

University Social Responsibility (USR) and Community Engagement in Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The University Social Responsibility (USR) has been widely discussed in Thailand mostly through the Service Learning (SL), which is a potential university's mechanism that assists in transformation of teaching and learning to develop social responsibility and an ethic of service. SL shows that students and instructors develop social responsibility and leadership, and also gain personal and social skills. The objectives of study are as followings, (a) to examine the new role of universities in the USR, (b) to review a case study of USR activity of an on - going project performed by Thammasat University, and (c) to review the USR application by investigating university instructors' willingness in participate the USR project to build community strengths. The study's important task is to examine how to introduce the idea of University - USR to support building community strengths that is coherent with civic movement. The study found that orientation of the SL is placed on its effectiveness and its ability to address community needs at a structural level. Through participation in the SL, students may develop understandings of the nature of social problems and of strategies for fundamental social change. Moreover, the study examines potential aspects of the SL and identifies an agenda for strengthening two key factors (a) trusts of the projects' instructors, staffs, peers, community members, and employers, and (b) duration and intensity of the projects must be flexible and appropriated to the defined objectives. The SL do consider not only short-term but also long-term projects in USR policy.

Keywords: University Social Responsibility, Service Learning, participation, community needs, leadershi

Introduction

In the past decade, many universities are no longer independent from the corporate sphere. Embracing with this corporation becomes a necessity for university's contemporary policy. The University Social Responsibility (USR) can be broadly defined as the strategic commitment to considering wider society as a stakeholder of the university, to acting accordingly through service learning (Kuasirikun, 2010, pp. 67- 73). Since 2011, the concept of the USR, which intellectually underlies within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), has integrated in Thammasat University's policy. Theoretically, the USR itself is still at an early stage of development. Its future progress should relate to the identification of more specific groups of external stakeholders, and the pursuit of policies which benefit them, as well as internal stakeholders.

Currently, higher education institutions earn billions baht in research funds, granted by national government or related institutions, which literally come from taxpayers. Everyday universities consume those grants; in return, provide society with a human resource and research developments. However, not all tax payers have their major concerns on those researches, besides they are more curiously to evidently see if the projects being actual built are worth with their taxes. Even though, the fundamental role of university is to provide higher education to the society, Fukukawa (2010) suggested that an interest in and awareness of the USR and its activity steadily grew over the first decade of the 21th century. Due to the growing importance of the CSR, which in the last decade has moved beyond the business sectors to the educational institutions, universities generate more than academic knowledge and provide more experts/professionals in needed fields. This study aims to seek how the university could generate or contribute the advantages related – engage to the mutual support meanwhile, keeping its own business continuity plan running as usual.

Meanwhile, the work of the USR in university is not specific assigned to university as an organization but in contrary it focuses on the usages of human resources in university for their best advantages. Therefore, the eventually goal of this research is to introduce the idea of the USR to support building community strengths that is according with the civic movement.

Objectives of the Study

This study set its objectives into three objectives that are:

1. To examine the new role of universities in the University Social Responsibility (USR)
2. To review a case study of USR activity of an on - going project performed by Thammasat University.
3. To reveal an applicable of the USR by investigating university instructors' willingness to participate in developing the USR to build community strengths.

Literature Review

The study reviews that how universities implement USR policy and engaging community. The study has reviewed in three aspects including definition of USR, USR implementation, and reflection of USR as follows.

Rionda (2002) summarized the definition of USR as transparent business practices that are based on ethical values, compliance with legal requirements, and respect for people, communities, and the environment. Increasingly, stakeholders expect that companies should be more environmentally and socially responsible for conducting their business. In the business community, the USR is alternatively referred to as "corporate citizenship," which essentially means that a company should be a "good neighbor" within its host community. They have just good management practices, which should give the competitive pressures of super capitalism regardless of how much little they benefit society (Reich, 2007). In light of this, it can be implied that providing the USR should however more or less bring benefits back to the organization. Guidelines for Universities Engaging in Social Responsibility (2015-2017) remarked that principles of the USR consists of 6 processes comprising of

1. established as a management model working from the top to the bottom;
2. be acknowledged and evaluated their impacts by the university;
3. maintain consisted dialogue with stakeholders;
4. transparency of university in evaluation of the results of the dialogue with stakeholders; and
5. clearly emphasize specific parts of USR and know how to prioritize.

