

## **Community Interaction at Stellenbosch University: Celebrations and Challenges**

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### **Introduction**

1. Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Observe all protocols: greet dignitaries, community partners, academics, students
2. My appreciation: Thank you for the opportunity to address you at the opening of your Community Engagement Week. It is a great honour for me.
3. My approach: I have a serious intention to share with you tonight, not to “profile” and to “brag” as is so often the case when people speak about their university (corporatisation). My approach is a “warts and all” approach. I am fully aware of the history of my institution as the cradle of apartheid, but I am also fully aware of what my institution is in the process of becoming and has the potential to be.
4. I am the head of a relatively small support service (4 permanent and 2 contract staff members), the Division for Community Interaction, at Stellenbosch University. The reason for our existence as a support service is to support academics to perform their CI task well. We do not, as a rule, undertake projects ourselves. Our task is support, coordination, quality assurance. I report to one of three Deputy Vice-Chancellors.

### **What are our reasons to celebrate community interaction at SU?**

Reinventing Stellenbosch: redefining relationships, repositioning the university, maximising access

I think we have come a long way in the process of redefining the relationships between the university, and especially its surrounding communities. We have come far in repositioning the University from where it was and we are serious about maximising access to the institution for those who were excluded in the past.

Prof Chris Brink, the immediate previous Vice-Chancellor of SU asked the critical question about *ownership of the institution* in a seminal address during his term, entitled simply “Wie se plek is dit die?” translated “Whose place is this?” He played a major role in the positioning of SU as a national asset, as opposed to an institution that is exclusively owned by the White, Afrikaans section of the SA population.

The current VC, Prof Russel Botman, put the question of access and the institution's role in development on the institutional agenda. "The daughter of the farm worker must have the same access to the University as the son of the farmer" – This one sentence covers race, gender, class and rurality. The University is now focused on the Stellenbosch HOPE project that is structured around five themes drawn from MDGs. [List 5 themes]

These strategic directions are, amongst others, lived out via the community interaction function in the form of local linkages, most of which are managed by CI line function, e.g. Rector-Mayor Forum, Lückhoff School, schools partnerships, service-learning placements, celebration of national days, social cohesion, SWOKK, science & society, emerging business, access to facilities. Some of these issues I shall refer to later.

### Community Interaction as a core academic function / Integration of the core functions of teaching & learning, research and CI

We can celebrate the fact that there is now recognition of CI as an academic core function by all parties in the university and beyond. It is not an understanding of CI as a separate function; it is an understanding of CI integrated with T&L and research. Therefore there is good cooperation between DCI, DRD and CTL. We recognise that there are different types of CI; our typology includes four types:

1. CI integrated with T&L (e.g. service-learning and other types of experiential learning, short courses)
2. CI integrated with research (e.g. community-based research, community assessments, science & society initiatives, research about CI, research into specific local, topical issues – laboratory in our backyard)
3. CI, T&L and research integrated (in rare cases this is achieved, e.g. small-scale trout farming project)
4. Volunteerism and public service (students and staff)

We celebrate that CI is taken seriously in our institution, and that it is based on an understanding that integrates it with the other core functions.

### Offering of support to academic staff

We offer the following kinds of support to academics:

1. Information service: data base of all CI projects [say more about this later]
2. Facilitation of partnerships: NGOs or academic departments looking for collaboration possibilities; request can come from any direction. **Bridge** / clearing house / match-maker [Schools partnerships and partnerships with local and provincial governments as important types of partnerships: relationships = important capital]
3. Service-learning: initially SLCBP, in cooperation with CHESP, upgraded to credit-bearing SPSLCE that articulates with other qualifications (PG Dip. + M in Higher Ed) [importance of peer experience] – course presented at MEDUNSA in 2011
4. Community-based research: workshop on methodologies in September 2011, together with DRD, hopefully grow into short course [importance of peer experience]

5. Community profiles: mutually beneficial agreement with Sociology & Social Anthropology + Municipality
6. Community tours & orientation: Community Interaction Orientation + Community tours for management & staff, benefiting local service-providers, in conjunction with Stellenbosch Tourism

#### Offering of support to students

One of my first major tasks after my appointment was the repositioning of Matie Community Service. Eventually it was decided that the best position would be under Student Affairs, with strong dotted lines to CI.

