

# Community engagement praxis at the University of South Africa

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## Abstract

Praxis: this is a concept that depicts how policy is disaggregated into practice. In many instances one finds huge gaps in this area. With regard to community engagement at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in South Africa, there was a need to investigate the extent to which policies on community engagement (specially the 2008 Community Engagement and Outreach Policy) filtered down into staff's key performance area (KPA) agreements and job adverts. The major findings were that there is a gap in terms of how community engagement has been infused into academic staff KPA agreements that still emphasise teaching as well as research. In terms of time allocation, these areas take up on average 80 per cent of academic staff time annually for junior lecturer to full professor grades, whilst community engagement takes up on average 10 per cent for senior lecturer to full professor grades and about seven and a half per cent for lecturer and junior lecturer grades. Surprisingly, the KPA agreements for junior lecturers and lecturers allow a zero per cent time allocation to community engagement. In addition, the appointment and promotion criteria for professors and associate professors demand excellence in teaching and learning as well as research. Community engagement for non-academic staff is not well defined and this responsibility is left to be shared between the staff member and their line managers for inclusion in the KPA agreements that must be based on the job descriptions. A review of generic as well as specific job descriptions as stipulated in adverts retrieved confirmed the absence of or minimal reference to community engagement. However, the revised Community Engagement and Outreach Policy of 2013 aims to address some of the gaps cited, bearing in mind that one of the guiding principles acknowledges Unisa as an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution.

**Key words:** community engagement, praxis, institutions of higher education, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

The term community engagement can be traced in history to concepts such as service. Bringle and Hatcher (2000, 273) noted then that there was a revival

of and growing interest in the manner in which service could be integrated into higher education. Hence the scholarship of service was seen as a catalyst in transforming the nature of work done by academic staff, enhancing student learning as well as fulfilling university missions. The scholarship of service would connect institutions of higher learning to their communities. Debating the need to nurture an ethos of community engagement, Berberet (2002, 91) maintains that the concept was not new in higher education. He reflects and reaches the conclusion that community engagement was part of the historic service mission of institutions of higher education (IHE). Community service (also interchangeably known as community outreach) was routinely included as integral to IHE mission statements.

However, the concept of service remained poorly defined as well as dissociated from research and teaching. Community service also remained poorly conceptualised in terms of scholarship. This is a point that Pienaar (2012, 40) also observes in terms of community engagement. In her words, Pienaar (2012, 40) writes:

Despite numerous attempts by scholars to clarify “community engagement”, it remains a vague concept in South African higher education institutions. Conceptual frameworks are sorely lacking and there are no universally accepted standards against which to measure the impact of community engagement.

Universities in South Africa are grappling with the concept of community engagement (known in other circles as community service, community outreach, engaged scholarship, community development or simply service). Unisa, also located in South Africa, is no exception and likewise, the institution is continuously defining its moments and space with regard to the subject matter (Unisa 2011a, 1). The manner in which Unisa has been involved with community engagement is best summarised by an extract from one of its publicly available reports of 2011. The report states:

Unisa is faced with the challenge of creating an environment for University-community engagement that facilitates and advances quality management, sustainability and social accountability. A quality management system for community engagement provides a foundation for pursuit of good practice in the planning, implementation and monitoring of Unisa’s community engagement initiatives. The primary aim is to guide the University towards the seamless integration of the quality arrangements of community engagement with those of teaching and learning and research. ... In this regard, the quality management system will assist to strengthen and monitor the effectiveness of the quality arrangements (Unisa 2011b, 13).

Universities have been recognised as having ‘remained aloof from society in large measure, and have not been as responsive to fulfilling the knowledge needs of a developing society’ (Bajjnath 2012, 1). Among many aspects upon which

universities that engage with their communities could add value, is indicated a need to develop a diverse range of skilled persons, sound governance and a vibrant culture. To this end, a larger proportion of the communities in which universities operate are not overwhelmed by the value added by costly and consistently underperforming universities.

