

The Role of Academic Publications in Community Service

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Community service has been described as “services which are identified by an institution of higher education, through formal or informal consultation with local nonprofit, governmental, and community-based organizations, as designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs, including such fields as health care, child care, literacy training, education (including tutorial services), welfare, social services, transportation, housing and neighborhood improvement, public safety, crime prevention and control, recreation, rural development, and community improvement”¹. In recent years, the service-learning movement has become a major presence within higher education. Community service in broad terms are programmes linked to higher education that involve participants in activities designed to deliver social benefits to a particular community in ways that teach the participants to work jointly towards achieving the common goal. In order for research universities to play a more significant role in public service, it has been highlighted that academic institutions needed to redefine service as scholarship and to make knowledge more accessible to the community in order to achieve public service². Public service and outreach have been described as hallmarks of the university of the future and for a university to be relevant and sustainable, it must be involved not only in teaching and research but be actively pursuing service and outreach activities³. However, it must be realized that participation in community service usually involves a degree of personal sacrifice in terms of time, remuneration and convenience⁴.

In line with this description of community service, it is therefore pertinent to view academic publications as having a potentially important role in community service. The academic institution reflects a cooperative setting whereby various strengths and expertise are harnessed to address specific problems for which a solution may be sought. In this pursuit of knowledge, research will contribute to new discoveries through

intellectual inquiry which can be further developed to larger intellectual patterns through scholarly communication and integration across disciplines. However such knowledge and skills will not be beneficial if they are not disseminated to the community at large. It is therefore important that academicians and researchers be aware of their responsibility to deploy the knowledge and skills generated for application in problem solving, service to society as well as to aid policy decisions that will hopefully lead to a better quality of life.

In conducting research towards knowledge generation, it is imperative that researchers take cognizance of the fact that sound ethics and professionalism are tremendously important. This is to ensure that research findings are accurate and reliable and can be utilized for improvement, problem solving or for the design of new modalities for the betterment of society; may it be in the disciplines of health care, environment, literacy rate, education or public safety. The International Medical University (IMU) views community service as a significant component of its teaching and learning programmes and has intensified efforts to ensure that the university plays a significant role in nurturing both teachers and students to respond to the needs of the community through the conduct of community service activities including having its own online journal viz. The International e-Journal of Science, Medicine and Education (IeJSME). Education and relearning are very effective tools that can drive change and thus academic publications are vital to inform the community at large of new knowledge and its potential applications.

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