE PERSONS

Dr Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, PRIA & UNESCO Co-Chair

Dr Rajesh Tandon set the stage for the master class, by linking the summit's theme, 'Education for tomorrow' with the essence of the topic of the class. Speaking about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he outlined the important role of education, which can contribute towards achieving most of the SDGs. He shared the basic ideas behind the concept of 'Community University Engagement', its principles and the various ways in which this can be realized. Few highlights from Dr Tandon's presentation are as follows:

- Higher/professional education today is focusing mostly on 'learning to do', and preparing students to become good scientists, professionals, scientists etc. Although this is important, but equally important is 'learning to be' and 'learning to learn'. These require nurturing students to be active and responsible citizen, and build their capacities to live in harmony with respect for human and ecological diversity.

- Such is the education which is required for tomorrow, and education which is ‘engaged with societies/communities’
- Higher education has three main missions: teaching, research and service. While most engagement activities is carried through the service function, the teaching and research function also needs to be tapped for carrying out ‘engagement with communities’.
- Teachers/professors need to help students reflect on the outside world, and streamline their thought process in a manner which is more socially responsible.
- ‘Community University Engagement’ (CUE) as a broad phrase means different things. Essentially, it implies mutually beneficial relationships between universities and communities, and one which spans across teaching and research function of the former, along with cutting across disciplines.



Pic 1: Dr Rajesh Tandon sharing his thoughts on Community University Engagement

- Global networks across the world such as Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi), Living Knowledge Network, Pascal Observatory are striving towards ‘engaged production of knowledge, contributing to social change; and helping universities realize their civic/social responsibilities.

- The formulation of the 12th Five Year Plan in India included a fresh focus on strengthening CUE in Indian Higher Education system. The idea here was to devise a mechanism whereby which higher education can be used as a means to promote social responsibility.
- The kind of 'engagement' advocated by CUE is something much bigger than social service scheme like NSS. Based on the principle of 'mutual benefit', CUE can be applied across disciplines, and span all three functions of higher education. Further, CUE calls for acknowledgement in student credits, along with inclusion in faculty appraisal.

Dr Abhay Kumar, Assistant Professor, Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi University

Dr Abhay Kumar, an active professor in Shri Ram College of Commerce, and who has many successful stories of engagement with the communities to his credit, as part of ENACTUS; shared his experience of CUE. He shared about the origins of higher education and its colonial roots, which merely produced 'workers' and not citizens. He also shared about some successful projects that ENACTUS has undertaken over the past few years.



Pic 2: Dr Abhay Kumar, sharing his experiences of ENACTUS at SRCC

Few highlights from his speech are as follows:

- Unfortunately, the Indian policy sector has not given the due attention to the field of higher education as much as it deserves. More so, vested interests have further worsened the situation.
- Today, not quality, but quantity of research papers are given more importance in higher education, and as a result, discussions on its social relevance has taken a back seat.
- There is much ambiguity on the term 'engagement', and as what appears it's real meaning has still not trickled down into university premises, who continue doing 'outreach' in the name of 'engagement'.
- ENACTUS operates on the principle of developing business models for communities, in line with their needs and skills. Doing so, it ensures sustainable livelihoods for communities, along with helping them build an entrepreneurial spirit.
- Any such engagement activity or community based projects requires funding, which is essential to successful implementation of objectives.
- ENACTUS has engaged in several such projects such as AZMAT, SATTVA, etc. whereby which it has used the knowledge gained by students in the classrooms to better the lives of the communities outside.

Dr Seema Singh, Associate Professor, Delhi Technological University

Dr Singh, who has been quite passionate about 'community engagement' and 'social responsibility' of universities, shared her thoughts on how Delhi Technological University (DTU), which is majorly an engineering institution, has been taking steps towards realizing CUE in regular academic curriculum. Few highlights from her address are as follows:

- It is essential to devise ways by which knowledge gained by students in classrooms be utilized to improve the lives of the people in slums.
- Students at DTU have been engaged in 'social responsibility' activities. This engagement of the students has also been incentivized in the form of recognition and awards.
- Inequality is emerging as one of the toughest challenges in the society today, which the gap between rich and poor increasing day by day.

- Inclusion is therefore the need of the hour; such inclusion also needs to be applied to education, and the universities/institutions should devise ways to reach out to and engage with communities, including them in the mainstream.
- DTU has a specialized course, in which the students are mandated to undertake studies in the community.



Pic 3: Dr Seema Singh deliberating on how we can make our universities 'socially responsible'

OPEN DISCUSSIONS

Presentation by resource persons was followed by a round of rich discussions on various action pointers to realize CUE in academia. Some major points which emerged from this discussion are as follows:

- There are several existent examples of university students using their disciplinary knowledge to help improve the lives of the communities, which was evident from stories from KL University, Andhra Pradesh; NIT Trichy, SRCC, DU. The need is to orient this engagement in a manner which is mutually beneficial, and helps universities fulfill their social responsibilities in a meaningful way.
- Unless teachers/faculties are involved in the engagement process, ensuring participation of students will be difficult.

- We need to find out ways in which university students can connect to village students in a manner which is mutually beneficial and convenient for both.
- Engagement as an exercise should be driven by social motives, and not personal interests. The urge to engage with communities should come from within the academia, rather than being imposed.
- Education should be used for production of socially relevant knowledge, and should not be limited to merely acquisition of degrees.



Pic 4: Prof AVS Prasad sharing experiences from Andhra Pradesh

- There is a need to strengthen curriculum with experiences coming from field work, in a way such that the latter is made more relevant in today's context. Sustenance of age old curriculum in current dynamic and challenging context is making knowledge irrelevant
- Students need to be encouraged to document the successful case studies of community university engagement; which should in turn be used for strengthening the academic curriculum.
- A pattern of continuity in CUE practices needs to be maintained at the institutional level. This is because while students are mobile, the lives of the community are permanent. This can be done by institutionalizing CUE in the university structure and regular academic discourse.
- Lot of potential exists in the form of various societies in universities, whose activities can be synergized to achieve CUE goals and objectives.

- Production of meaningful and relevant knowledge for the forthcoming generations and for achievement of sustainable development goals is the cornerstone of CUE.



Pic 5: Brigadier R S Grewal, sharing his perspectives on CUE