The USR relevant stakeholder could be divided into two classifications: (a) university meet business and (b) university meet Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Guidelines for Universities Engaging in Social Responsibility (2015-2017). The interaction between academia and business is a potential driving force in meeting societal needs and providing solutions to press social problems. Therefore, such interaction should be considered a top priority for both sectors. It is important that each sector provide a mutual respect for the other, and that academic freedom co-exists alongside a commitment to working with business. Moreover, universities should be able to identify ongoing business needs in order to address topics that add value to the business communities they serve. Building on initial partnerships – based on a single research project run within a given university research team – universities management should look to create long-term strategic partnerships that are embedded within the university's mission and the relevant company's development strategy (Davey, 1985). The university management should encourage academic engagement with the business sector. Whereas the university meet NGO/ mutual need and overlapping fields of work/ types of cooperation. It is a common practice for the business sector to cooperate in joint research projects with universities in order to solve a given research need. This is particularly useful for small and medium-companies without their own research & development department. Both NGOs and universities face challenges that can be met by mutual support and exchange of various services and know-how. Educational services and skilled workforce. As meanwhile Involving students in USR has not only through the volunteering they do, but also through service learning projects, participation in research activities and even “as partners in governance and decision-making, providing for their representation on the Board (or equivalent) and on its advisory committees” (Martin, 2015).

Encompassing the implementation of the action-reflection conditions through a strategy of deliberate psychological education (Sprinthall, 1991). Moreover, taking significant roles in real contexts, balanced with systematic occasions for the careful integration of the meanings of experience, in a context of support provided by professors and colleagues, with temporal continuity. In case of under the UNIBILITY project, the study has identified a set of USR practices that have students as the main recipients and/or participants (Resch, Fritz, & Uras, 2016). Relying on UNIBILITY's service learning projects, this section will draw on the four main dimensions of the involvement of students in USR. Students were encouraged to write document their experiences by using a logbook, a personal registration of activities, feelings and thoughts. It is from these documents that the students' quotations reproduced below are taken. For acting of students must have opportunities to use their skills and knowledge in their own communities, have a significant role in real

contexts, and develop plans and strategies for the resolution of specific problems. Although this debate about USR and its practice in Thailand academic institute have relatively unexplored in international literature, international trade gave stimulus to the development of USR in Thailand. Various Thai professional sectors ranging from academics, government agencies, charitable organization, business community and regulators have explored relevance of USR (Kuasirikun, 2010). Thammasat University is one of a most well – known universities in Thailand. TU has been performing various USR activities initiating integrated in its courses such as, as part of their extra-curricular programme during the 2007 academic year, the project was designed to carry out a capacity building program on community-based tourism planning and management for 11 local communities in Thailand. It has an emphasis on how community-based tourism can be better planned and managed by local community in order to achieve environmental/ economic/ culture/ social sustainability as well as to provide quality visitor experience and hospitality destination.

Benditt (1990) strongly claimed that “educators and the public at large believe that one of the main roles of higher education is to develop critical abilities, including the capacity to deal with the constants barrage of new information and general, the pressures of a changing social and physical environment not only on a national but on a global scale” (Benditt, 2016). In the same way, pointed that “organizations today and in the future will continue to be evaluated by their commitment to ethical behavior and social responsibility.” Perrott (1996) also agreed as well as others. “Although consumers of public services are of primary importance, there are other stakeholders whose interests must be considered if an organization is to pursue a reasonable level of social responsibility” (Murphy, 2012).

Research Method

Quantitative and qualitative methods are combined in a systematic approach to addressing policy University. In addition, Service Learning (SL) method is applied as an analyzing tool in solving particle and policy issues in Thammasat University. Furthermore, this research conducts a questionnaire survey with use of a snowball method in Thammasat University.

Results

Findings of the study can be demonstrated as follows.

