

VISIONS AND EXAMPLES OF ENGAGING THE UNIVERSITY AS AN INSTITUTION

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INTRODUCTION

We imagine two broad approaches to engaging the university in conversation:

- The academic work of the university
- How the university functions as an institution

In this session we focus on engaging the university in conversations about the people, about the organization of the university, about the university in society:

Overview:

- Student concerns
- Local university issues
- National higher education issues
- The Idea of the University
- Societal issues

1. Student concerns

How do we stimulate dialogue and conversation about student issues?

These vary enormously across the world, across different types of higher education

- Corruption – sex for grades – Sierra Leone
- Sexual vulnerability – sexual violence – Northwestern University
- Public health – terrible health conditions in student dorms – NIFES
- Mental health – Stanford U students reporting on immense pressure

Example: Nigeria: NIFES Social Response Unit

Teams go out to Nigerian universities to engage students and faculty about:

- HIV/AIDS
- About corruption on campus
- About stress and its management

These teams have been showing the love of Jesus through free medical checkups.

They marched with other groups on World AIDS Day.

They set up seminars on how to cope with stress.

2. Local university issues

How do we stimulate dialogue and conversation about issues in our own universities?

These issues also take a huge variety of forms.

When I asked graduate students in California what were their big issues they said:

- Black lives matter
- Increasing participation of women in academia
- Sexual misconduct and harassment
- Adjunct faculty
- Cost of housing and lack of housing
- Mental and emotional stress (weeks working without a day off)
- Sexual assault

Example: Project Gratitude, Singapore

- 5 u/gs at NUS wanted to mobilize the entire student body to show appreciation for campus service staff, canteen and toilet cleaners, bus drivers, campus security guards
- Intention = create a “culture of gratitude and compassion”, I.e., demonstrate the virtues of Jesus
- Activities:
 - Gave a piece of fruit or a cup of coffee to a staff member with a small note of thanks for their work
 - Created photo essays for a public exhibition on campus
- Received campus-wide attention – including student newspaper
- TH: Christians are kind, thoughtful, compassionate, care about those many of us think are beneath our dignity.

3. National higher education

How do we stimulate dialogue and conversation about higher education?

- Jobs for graduates
- Mismatch between education and work
- Cost
- Elitism
- Discrimination, exclusion

4. The Idea of the University

How do we stimulate dialogue and conversation about the idea of the university?

- Impart knowledge? Learn things you don't know? Create a storehouse of information in your head?
- Critical thinking? How to test every idea?
- Job training? Skills useful for the workforce?
- Credential factory? Merely a certificate to show an employer?
- Creative thinking? How to imagine new things?

- Discovery? To teach how to do research?
- Moral vision of society? A society that cares for all? A society that is compassionate? A society that is committed to human flourishing?

Example: Guatemala “Arts Festival for Justice”

- The IV worker on campus, Isra Ortiz, reported that there is a huge discrepancy between problems faced by Guatemala (and failure of evangelicals to confront these)
- Christians have too often been silent on violence, corruption, inequality, racism
- Goal: to show a different face of Xianity to the Univ of San Carlos campus
- Idea = arts festival focused on justice – part of Campus-wide arts festival – so embedded inside something already a large infrastructure
- Preparation: read book on injustice, visited the City dump where poor people living, joined a march for justice on MayDay, May 1
- Created a Facebook account:
 - A student wrote a play about injustice
 - Student wrote a theme song
 - Created a photo display
 - Created a painting exhibition – a collage on justice
 - Jesus celebrated as the model of justice

At the end of the day, more than 100 people had been on stage (35-40 presentations), inviting students to reflect on justice through the arts. In total, around 600-700 people attended the Festival!

- Overall, challenged the stereotype that Christians don’t care about justice
- Demonstrated how the arts can be a medium for the message of Jesus

5. Societal issues

How do we stimulate dialogue and conversation about the university and its role in society?

The issues can include:

- Training public leaders
- Holding society accountable
 - Corruption
 - Policy priorities
- Fighting for morality in social institutions
- Contributing to the public good (e.g., engineers, teachers, agricultural scientists, lawyers)

These issues could be about:

- Immigration – France – US
- Slavery – resurgence in late 20thC.
- Gender discrimination – why so ubiquitous? Is it fair, just, acceptable?
- Poverty – US Great Society – World Bank – do we know how to alleviate it?
- Climate change
- Preventing/repairing civil conflicts
- Protection of indigenous peoples

Example: Veritas magazine, JNU, New Delhi, India

Quote:

“For the last couple of years, there has been a lively and often, controversial and violent debate on the question of who is an Indian, or perhaps more accurately, who is a *patriotic* Indian. It exploded in February last year when sedition charges were levelled against various students of JNU. Since then, there has been a wave of *nationalism* in the country as is evident in the National Anthem being played in cinema halls by order of the Supreme Court. It has also been used to garner public support as in the case of demon-etisation. The question of ‘who is a nationalist?’ has re-mained thinly veiled in public discourse in recent times. **The present edition of Veritas is an attempt to join this conversation.”**

Example: India: Re-Imagining the Idea of India UESI (IFES India)

The issue: concern about Hindu nationalism advanced by the government

The goal: to produce an alternative political vision

The conference: Invite scholars from Theology, English, History, Economics, Philosophy, International Relations

NB: joined with Muslims, Marxists who shared a similar goal of an open political society and against religious nationalism

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Event organizer: AGEUP, the IFES movement of Peru

Event topic: Engaging the University

Participants: AGEUP staff, students, faculty

Place: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM), Lima

Language: English