Establishment of One Stop Service, appointment of Michelle Pietersen / Link to RAG

Orientation of volunteers, proposal writing and presentation (with partners), reflection (own learning) – gave rise to a Short Course on Leadership & Community Interaction, presented by Frederick van Zyl Slabbert Leadership Institute (offered as a stand-alone course, over and above students' own course / currently offered to SU students, could be broadened)

Mandela legacy workshop, 22 July 2011

1000 volunteers per week in local communities, aim to increase it to 2000, i.e. an army who can be deployed where it is needed. Communities benefit and at the same time it educates our students – citizenship, diversity, professional development, personal development, employability [Example: Halowene Armstrong]: this we celebrate!

#### Structured, mutually beneficial partnerships

Including Schools Partnerships (major): development & recruitment foci

Local governments: CoCT (through CHEC), Stellenbosch Municipality, Drakenstein Municipality / pending: Theewaterskloof, Hessequa, Eden District Municipality, Cape Winelands District Municipality (rural bias)

Provincial government: PGWC (through CHEC)

What is the typical kind of issues addressed? - skills development, spatial development frameworks, rural development, infrastructure, environmental issues, water, renewable energy, etc. [science & society]

We celebrate being the knowledge partner for development through all these collaborations. Learn to know different institutional cultures [government & university]; difference between academics and consultants

#### Policy framework

It is important to have a set of agreements or a framework to guide your CI work.

2000-2004: conceptualisation phase; end result CI Policy & Plan

HEQC Audit – revision of policy, iterative, CI Symposium in 2008: recommendations, new policy in 2009

We celebrate the fact that our policy process involves deliberation, participation, and is a living process

#### Knowledge management/marketing

Database, integrated with other SU systems, e.g. HR, finance, students vs. stand-alone system

Reports can be generated on request, e.g. Dean's reports

Branding & marketing items: CI look & feel, within corporate identity, banner, files, umbrellas, candles, brochures, DVD (future plan)

Symposium reports

#### Structures/Institutionalisation

Senate Committee: Community Interaction Committee of Senate (CICS): at first faculties tried to send female, black, junior staff members, but we insisted on high profiles [all three DVCs]

Faculty structures: different arrangements, the advantage of champions like Jacob du Plessis

Vice-Rector: Community Interaction & Staff (only one in country with CI in his job title)

Budgetary provision (salaries for 4 persons, operating budget for Division, equipment budget and Flagship Projects)

Central Division, acting as a support service, led by SD:CI

#### Incentives

Rector's Award for Excellence in CI [10 x R20, 000 awards + certificate]

Flagship Projects [R150, 000-R300, 000]

Discretionary Fund: ad hoc requests

Conference support, e.g. ISSL [this year in China, 7 staff members, present & publish]

SL implementation support in first year [especially transport costs]

#### Employee Volunteerism

This is the latest addition of which I am exceptionally proud; there is a lot of potential. Launch on 8 June 2011 / Nedbank Local Heroes & Team Challenge

Mandela Day, 18 July 2011 – 10 university departments

This is not about doing good; it is about what kind of institution you want to be known as. We want to be known as a caring institution that is responsive to the needs in a society with many development challenges.

## **What are our challenges in terms of community interaction at SU?**

### Frames of mind: academic staff, community partners, students

Academic staff: orthodoxy, elitism, conservatism, snobbery, arrogance, lack of inclination for innovation and experimentation, existing academic practice – detachment, prioritising academic knowledge as only knowledge, lack of openness to say: here may be something?

University staff & community partners: generous donor & grateful receiver (in the face of knowledge of other possibilities)

Students: Social justice vs. mitigation of difficult situations [community service]

### Measurement of community interaction

This is not only our challenge, all over the world (Talloires Network in June)

For funding, DHET

Frameworks/rubrics

### Performance management of academic staff / acknowledgement & reward, especially in terms of promotion

Like for T&L and research

Acknowledgement

### Risk management

Staff and students are exposed to different kinds of risks

Not only for CI, but generic for all external experiences (integrated)

Cannot describe all situations

### Volunteerism funding (now that RAG is gone)

An opportunity to look for alternative ways to fund student volunteerism

## **Closing remarks / Recommendations**

1. Pursue mutually beneficial partnerships that advance missions of all partners
2. Advance social justice with our CE work, not merely ameliorate bad situations

3. Pursue the integration of core functions; never only CE as a stand-alone activity. Do what universities are supposed to do – but with ever greater relevance, application – distinguish between slow science and hot, sexy science – and the importance of both: CE to take on the form of scholarship and to adapt to the culture of the University [this what I advocate]
4. But more, and concurrently with the above, CE has the potential to change the university. This is my vision and fervent hope: a university with more humility and humanness, open to complexity and transdisciplinary, contextually co-produced knowledge construction (with partners outside the university), advocating and living sustainability and building solidarity]

THANK YOU