At Unisa, participating in community engagement could no longer be equated to participating in the charity arm of the university. To take community engagement further than being a mere charitable activity, Unisa set objectives to: establish a learning community around institutional change strategies, policies and practices that support and advance community engagement; ensure that university tenure and promotion policies and practices recognise and reward community engagement; implement and evaluate innovative mechanisms for developing engaged scholars and establish a vibrant, sustainable network of departments and communities that support and advance community engagement (Baijnath 2012, 1–2). The points raised above validate Douglas' (2012, 27) notion that 'engagement and scholarship do not always sit comfortably within the higher education institution'. As an ODL institution, Unisa's revised Community Engagement and Outreach Policy (Unisa 2013, 6) enshrines the fundamentals of ODL in its community engagement activities. Hence community engagement activities at Unisa should embrace the notion of lifelong learning that results in skills capacitation through various modes including 'workshops, training and employment opportunities'. The policy further acknowledges the role of technology in ODL and promotes the application of multimedia such as 'social media, internet platforms, mobile technology and e-learning'. In addition to the ODL guiding principle, the revised policy documents regarding social responsibility, reciprocity and equity, ethical engagement, collaboration, sustainability and graduateness act as the other guiding principles.

Barker (2004, 132) has classified five practices of engaged scholarship. These he identifies as public scholarship, participatory research, community partnership, public information networks, and civil literacy scholarship. These practices are also linked to various theories, including deliberative, participatory democracy, social democracy and democracy broadly understood. Details on the five practices of engaged scholarship are discussed later in the article under the section dealing with contestations on community engagement. In the process, a set of different problems could be addressed that include complex 'public' problems, inclusion of specific groups, social change as well as structural transformation, communication and enhancing public discourse.

It is in line with the key issues that point to community engagement praxis that this article has been framed. The article is a case study of Unisa, one of the

top ten universities in South Africa. To what extent has Unisa put in practice its Community Engagement and Outreach Policy in as far as integrating it into key performance areas (KPA) and job adverts for all its employees? This is the question that the article attempts to address. It concludes that there is overwhelming evidence that teaching and learning as well as research still dominate the practice at Unisa. This is the situation four years down the line since the drawing up of Unisa's Community Engagement and Outreach Policy in 2008. The questions raised will assist this research to probe the educational, social and research implications of this gap for Unisa, with lessons drawn for other local and African higher education institutional settings.

## **METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION**

The article takes an evaluation approach in assessing how Unisa's Community Engagement and Outreach Policy has been implemented four years down the line. The Community Engagement and Outreach Policy became effective on 26 January 2008 (revised on 20 September 2013). The research question is also asked against a background of overwhelming evidence that although institutions of higher learning are increasingly inclining themselves towards elevating community engagement in their core business, there has been little progress in this space. Universities remain glued to the research (publish or perish) agenda as well as addressing teaching and learning. For South Africa, where the government gives huge rewards for published outputs and graduated students, community engagement certainly lags behind in importance. The methodology is situated within a case study framework. The full consent was granted by the top management of Unisa to embark on the research and publish this academic article. No conditions were attached in terms of the need to conceal the identity of the university.

A case study approach allows for a detailed analysis of a single entity such as Unisa's community engagement with a view to generating evidence for that particular case and findings from such may not be generalised (Yin 2009). In Yin's view, case study research propels theory development. To this end, construct, internal and external validity as well as reliability remain prerequisites. The KPAs, appointments and promotions criteria were deemed to be the most appropriate measurement tools for this research. The same measurement tools were used for internal validity checks as they acted in triangulating information generated from the documents. As already highlighted, the case study was not subjected to external validity since it could not be generalised to any other university in South Africa or any other ODL institution. With regard to reliability, the author is

confident that any similar study repeated to address the same or similar questions could yield similar findings and possibly conclusions since all documentation retrieved was from authentic sources.

Key data sets were generated by retrieving policies related to community engagement at Unisa (Ibid), the KPAs for all grades of workers both academic and non-academic, as well as selective interviews and email correspondence with key informants (Nhamo 2006, 39–40). The documentation is available on Unisa's intranet. Community engagement is referred to in a number of Unisa policy documents. The key policies include: the 2005 Strategic Plan (as revised to 2015), Community Engagement and Outreach Policy (2008, revised 2013), Policy for the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) and the Institutional Operational Plan of 2012–2013. These policies will be elaborated upon further in their sequence of approval by Unisa Council starting with the Strategic Plan of 2005.

