



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Higher education ought to impart service mindedness in the students. Learning activities have a visible impact for developing sensitivities towards community issues, gender disparities, social inequality etc. and in inculcating values and commitment to society. Mutual benefit through affiliation and interaction with groups or individuals who have an interest in the activities of the institution and ability to influence the actions, decisions, policies, practices or goals of the organization could help develop processes and strategies that relevantly sensitize students to social issues and contexts. Most of the extension activities are trying to build students leadership skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence and developing organizing skills in addition to make them responsible citizen with concern for society, environment and country at large. Hence student participation in these extension programmes will help them to inculcate better citizenship in the society. It would complement their academic learning through improved communication, increased co-operation, enhanced discipline and exposure to social reality. Various strategies could be adopted by the institution either through partnership with organizations for extension and community engagement or address it in their own way through institutional NGO or collaborate variously with various agencies for different activities. In this paper an attempt is made to assess the community engagement initiatives adopted by higher education institutions to foster citizenship and service mindedness in students.

Index Terms: Community Engagement, Higher Education & Extension Activities

1. Introduction:

Higher Education institutions are vested with the responsibility of grooming a generation of youth through providing quality education and skills, matching the requirements of a harmonious, self reliant and developed society, and values inclined to serve with selfless devotion in whatever capacity they assume and wherever they work. Society at large looks upon the institutions to address their needs and solving community-based problems through creating a pool of human resources which would be sensitive towards community issues, social inequality and gender issues. Extension activities performed by the institution in the community helps to build students' leadership skills, communication skills and making them responsible citizen with concern for society, environment and country at large.

2. Community Engagement Activities:

Learning activities have a visible impact for developing sensitivities towards community issues, gender disparities, social inequity etc. and in inculcating values and commitment to society. Mutual benefit from affiliation and interaction with groups or individuals who have an interest in the activities of the institution and the ability to influence the actions, decisions, policies, practices or goals of the organization help develop processes and strategies that relevantly sensitize students to the social issues and contexts. Strategies adopted by an institution for community engagement are listed below.

- ✓ Community development is implemented through extension and outreach activities of the institute's NGO called Rural Reconstruction Agency. It conducts a lot of programmes in the community involving the students.
- ✓ Students conduct computer literacy programmes for school children in the evening hours during specified days to impart basic computer knowledge.
- ✓ The programmes pertaining to community involvement is carried out by undergraduate students where students are encouraged to contribute food grains, clothes, and other stationery materials for nearby orphanage.
- ✓ On special occasions to mark and celebrate the event like world elders' day a group of staff and students visit orphanages and speak to the inmates and also provide them with eatables and fruits and seek their blessings on such occasion.
- ✓ The institute is associated with the activities of Sri Ramakrishna Mutt. Vivekananda Study Circle under the patronage of the Mutt is functioning in the institution, which conducts programmes aimed towards the holistic development of the students.
- ✓ Under village adoption programme, the institute has adopted Fishermen Community situated in the coastal area near the college. Students are involved in service activities in the community and thereby develop service orientation.