Guidelines of Service learning (SL) Program in University

SL entails the active involvement of students and community engagement, which set program to do with community under curriculum university Policy, which sets in each subjects of registration for every student grade one must compulsory study and do activity of SL based on a diffident knowledge background to community in UP101 and encourage other curriculum promote SL Policy in curriculum. The students start to SL based on concept problems based learning or problem based areas, which students must learn by themselves for solving a “need” identified in the community, the clarification of skills or knowledge to be developed, and the provision of spaces intentionally organized for reflecting upon the experiences. Thammasat University has initiative open SL community engagement since 2011 in curriculum. For learning to occur in service-learning, there must be careful planning and clear objectives. The experience must be linked integrally with academic courses, and the experience must include structured reflection. The most critical factor in the service component is the local agency which provides the setting for students to work. It is important for the agency to have authentic roots in the community and to provide continuity for programs in which students serve and for the relationships which short-term service-learning students build.

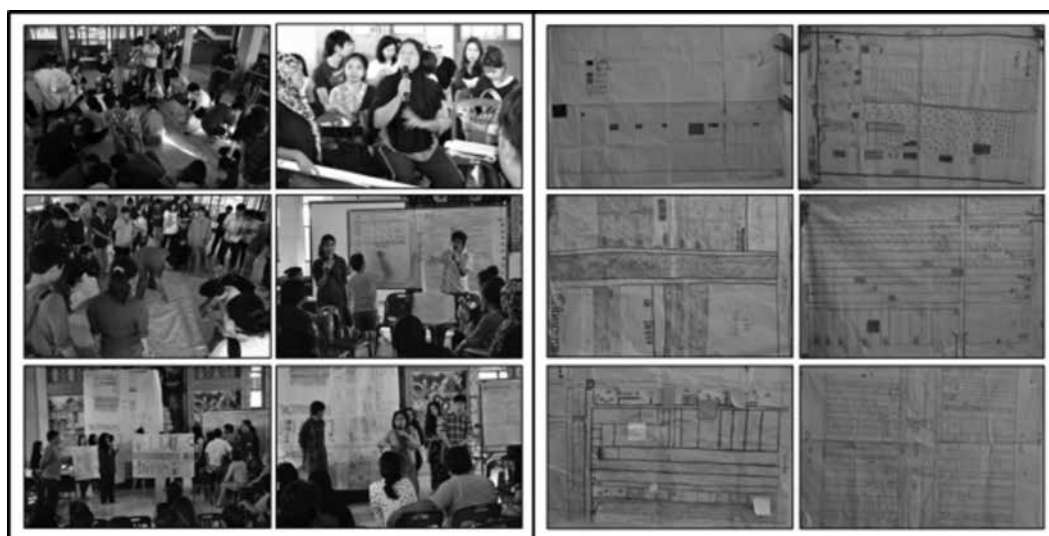
Evaluating a Case Study of SL Activity Performed by Students of Thammasat University in Collaboration with Community Organization Development Institute and Phuet-Udom Community

This case study reviews the idea of using concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) for building community strengths in UP 416 Seminar in Planning course, which is run by the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Thammasat University. In this UP 416 course, the 48 students did a field survey with 50 local residents for data collection by Map Making Approach Technique (MMAT). The students analyzed problems of land tenure in Phuet – Udom, a rural community deriving from expansion of the plant industry. If residents in the area still cannot find a way to bring stability to their land. they may be dismissed by the land owner to change the area for the plant industry.

The Community Organizations Development Institute or CODI, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning Students, Thammasat University, prepared to assist the villagers in Phuet - Udom community in creating stability in their own land through a process called “Atlas District” or “Map Making Approach Technique” (MMAT), one of the main techniques in using Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI). This process is to an increase potential land use information system for rural areas that have not data based information for future development. The process also helps in enabling local people to understand the nature of their living space. Pros and Cons about the problems in their area. To help them to develop their capacity to deal with various problems that arise. All steps in the conduct of the students along with the residents that the development project will go in any direction. University SL Program have a duty to consult pushing work and assistance throughout the project to make the project a success, even more effectively. The aim of the participated villagers, who engage in a project-driven for local residents are to learn the procedure in troubleshooting itself without waiting for help from the public sector alone.

This process of the SL, the students have to cooperate and to discuss with residents in community along with teachers and CODI officers. In the initial stages of the map making approach district. The students encourage the residents to jointly work on a preliminary map assembly with the locals and a summary of the problem by segmenting a preliminary and a village level prior to the conduct of the project as a whole next level. The main goal is to make people understand the process of the project in order to build database for future development of the community.