In addition, data were also generated from the adverts posted on the websites with a detailed analysis of how the job advert was structured and the manner in which the job adverts addressed community engagement issues. A total of 20 job adverts were retrieved for analysis (five per category, excluding junior lecturer). Elements of Critical Discourse Analysis as well as Critical Document Analysis informed the manner in which the literature and data generated were analysed as guided by authors like Van Dijk (1997, 1–34) well as Sandig and Selting (1997, 138–156).

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A CONTESTED TERRAIN**

So, what is community engagement? This is a question that always emerges whenever the subject matter is discussed in many forums. Kruss (2012, 5) writes: 'Currently in universities there is a widespread and formal promotion of "community engagement", but there is also conceptual confusion, debate and contestation, as reflected in vastly differing interpretations of what counts as "engaged practice"'. The author goes further and concludes that IHEs in South Africa are grappling to define what 'community engagement' means. Other issues that bring contestation with regard to community engagement deal with benchmarking and indicator development, measurement, monitoring and verification as well as evaluation, feedback and rewards. In an institution like Unisa, the issues raised above are witnessed playing out in terms of the community engagement praxis that is being addressed in this article. The issues raised here will now be considered each in turn in the next sections.

## **Defining community engagement**

Although lost completely in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa 1997), elements of community engagement are evident in the Higher Education White Paper of 1997 (Department of Education 1997, 4). The White Paper states that:

Higher education has an unmatched obligation, which has not been adequately fulfilled, to help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests. It has much more to do, both within its own institutions and in its influence on the broader community, to strengthen the democratic ethos, the sense of common citizenship and commitment to a common good. (Department of Education 1997, 4)

The White Paper went further, indicating the functions of higher education in South Africa and beyond. Such functions included teaching and learning, scholarship and research, community development and extension services. Higher education was also challenged to enhance responsiveness to regional and national needs for academic programmes, research, and community service (Akpan, Minkley and Thakrar 2012, 1).

Drawing on studies in the USA, Weerts and Hudson (2009, 65) concur that IHEs should develop smooth marketing strategies to communicate their type of engagement. Such brands must be aligned to an institution's culture and mission. In this way, community engagement is uniquely communicated to both the internal and external stakeholders. Whilst this is taking place, community engagement simultaneously shapes and re-aligns the culture of specific campuses of IHE. As this is taking place, the authors observed the importance of the language used to describe community engagement activities on the different IHE campuses. Hence, IHEs use different terms to refer to community engagement. Barker (2004, 132) identifies five practices of engaged scholarship. Details regarding the different social and/or public problems these practices address are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Engaged scholarship: Practices, theory, problems addressed and methods  
(Source: Barker 2004, 132)

<b>Practices</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Problems Addressed</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Public scholarship	Deliberative	Complex 'problems requiring deliberation in public'	Face to face open forums
Participatory research	Participatory democracy	Inclusion of specific groups	Face to face collaboration with specific publics
Community partnership	Social democracy	Social change, structural transformation	Collaboration with intermediary groups
Public information	Democracy broadly understood	Problems of networking communication	Resources
Civic literacy	Democracy broadly understood	Enhancing public discourse	Communication with general public

The criteria for institutional audits from the Council of Higher Education of South Africa (CHE-SA) include community engagement as one of the core functions of universities (CHE 2004a, 1). The quality issues in community engagement are evaluated primarily in relation to the mission of the university and academic connections with teaching and learning as well as research. 'Engagement with the local and broader community is one of the core functions of higher education through which institutions use their resources and expertise to address issues relevant to their communities' (CHE 2004a, 5). Community engagement must be formalised within a university's quality management policy framework, linked to teaching and learning and research (where applicable), and allocated adequate resources and institutional recognition. In another publication by the CHE-SA a whole chapter is dedicated to community engagement. In the introduction to that chapter, the concept 'service' is equated to community engagement. 'Higher education institutions have a longstanding tradition of teaching, research and service. Of these, "service" remains the most undefined and the one least considered in institutional policies, planning, and resource allocation processes,'

the publication explains (CHE 2004b, 129).

