How is ‘community engagement’ reflected in the practices of academics at University of Pretoria?
The research project

Map the scale and forms of interaction with external social partners, to contribute to understanding (community) engagement and the changing role of the university in building a national system of innovation

- in diverse disciplinary or knowledge fields
- in different types of university
- in terms of outcomes, benefits and risks
- in terms of institutional conditions that facilitate and constrain

- We are working with … to survey the ways in which academics are extending their knowledge to the benefit of external social partners
Scholarship for direct benefit of external audiences

ENGAGED/ RESPONSIVE
- Teaching
- Service
- Research

Not ENGAGED/ Not RESPONSIVE
- Teaching
- Service
- Research
The UP survey sample

• Telephonic survey:
  • 2 159 academics: UP (34%), NMMU, CPUT, UCT, UFH
  • Response rate 62.5%, total 738 academics at UP
• Sample represents UP academic population well
  • Female 47%
  • White 81%
  • Professors 36%
  • Doctorates 55%
• SET 58%: Humanities: 20% Business & Commerce 14%: Education 13%

• Almost a quarter, 24% do not engage (UCT 7%, UFH 14%, NMMU 21%, CPUT 26%)
What is distinctive about CE at UP?

- Institutionalisation of promotion of Community Engagement: structures, responsibilities and functions, cascaded down to all levels
- Focus site for CE activity: township campus
- Clear policy framework linked to strategic mission, formally accepted to guide activity (*new policy 2012?*)
- The conceptual definition of Community Engagement: five-fold typology

=> Challenge = to embed CE in academic practice
A tension

• Curricular community engagement
• Research-related community engagement
  *(new notion related to academic scholarship)*

• Non-curricular community engagement
• Outreach
• Social development and empowerment
  *(old notion of community service)*

⇒ Differing interpretations in faculties and departments
How can evidence from the research project inform strategy?

What does the commitment to ‘community engagement’ mean as reflected in the practices of academics?
Who are the main social partners of academics at UP?
• Highest reported frequency within academic realm
• BUT patterns of partners?
• Principal Component analysis – 6 factors – inspection of means: Academic, health, government, firm, welfare, civil society partners
• How frequently does a single academic engage? 45% not at all or isolated instances
• How many partners do those who engage on a moderate to wide scale have? 36% = 1 partner, 12% = 2, 5% = 3 – small scale of networks
• Who is that one partner? 107 out of 206 = academics, 41 = health, 26 government, 22 firms, 8 welfare partners
In what knowledge fields are these more frequent interactions?

- 118 in health
- Engineering? Mostly academics and firms
- Social Science? Academic and government partners
- Firm partners? Engineering, Bus&Comm, Health, Science
- Welfare partners? Education
- Flagship projects in many faculties as focus of activity BUT scale of interaction amongst all academics?
Types of relationships?

- NOTE: Academics’ outreach activity not assessed
- Same analytical methodology – WAI, PCA: 5 factors

- Correlation with types of partner?
- Academic partners (most frequent) most strongly associated with engaged research type, as are government partners
- Community teaching type relationships associated with welfare partners, civil society and government (but low frequency)
Trends in practices of academics?

- Diverse patterns between faculties
- Partners and types of relationship promoted by Community Engagement policy are important - but scale?
- Those who engage most frequently are doing so with other academic partners and in research relationships
- Tension: traditional academic practices ↔ engaged practices ↔ community service
How can this data be useful?

• Inform strategic policy development and implementation by highlighting the types of relationship and partners currently existing in practice
• Identify and target types of relationship or partners or outputs that wish to promote strategically, in line with UP strategic vision
• Debate around the substantive meaning of community engagement
Thank you!

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