- ✓ The institute works closely with agencies such as Art of Living and conduct programmes to overcome stress situations, manage negative emotions, build confidence which are essential for holistic development of the students.
- ✓ The institution also offers customized Yoga Classes as a part of Certificate Programme on Corporate Yoga & Mind control, which is designed in collaboration with Integral Yoga Centre.
- ✓ Students are required to conduct field work by associating with NGO's and involving in their activities. In these agencies students take up independent programmes aimed towards Charity and Philanthropy. This serves to promote institution neighbourhood -community network contributing to good citizenship and service orientation.
- ✓ A Unit of National Service Scheme is functioning in the institution. The unit conducts regular activities involving all students from undergraduate courses. The institute has an active NSS unit which conducts various programmes including rural camps, blood donation camps, old cloth distribution, afforestation campaign, Environment awareness.
- ✓ Rural camps are conducted every year in order to provide an opportunity for group learning and living together. This contributes to good citizenship and holistic development of the students.
- ✓ Through its association with hospitals, the students conducts health check-up and medical camp as well as Blood donation camps in the community.
- ✓ The placement & Training unit of the institute conduct mega job fair every year in the College in collaboration with Dept. of Human Resource Development of Govt. of India. This attracts a lot of youngsters in the community to participate in the opportunity and strengthen its neighborhood network. During last few years Job fair provided over 1,000 jobs to eligible aspirants.
- ✓ The college has an active unit of the Red-Cross. Through involving in the activities of the Red-Cross, students learn responsibility & good citizenship. The Red Cross unit members work in close collaboration with the community in Humanitarian relief and Disaster Management. Training is provided on regular basis in order to develop competency in disaster handling.
- ✓ Besides the Social Service Forum involves students in social service activities.
- ✓ Life-Line Database : The institution recently started an innovative way of supporting needy people by providing blood instantaneously by creating an extensive database of blood donors. The information including the list of donors is put on the website of the college so that for any emergency requirement, the public can avail the facility through contacting the college.
- ✓ Recognition for Public Service : The institution identifies persons of eminence in public service and felicitate them with honour and awards every year. This is intended to motivate spirit of public service.
- ✓ Faculty Association for Social Service : The Faculty members of the college has formed an association which collects tiny contribution during different occasions. This money is used to provide small material help in the form of wall clocks/ books/ water purifier, storage tank etc. for nearby Govt. Schools.
- ✓ Social Research: (1) Some faculty members are doing research on Problems of children from under privileged sections so as to secure them social justice through influencing Govt. policies and public attitude. (2) Some of the PG students choose problems in areas related to children particularly students in distress so as to recommend welfare measures for empowerment. (3) Apart from above the institute on its own is pursuing Funding for research studies on Effectiveness of Govt. schemes on the intended beneficiaries and particularly the children of school going age in backward community.
- ✓ Welfare: (1) Substantial Fee concession is offered for students from backward and marginalized sections of the society and its own undergraduate students who does not have sufficient means to join post graduate courses of the college. (2) The institute also offers substantial Fee concession to its own students from backward sections for admission to Post graduate Courses of the college. (3) As a part of its activities, the NGO under the College conducts survey in various schools to identify students from underprivileged sections who have health problems and sicknesses and provide free medical aid from Hospital.
- ✓ Milk Producers Co-Operative Union: The college has long standing relationship with MPCOU and students involve in market research to help business improvement to benefit farmers.
- ✓ Special Schools: Students of the college render service to improve operational efficacy of nearby special schools and conducts various programmes for the special children.
- ✓ Sister Institutions: The institute offers consultancy in social service to its entire sister institutions working in the community and participates in programmes such as Vanamahotsava, Environment Awareness, and Cleanliness Campaign etc.

3. Institutional Mechanism to Track Student Involvement:

The institution has put in place lot of mechanisms to keep track of the students involvement in community engagement activities.

- ✓ Certificates are awarded to motivate students to involve in the social service activities.

- ✓ In some courses community service activities are part of the CC & EC (Co-curricular and extra-curricular) for which internal marks are awarded to supplement the marks obtained in the curriculum.
- ✓ In some courses these activities are compulsory for awarding marks as part of field practicum.
- ✓ The college has instituted prize for Best Social Worker which will be awarded on Annual Day by the Chief guest. This serves as a recognition to promote student involvement in social work activities.
- ✓ The certificate obtained through participation in National Service Scheme activities is considered favourable to obtain certain jobs and preference for admission for higher studies.
- ✓ In the Job Fair, students serve as volunteers to assist the company representative as well as public.
- ✓ The institutional NGO serves as a mechanism to ensure student participation in community activities by involving students in field work practicum.

4. Stakeholder Perception of Community Engagement Activities:

Stakeholder Perception of overall performance and quality of the institution depends largely on the community engagement activities initiated.