Community engagement is not a commonly agreed concept at various South African universities. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) defines and describes community engagement to include activities and programmes offered by the university that include ‘collaborative interaction with individuals, groups, and organizations external to CPUT at the local, regional, national and international levels’ (CPUT 2012). This is done in order to achieve economic and social objectives using engaged teaching and learning initiatives, volunteerism, research and other forms of work-integrated learning like service learning and cooperative education. At the University of Fort Hare, community engagement means ‘all negotiated and dynamic partnerships between the university and the community it serves, which is practiced through varied initiatives focused on the interface of teaching and research’ (University of Fort Hare 2012). Such a typology of community engagement is aimed at addressing the social, cultural and economic development objectives of society. Community engagement according to North-West University refers to ‘human development activities that staff and students of the university perform to uplift needy sectors of society and/or individuals’ (North-West University 2012). It must be highlighted here that the ‘needy sectors’ are not equated with disadvantaged or poor sectors as the university at times charges nominal fees to perform some community engagements. The University of Pretoria prefers describing what community engagement entails. Hence, at the University of Pretoria, community engagement is not treated as a separate function from all aspects of teaching and learning. Rather, community engagement ‘is therefore incorporated widely in academic programmes, projects and research efforts. The focus is particularly on areas where the university has proven competencies that can alleviate developmental and capacity problems in identified communities’ (University of Pretoria 2012).

Stellenbosch University starts by considering the term ‘community’ which it depicts as signifying ‘a social grouping of society involved in an interaction at any given moment’ (Stellenbosch University 2009, 4). Hence the community refers to groups of people united by a common location or linked intellectually, professionally, and/or politically. These linkages define geographic communities, communities of interest and communities of practice in that order. Such a taxonomy of communities, according to the university, provides a platform to focus on marginalised groupings in society whilst at the same time including other community formations. The term community interaction is also introduced as synonymous to community engagement. These two terms are said to describe mechanisms through which teaching and research are integrated into a university’s engagement with and in society. Community interaction is preferred



by the university as this is viewed as providing better emphasis on reciprocity between the university and the community.

Even though there are huge differences between residential and ODL institutions of higher education, the above review shows that academics and other staff are still expected to engage in community engagement activities. The major challenge for ODL institutions like Unisa is in mobilising students. Hence for Unisa, the revised 2013 policy (Unisa 2013, 6) tries to harness students in community engagement through their research projects.

The different terms used to denote community engagement from the different South African universities fit well with what has been identified elsewhere, especially from the US literature. In an earlier study, Saltmarsh et al. (2009, 31) identified up to 14 different terms used to refer to community engagement. These include: service to the community/public, service-learning, application, outreach/engagement (extension), engaged scholarship, civic engagement, scholarship of community engagement, scholarship related to public engagement mission, community-based research, scholarly civic engagement, service-related publications, scholarship which enhances public good, and civic engagement scholarship. Even though it is difficult to agree on one definition of community engagement, the authors make it clear that it is important for an IHE to delimit its boundaries in terms of conceptualisation. This is important if the institution is to reward community engagement. An example is cited of one IHE that delineated community engagement as:

... the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good (Saltmarsh et al. 2009, 31).

The status of community engagement in South African higher education institutions is best described by the CHE-SA. The CHE-SA notes the following (CHE 2011, 10–11) in connection with the subject matter:

- There is wide variation in the ways in which community engagement is conceptualised in institutional vision and mission statements, and in the high-level engagement priorities that follow from these.
- Community engagement appears to be an under-theorised activity at most institutions. This has important consequences in terms of the integration of community engagement into the other core functions and its levels of resourcing.
- Most institutions have some organisational structure that takes responsibility

for community engagement.

- The majority of institutions do not have formal systems for the quality assurance and monitoring of community engagement. Generally, there is little integration between research and community engagement.
- At most institutions there are a range of activities that can be categorised as community engagement but, generally, most of these activities rely on individual initiative rather than them being formally owned, supported and driven by the institution.

The next sections present information on community engagement benchmarking and indicator development, measurement, monitoring and verification as well as evaluation in IHE. The purpose of this section is to provide both international and local literature that will assist in evaluating where Unisa's community engagement activities are, especially with regard to rewards and other recognition associated with similar activities for research as well as teaching and learning. In fact, as revealed by one of the recent papers from Pienaar (2012, 40), a proposal to use the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a platform for assessing and evaluating community engagement at Unisa has been accepted by the university management.