Figure 1. Map Making on Land Tenure Information System with Student and Residents



University Instructors' Willingness to Participate in Developing University – SL for Building Community Strengths

The USR concept for building community strength is based on full usage of the university's human resources. This research aims at investigating attitude of university's instructor toward the concept to show applicable of the concept itself in term of university instructor' willingness to participate in developing university – SL for building community strengths. Since, attitude of university instructor is an essential factor to promote the concept of university – SL, thus understanding the attitudes will reflect promptness of university and how to give instructor an incentive to participate in developing university – SL.

First, this research explored university instructor's attitude towards SL which show the majority of respondents agree that SL activities could drive their university into using university's human resource more efficient and they will trust more in their university, if the university include more USR activities at 20 and 17 respondents out of 43, respectively. This implies positive attitude of university instructor toward SL activities. The good attitude is the first step to embrace the concept of university – SL in the future.

Figure 2. Attitude of University's Instructor Toward SL

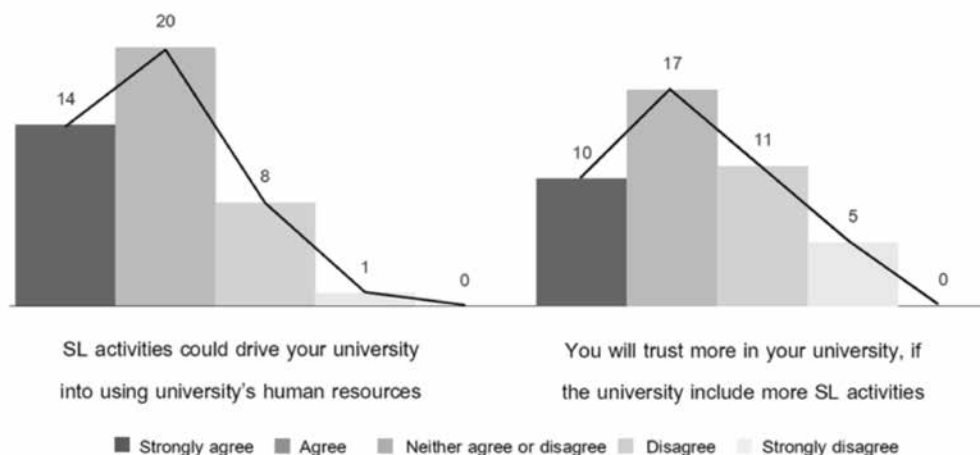


Table 1. Means Score of SL Experience and Willingness to Participate in SL Activities

Have you ever experienced working in USR activity?	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes, I have experienced before			
- You are willing to participate in USR activities hosted by your university, even if your duty of working as instructor might be increased	3.79	24	1.062
- You are willing to add/adjust contents in your class to educate your students concerning more on social services for supporting community development	4.08	24	0.929
- You are willing to add/adjust professional practicing of students under your supervision to concern more on social services for supporting community development	3.96	24	0.999
- You are willing to and ready to adjust/ enhance your teaching in accord with USR policy of your university	3.63	24	1.403
No, I did not have experience before			
- You are willing to participate in USR activities hosted by your university, even if your duty of working as instructor might be increased	3.37	19	0.831
- You are willing to add/adjust contents in your class to educate your students concerning more on social services for supporting community development	3.84	19	0.834
- You are willing to add/adjust professional practicing of students under your supervision to concern more on social services for supporting community development	3.95	19	0.621
- You are willing to and ready to adjust/ enhance your teaching in accord with USR policy of your university	3.53	19	0.697