- ✓ Students: Students expect growth & development of their personality through confidence building, service mindedness, and sense of responsibility. This would help to gain employability and career advancement.
- ✓ Parents: Parents look for discipline oriented growth in their children so that they will become useful and responsible citizens of the country.
- ✓ Teachers: Teachers look for holistic development of the students through knowledge gained by learning, and qualities developed such as discipline, honesty, service mindedness, compassion to fellowmen and respect to others.
- ✓ Employers: Employers look for industrious, honest, co-operative, helpful and competent employees.
- ✓ Community: Students are moulded into good citizens through quality and service oriented education to build a strong community for the country.
- ✓ University: The University expects that each passing out student is moulded by the institute to be a responsible and useful citizen to the society.

5. Planning and Organizing Extension and Outreach Programmers:

The extension and outreach programmes are well integrated into the institutional plan.

S.No	Extension and Outreach Programme	Institutional Plan
1	Institutional NGO activities	Co-ordinator prepares annual plan in consultation with the Executive body.
2	Computer literacy programmes for school children	The computer science department designs schedule and executes with the help of school authorities.
3	Social Service Activities	Social Service Cell formulated by the under graduate students.
4	Programmes for under-privileged people	The college in consultation with beneficiary organizations
5	Activities of Vivekananda Study Circle	The college maintains liaison with Sri Ramakrishna Mutt.
6	Village adoption programme	Social work department and the village adopted.
7	Art of Living Youth Programmes	Authorities of Art of Living agency negotiates the requirement with the college
8	Certificate Program on Corporate Yoga & Mind control	The college is offering a certificate course exclusively on this.
9	Field work of Students	As per specifications in the curriculum, the faculty of social work department takes care of the activities.
10	National Service Scheme	Programme Officer of the NSS Unit of the college in consultation with University.
11	Rural camps	The NSS Unit of the college in consultation with the needy villages.
12	Programmes at Hospital	The college is in consultation with hospital authorities.
13	Mega job fair	The Placement & Training Cell of the college plans in consultation with Dept. of HRD and Employer Companies.
14	Programmes in collaboration with Red-Cross Society	The Red Cross wing of the college in consultation with Red Cross unit of the District.

15	Social Service Forum activities	Student union Activity planned in consultation with the teachers.
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6. Outreach Programmes and Their Impact on the Overall Development of Students:

The extension and outreach programmes are aimed to build such qualities which would contribute to just and humane society, equity and oneness, spiritual and personality development, character formation and preparedness to face challenges.

S.No	Extension and outreach programme	Impact on the overall development of students
1	NGO Activities	Sensitivity to social problems
2	Computer literacy programmes for school children	Skill building for under privileged sections
3	Social Service Activities	Humanitarian outlook
4	Programmes for Under-privileged people	Rights & Social Justice
5	Activities of Vivekananda Study Circle	Spirituality & Personality development
6	Village adoption programme	Community Service
7	Art of Living Youth Programmes	Character formation
8	Certificate Program on Corporate Yoga & Mind control	Practicing Self control
9	Field work of students	Responding to realities
10	National Service Scheme	National Integration
11	Rural camps	Collective living
12	Programmes at Hospital	Concern for marginalized
13	Mega job fair	Career building
14	Programmes in collaboration with Red-Cross Society	Preparedness to face challenges
15	Social Service Forum activities	All-round development

The benefits of these programmes have been observed through student performance in classroom learning and exemplary behaviour.

7. Centre for Science Education Activities:

(a) Objectives: The Centre is devoted to the popularization of Science & Engineering Education. The objectives of the centre are

- ✓ Popularization of Scientific & Engineering thoughts in the society.
- ✓ Design models for the popularization of science according to national and regional needs, encouraging populations to embrace science as a means to improve the quality of life and achieve sustainable and equitable development
- ✓ Current issues in various areas of knowledge
- ✓ Train science dissemination Professional.
- ✓ To provide advisory and consulting service on science and technology related issues, and promote the transfer of scientific and technological achievements;
- ✓ To advocate scientific spirit, popularize scientific knowledge, and disseminate scientific ideas and methods.
- ✓ Defend the dignity of science, popularize the advancement of technology, and develop the scientific and educational activities for the young people, so as to improve the scientific literacy of the whole nation.