### **Benchmarking and indicator development**

Benchmarking involves drawing up a starting point and base year. For Unisa, the key performance agreements (KPAs) provide a benchmark in terms of how community engagement should be measured. All members of staff are measured on a benchmark that adds up to 100 per cent of their work time throughout the year. In 2007, the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) realised a need for the development of national and international benchmarks for community engagement activities. The initiative has to date developed definitions, justification and a set of goals, strategies and measures for benchmarking institutions of higher education community engagement (Langworthy 2007, 1). Initially 28 AUCEA member universities expressed interest in the benchmarking. The working group developed the framework and indicators to be used and pilot tested. Eleven indicator filters assessed on a 1–5 score were developed and among some of the indicator filter questions were: Is the indicator valid (a logical measure)? Is the indicator likely to give information about the future? Can the indicator be easily measured? Is the indicator able to show trends over time? Through the use of the indicator filters, 18 major strategies and 18 major measures were developed. Some of the challenges in the benchmarking exercise as observed by Langworthy (2007, 3–4) were the

potential threat of the benchmark promoting competition within universities and a need to sharpen definitions and methodologies. Unfortunately, Unisa is yet to develop a benchmark that reflects key aspects discussed here.

Dejo (2012, 89) identifies the increasing value of community engagement activities in universities worldwide as a driver to emphasise benchmarking. From his further observations, however, the emergence of effective benchmarks in this regard is still in its infancy stages. Given that community engagement benchmarking is still evolving in South African IHEs, the author proposes the application of similar methodologies from other settings outside the country. Dejo then goes further and benchmarks community engagement at North-West University.

Citing from the 2001 work of Holland, Furco and Miller (2009, 47) concur that IHEs with institutionalised and functional community engagement must have the following five foundational pillars:

- a philosophy and mission that emphasises engagement,
- genuine faculty involvement and support for engaged research or teaching, or both,
- a broad range of opportunities for students to access and involve themselves in high-quality engagement experiences,
- an institutional infrastructure that supports engagement practice, and
- mutually beneficial, sustained partnerships with community partners.

When assessing community engagement, the emphasis placed on each of the foundational pillars differs among IHEs based on each one's particular engagement goals and purposes. The 2005 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching systems approach of assessing community engagement has gained universal acceptance for assessing community engagement (Driscoll 2009, 5–12). The Carnegie approach identified three categories in which IHEs can be placed in terms of their involvement with community engagement, namely: curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, and the third that covers both. Driscoll indicated that the number of IHEs listing for the Carnegie assessment in the USA has been growing with 154 IHEs included in the 2008 assessment from 73 in 2006.

The Policy and Procedures for Measurement of Research Output of Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Education 2003, 1–37) in South Africa sets clear research benchmarks. The 2003 policy outlines recognised research outputs from accredited journals, peer reviewed books and peer

reviewed conference proceedings. Accredited journals are included in three Department of Education lists namely: the International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS), Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) and the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) approved journals. The books and conference proceedings must have an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). The policy has been designed to allow the government to provide subsidies based on the outputs. Subsidies are also provided based on graduates channelled out from the university systems with master's and doctoral outputs attracting huge sums of money. The subsidies going to a recognised output (or unit) in 2010 stood at R119 331.22.<sup>1</sup> An accredited journal article is benchmarked at one unit. The same applies to a graduated master's student, with a graduated doctoral candidate attracting three units. A book accumulates up to five units (calculated from a minimum of 60 pages to a maximum of 300 pages), with a peer reviewed conference proceedings article attracting half a unit.

In February 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training published for public comment the revised Policy and Procedures for Measurement of Research Output of Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013, 18). Under the proposed amendments, nothing has changed with regard to the auditing of journal articles and conference proceedings that still earn one unit and half a unit of output respectively. However, the amount of units accrued by accredited books under the subsidy scheme has changed significantly. If the proposed amendments pass, a book can now accrue up to a maximum of 10 units from five units, with a chapter in a book considered one unit. As a guideline, a book of 60 pages will earn two units; that of 120 pages gets four units; 180 pages, six units; 240 pages, eight units and 300 pages plus, 10 units maximum (Ibid).