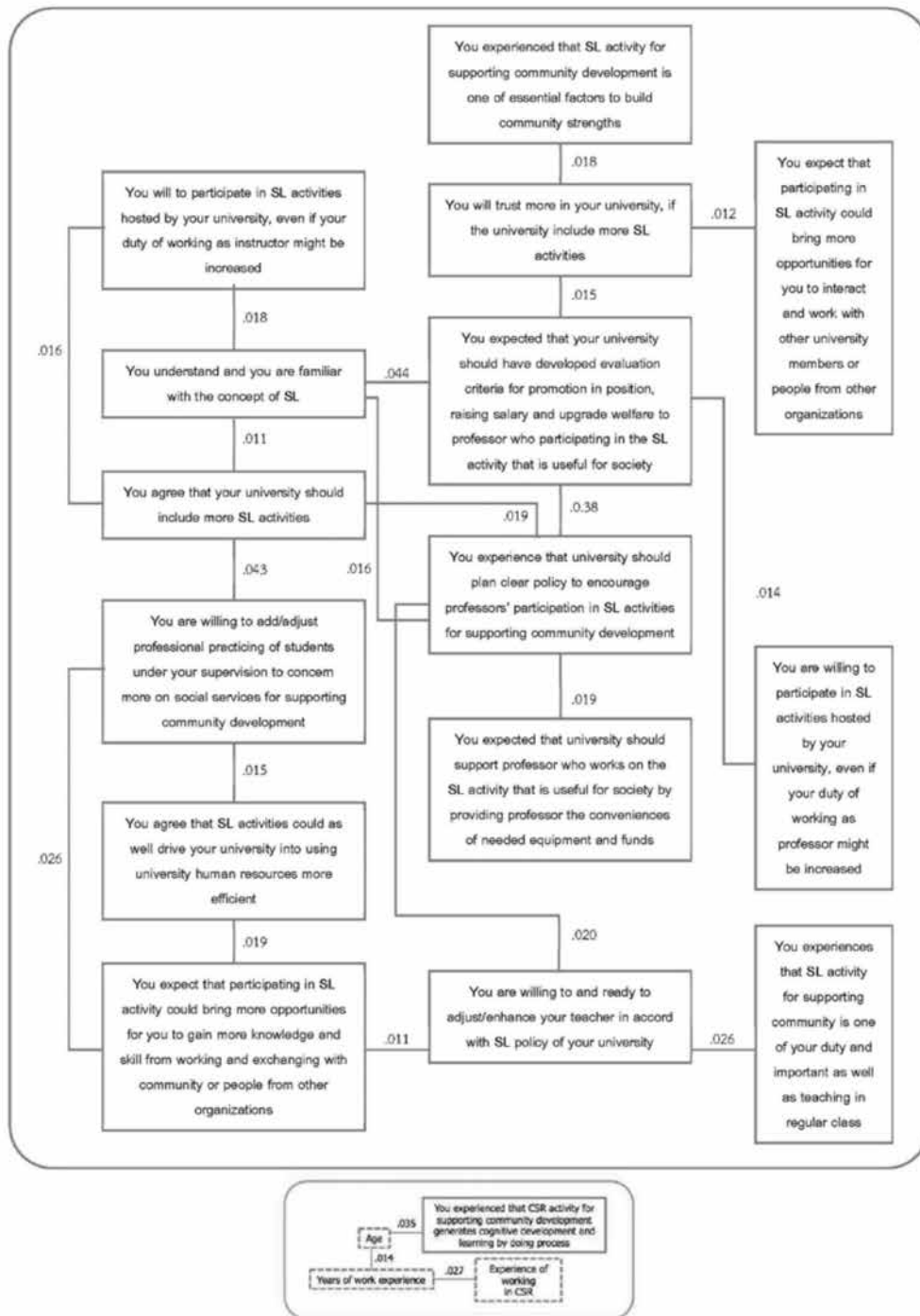
Table 2. Means Score of SL Experience and Expectation After Participating in SL Activities

Have you ever experienced working in USR activity?	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes, I have experienced before			
- You expect that your university should have developed evaluation criteria for promotion in position, raising salary and upgrade welfare to instructor who participating in the SL activity that is useful for society	3.92	24	1.248
- You expect that university should support instructor who works on the SL activity that is useful for society by providing instructor the conveniences of needed equipment and funds	4.50	24	0.780
- You expect that participating in SL activity could bring more opportunities for you to gain more knowledge and skill from working and exchanging with community or people from other organizations	4.33	24	0.816
- You expect that participating in SL activity could bring more opportunities for you to interact and work with other university members or people from other organizations	4.33	24	0.702
No, I did not have experience before			
- You expect that your university should have developed evaluation criteria for promotion in position, raising salary and upgrade welfare to instructor who participating in the SL activity that is useful for society	3.53	19	0.612