(b) Activities:

- ✓ Popular Lectures on Challenges in Science & Technology
- ✓ Workshops on Engineering Education
- ✓ Science Model Competition for High School Students
- ✓ Science Foundation Examination & Merit Scholarship for Xth & XIIth Students
- ✓ Medical Exhibition
- ✓ Online Certification Programs in Nano-Technology
- ✓ Renewable Energy Initiative Programs & Consultation
- ✓ Quarterly Newsletter/Magazine
- ✓ Best Innovative School & Science Teacher Award
- ✓ Free online study materials for 10th, 11th & 12th Standards of the Country

(c) Programmes:

- ✓ Popular Lecture Series
- ✓ Half-day/One- day Workshop on Engineering Education
- ✓ Talent Search Exam

- ✓ Science Magazine
- ✓ Science Model Exhibition & Competition
- ✓ Free Downloadable Study Materials
- ✓ Faculty Development Programme for Science & Commerce

8. Intended Outcome of Community Engagement Activities:

S.No	Extension Activity	Objectives & Expected Outcome	Values and skills inculcated in addition to academic learning
1	NSS Activities	Service to society & Civic Consciousness	Team work, Co-operation, Collaboration, Concern for fellowmen.
2	Red -Cross	Develop preparedness to respond to crises. & Responsibility during disasters	Team work, leadership, Humanitarian relief.
3	NGO Activities	Promote Social Service & Problem free society.	Problem Identification Skills, Helping attitude for under-privileged people.
4	Vivekananda Study Circle	Spiritual Emancipation & Devotion to self-less service	Service to Humanity, Self control& Self discipline
5	Village Adoption	To converge verity of services to one community & Community development	Social justice, Communication, networking and advocacy.
6	Social Service Activities through Student forum	Helping People &Sensitising to the problems and sufferings of others.	Social Responsibility, Emotional Intelligence
7	Field Activities through MSW Students	Develop competence in providing Professional service & Better understanding of social health.	Community service, Rapport building and joint exploration
8	Participation in Extension & Health Services	Promote health and Well being& Enhancing accessibility and affordability of Health schemes.	Social Obligation to citizens, & Organizing and operational skills.
9	Centre for Science Education Activities	Popularizing science Education & Better informed community	Eliminating ignorance & Education and communication
10	Life-Line Database	Emergency Service & Fast response	Humanitarian Service & Mutual Help
11	Recognition for Public Service	Encouragement & Motivation	Role models for future & Achievement Orientation
12	Faculty Association for Social Service	Set examples to Students & Dedication to community	Selfless service & Resource mobilization

The diverse range of community engagement activities focus on the growth, self-reliance and sustainability in the community through the following ways.

- ✓ Promoting active participation of community for better qualitative human resource development.
- ✓ Providing essential services in the field of health, education, economic development, social development and spiritual Development.
- ✓ Facilitating the empowerment of the under privileged in the process of social development.
- ✓ Undertaking research work with regard to socio-economic issues.
- ✓ Capacity building of poor communities to facilitate them in improving their living conditions.
- ✓ Assisting communities in sustainable development and management of natural resources.
- ✓ Creating awareness among the masses about the importance of education, health, good sanitation practices and communal harmony.
- ✓ Dialogue and networking with like-minded voluntary organizations.

9. Conclusion:

Most of the extension activities are trying to build students leadership skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence and developing organizing skills in addition to make them responsible citizen with concern for society, environment and country at large. Hence student participation in these extension programmes will help them to inculcate better citizenship in the society. It would complement their academic learning through improved communication, increased co-operation, enhanced discipline and exposure to social reality. At the same time such activities ensure the involvement of the community and contribute to the development.

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