The payment of subsidies by the DHET into university coffers based on their annual outputs is something that has made education a tradable commodity in South Africa. Hence all universities do their best to increase the outputs as this simply means more money. This is an element that undoubtedly influences how research policy is shaped in many South African universities. In terms of claims, universities receive the money after a two-year cycle following their claims. Hence, claims for 2007 are realised into university coffers in 2009, those for 2008, in 2010, etc.

Drawing on case studies in the USA, Driscoll (2009) makes similar observations in terms of promotion and tenure policies that do not support active participation of academic staff in community engagement. Although the responses in the data generated indicated that IHEs encouraged faculty to include community engagement scholarship in the service category, traditional scholarship, mainly

in the field of research, was the key requirement for promotion and tenure. Even though academic development support for community engagement existed in many IHEs, very few academics documented this as a priority in their job descriptions and recruitment practices. These findings were in contrast to the fact that many IHEs had institutionalised community engagement prominently in their mission statements.

## **Measuring**

The stage of measuring involves the generation of data against the set indicators. Given that this could include measuring the process on community engagement itself, the stage of measuring becomes truly ongoing. Holland (2001, 7) argues that measurement of community engagement in higher education is useful for: academic legitimacy, image and reputation, accountability, different civic missions, quality control and improvement as well as matching measures to purposes and communities. In addressing the question of what will be measured, Holland identifies the following: student learning – both academic and civic, institutional commitment, institutionalisation, sustainable involvement in engagement, partnerships, community involvement, impacts of staff work, impacts on community capacity and changes in community conditions. In the USA, most of the university based assessment efforts during the early 2000s focused on measuring impact, process and inputs/outputs related to the experiences of students. The most common measuring targets include (Holland 2001, 7):

- levels of activity – hours of service, numbers of partnerships, quantity of services, numbers of courses
- process issues – what worked well; what did not work
- identification of obstacles
- documentation of impacts on student attitudes and aptitudes
- staff attitudes and concerns
- community involvement and/or satisfaction.

Aspects of measurement and performance indicators are best summarised in the quotations listed henceforth (Quotationpage.com 2010). These aspects are also true to community engagement in institutions of higher education nationally and globally:

“You cannot manage what you cannot measure” – Bill Hewitt (co-founder of Hewlett-Packard). “If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it” – George Odiorne.

“If you can measure that of which you speak and can express it by a number, you know something of your subject; but if you cannot measure it, your knowledge is meagre and unsatisfactory” – Lord Kelvin. “What you do not measure, you cannot control” and “What gets measured, gets done” – Tom Peters (<http://www.quotationspage.com>).

Berberet (2002, 93–94), observes that the scholarship of community engagement occurs on a continuum ranging from what he calls community-based research focusing on economic development and public policy issues to full-scale mission-driven engagement with communities. In his view, full-scale mission-driven engagement with communities is what IHEs must aim at. In this way, IHEs truly collaborate with their communities in an interdisciplinary manner, networking faculty and student scholarship and facilitating learning. This form of community engagement also seeks to address the genuine needs of the communities.

### **Monitoring and verification**

During monitoring and verification, the university monitors the implementation of agreed targets. In the case of Unisa, community engagement targets are specified in the KPA agreements by academic employees. Although benchmarks for monitoring and verifying actual community engagement projects have not been established, data generated in terms of improvements in the community should be verified, where possible by independent auditors. The verification will be done against the benchmarks and indicators laid down in the beginning. Verification plays a crucial role in that at times the designed community engagement project may not always result in improvement of the community’s wellbeing. Think of the example of a failed community garden project.

### **Evaluation, feedback and rewards**

The evaluation and feedback stages open up the continuous improvement cycle. As the group evaluates progress against the initial objectives and targets, new areas requiring engagement might emerge as well as new ways of engagement. The evaluation process usually manifests in two forms, namely ongoing (formative) and summative (end of life) evaluation. Within the context of Unisa, the formative evaluation takes place in June each year and the summative takes place in January each year. Hence community engagement activities will be measured twice a year. Summative evaluation also presents opportunities for recognition and awards from either the university’s perspective or that of the community. University staff could be promoted or recognised in other ways following the evaluation process of the community engagement process. Evaluation in measuring community

engagement leads one to the use of certain evaluation frameworks that mainly utilise goal achievement or real time evaluation (Mickwitz 2003, 415). Within the context of Unisa and higher education in South Africa, community engagement rewards also play a vital role.