- You expect that university should support instructor who works on the SL activity that is useful for society by providing instructor the conveniences of needed equipment and funds	3.84	19	0.688
- You expect that participating in SL activity could bring more opportunities for you to gain more knowledge and skill from working and exchanging with community or people from other organizations	3.68	19	0.478
- You expect that participating in SL activity could bring more opportunities for you to interact and work with other university members or people from other organizations	3.63	19	0.597

One assumption of this research is to find out whether there is any significant difference between the group of respondents with and without experience working in SL activities. To confirm that this research provides 2 tables to ratify the difference between those two groups. In Table 1. shows the difference means score between the group of respondents with and without experience working in SL activities reflecting their level of willingness to participate in USR activities hosted by their university. The result demonstrates that means score of group of respondents with experience has higher score than group without experience in all variables. In the same way of the level of their expectation after participating in SL activities that respondents with experience has a higher means score rather than respondents without experience.

Figure 3. Correlation Between Variable Group of Respondents and Level of Willingness to Participate in USR Activities



Moreover, this research has found the correlation between the variables that can be used to predict that one opinion will reflect other opinions with significance of 0.05 level (each significant level indicated between variables). The correlation of variable shown in two groups of relationship which presents in Figure 2. The first group is correlation of variable that is dependent variable and the second group. At the bottom, is correlation of variable between independent (show in dotted square) and dependents variable. From this correlation diagram could imply that respondents' attribute that are age, years of work experience and experience of working in SL have correlation with the level of experience that confirms working in SL activities for supporting community development could generate cognitive development and learning by doing process.

Discussion

There is clearly a growing emphasis on the social responsibility of universities, and universities across Thailand is responding to this by increased action in the sphere of social responsibility and increased attention to the need to strategize their USR.

1. There is also a growing volume of useful materials to aid this transition. The foregoing guidelines are intended to comprise a useful starting point, while the list of resources below provide further orientation for working with external stakeholders and for the development of the USR. The full development of USR depends both on the enthusiasm and effort of relevant people within and outside of the university, as well as on the existence of a strategic investment at management level.

2. Considering of reflection on the SL, the USR should be a priority for each strategic development plan as it empowers individuals and groups to foster partnerships and strengthen relationships between higher education and society to tackle societal issues and shape the future of higher education. The SL reflection introduce on the USR in the academic curriculum, this involves not only a cross-curricular approach to the USR in various courses, but also the provision of courses specifically devoted to this topic. Specific courses should involve a systematic reflection over experience.

3. As a result, accreditation of engagement in these topics must be considered. Reflection should consider both in the emotional (such as a first impression related to the service learning experiences) and the instrumental (for instance, a description of the context of the project) dimension of learning. Length of each service learning project can be up to a 12-week period.

4. Institutional support

4.1 Student engagement must be promoted and supported by teachers, staff, USR departments and student unions. Thammasat University policy should encourage more SL projects in the academic curriculum.

4.2 The USR must be acknowledged and prioritized in strategic plans and other institutional documents.

4.3 Trust has to be cherished, be it related to teachers, staff and peers, community members, employers, etc.

4.4 Time: The duration and intensity of the projects must be flexible and appropriate to the objectives defined. SL do consider not only short-term but also long-term projects.

4.5 Impact: The promotion of soft skills: communication skills, flexibility and adaptation, conflict management.

4.6 Students' personal change, featuring a significant diversity of competencies and learning domains, such as patience, flexibility, realization, worldview, awareness, recognition, responsibility.

Conclusions

Educating personal and social responsibility may make a university's cultural shift, however, its results bring benefit to society as a whole. Practicing the URS, universities are becoming more and more important participants in the creation of sustainable social development, because connecting the learning process with economic activities can affect the creation of sustainable dynamics as well as the community's economic and social development. University should encourage to have connections with community and base their academic and organizational responsibility on ethical concepts that will correspond with satisfying the needs of community in which they operate. This defines university's social responsibility as its ability to disseminate and practice a set of principles and values through four key activities: management, education, research and additional activities. This will include responding to the legitimate interests of all the stakeholders based on the principles of good practice, developing strong college/community partnerships which reflect quality and reciprocity, teaching a sociological imagination, incorporating advocacy and community development opportunities, and developing evaluation and assessment strategies, which will assure continued program improvement.

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