From Hart and Northmore's (2001, 34) experiences in the United Kingdom, the growing importance of community engagement activities in IHEs has necessitated an increasing emphasis on auditing and evaluating such. As a follow-up innovation to evaluating community engagement in South Africa, and in particular at Unisa, Pienaar (2012) proposes a framework that draws on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through the use of the MDGs, the author concludes that IHEs will not only be able to evaluate community engagement, but also be able to position it within the sustainable development discourse. The MDGs framework will also present a good platform for a monitoring tool that results in increased accountability. Based on US studies tracing community engagement in 154 IHEs, Driscoll (2009, 12) concluded that if we are to win the battle to promote effective community engagement in IHEs, we must address shortfalls in the assessment and evaluation. In addition, the author encourages IHEs to address gaps in aligning the search and hiring practices as well as the promotion and tenure policies for academic staff. Lastly, Driscoll calls for improved communication and collaboration with community as partners to IHE. The issue of rewards for community engagement and the allocation of internal resources (including budgets) have been debated at length too (Weerts and Hudson 2009, 65–74).

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT UNISA: THE PRAXIS**

This section, which forms the key component of the article, presents the praxis of community engagement at Unisa. The praxis is where theory meets practice. To this end, Unisa policies addressing community engagement are analysed. In addition, an evaluation is made of how these policies have filtered into KPAs, job adverts and other areas.

### **The policy framework**

As indicated earlier under the methodology section, community engagement is referred to in a number of Unisa policy documents. As part of its mission, Unisa states upfront in its revisited 2015 Strategic Plan (Unisa 2005, 3) that 'Unisa is a ... learning institution that produces excellent scholarship and research, provides quality tuition, and fosters active community engagement'. Community engagement also features as part of the seven goals and related strategies. As its

goal, Unisa wishes to grow community engagement initiatives. The university explains further, indicating this will be done through twin strategies: redefining the scope and extent of community engagement in its context of learning and model of delivery and building an enabling environment for community engagement.

From Unisa's 2015 Strategic Plan, community engagement is featured under the broader category of community development as one of the 10 strategic goals. The goal for community development is thus framed as: 'Utilise the resources and capacities of the University in community development initiatives, and collaborative partnerships' (Unisa 2005, 17). Community engagement is determined as one of the five strategies and featured within the strategy that focuses on '[e]nhancing teaching, learning and research for staff and students through programme-related community engagement and community service learning opportunities that are responsive to national priorities and community needs' (Unisa 2005, 17). Out of the five targets spelt out to facilitate community development, four of them focused on community engagement (Box 1). Further to Box 1 it can be confirmed that the Policy and Strategy on Community Engagement was not approved as scheduled in December 2006, but rather in 2008.

Box 1: Targets for community development at Unisa

- Conduct an audit of the existing community engagement activities by July 2006 resulting in the establishment of a community engagement project database.
- Council approval of a Policy and Strategy on Community Engagement by December 2006.
- Council approval of a Policy on International Relations and Partnerships by April 2006.
- Proposals for all new formal programmes to include an indication of how community engagement will be used to enhance teaching, learning and research from 2006.
- Proposals for all new short learning programmes to include an indication of how community engagement will be used to enhance teaching and learning.

Source: Unisa (2005, 18)

Reference to community engagement in the 2015 Strategic Plan is also made under the goal dealing with the '[e]stablishment of a performance-orientated approach to management, promotion of quality assurance and the assessment of outcomes and reward productivity and excellence' (Unisa 2005, 24). Out of



the five strategies stipulated, the promotion of excellence in teaching, research and community engagement was indicated. This was to be done by giving high priority to such core areas in the performance management system. Under the section dealing with targets, the focus in the 2015 Strategic Plan narrowed to deal mainly with performance management. The performance management plan had to be in place by December 2006. An appropriate academic performance management system was also to be finalised by October 2006 and this had to include differentiated, concomitant performance appraisal agreements with individual academics based on their rank, job description and general academic expectations. An Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) was only approved two years later towards the end of 2008. As part of assessing the effectiveness of these provisions, an assessment was made of how job adverts at Unisa are addressing the element of community engagement.

Unisa's Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach (Unisa 2008a) entered into force on 26 January 2008 after its approval by the University Council. The Policy is divided into 14 key sections that cover the preface, aims, definitions, community engagement and outreach typology, relevant policies, quality assurance, finances, development and delivery of community engagement and outreach programmes, ethical considerations, impact, establishment of the directorate of community engagement and outreach, review and revision as well as implementation of the policy. Some of the fundamental provisions of the sections identified here will be considered in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The policy identifies 10 key terms and concepts for definitions. These include: academic citizenship, community, community engagement, community outreach, community participation, curriculum-based or curricular community engagement, service, service sector, service learning programmes (or community engagement learning programmes) and lastly the Unisa community. Within the generic Unisa community is included: students and alumni, science, distance education and open distance education learning communities. The policy adds that there are communities in the social, economical, political and environmental spheres of influence. Hence the term Unisa communities is associated with 'any group associated with Unisa' (Unisa 2009, 6). One can also safely view Unisa as a community within a community.

Drawing on the definition of community engagement provided by the CHE (2004a, 18), Unisa's Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach distinguishes between community engagement and community outreach. Community engagement according to Unisa is a two way relationship, involving Unisa as it engages in partnerships with the community, whilst community outreach is one way and voluntary, involving initiatives from Unisa, its students

and alumni to communities (Unisa 2008a, 5). Unisa views community engagement as a core function together with teaching and learning as well as research. Hence community engagement is an integral component of both formal and non-formal teaching, learning and research. Furthermore, community engagement is a scholarly activity whose aim is to enrich and put both the curriculum and research activities into context. Unisa then draws up a typology of community engagement that includes: curriculum-related; non-curriculum related; research-related; and community development and capacity-building related community engagement. Unisa's Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach makes reference to other internal policies that include: tuition, research, grants from research funds, short learning programmes, work-integrated learning, international relations and partnerships, research ethics, and learnerships. In terms of quality assurance, community engagement is formalised and integrated with teaching and learning as well as research systems with the Directorate of Community Engagement having been established to develop procedures and mechanisms.

Following extensive consultation, Unisa's Community Engagement and Outreach Policy was revised and by the time of finalising this article, a new policy was in place as approved on 20 September 2013 (Unisa 2013). This means any future community engagement activities will now draw on the new policy. By way of definitions, the new policy still differentiates between community engagement and outreach. Community engagement is defined as:

the scholarly activity of academic research and teaching that involves external communities and stakeholders in collaborative activities that address the socioeconomic imperatives of South Africa and the African continent while also enriching the teaching, learning and research objectives of the university (Unisa 2013, 3).

Likewise, community outreach is defined as:

the donation of time and/or resources by UNISA employees, be these academic, administrative or support employees, in their capacity as employees of UNISA to benefit a community or its institutions such as nonprofit, faith-based or community-based organisations in an effort to improve the quality of life for its community residents. Outreach activities are not discipline-specific (ibid, 3).

The policy goes further to explain the relationship between the two concepts and stipulate that outreach activities should be realised as potential platforms to open up opportunities for community engagement projects. Where outreach activities are taking place, the policy recommends drawing up memoranda of understanding with partners to manage expectations.

What is striking in the new policy is how community engagement is viewed as scholarship-extending and fusing Unisa expertise in teaching as well as research and innovation. The policy outlines 19 community engagement outputs as

scholarship including engaged methodologies like action research, expert advice, academic journal publications, conference presentations, factsheets, cross-translation of research outputs and learning materials, dissemination of research in popular language, policy briefs, in-service learning, workshops, training of community members, short learning programmes addressing community needs, newsletters, reports, public lectures, international fellowships, contract research and formal curriculum development (Unisa 2013, 4). These aspects were silent in the old policy and can now be easily accounted for in promotion and other staff recognition. With regard to the status of community engagement at Unisa, the revised policy makes it clear that it ‘enjoys equal status alongside the other forms of scholarship, namely research and teaching and learning’ (ibid, 5). This is a direct answer to the old debate on the inferior status experienced in community engagement activities of old at Unisa and possibly in many other institutions of higher education.

Linked to Unisa’s Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach is the IPMS approved on 3 October 2008 (Unisa 2008b, 1–7). The IPMS stipulates a 12-month cycle, extending from January to December each year. Inherent in the IPMS is the standard rating scale of 5–1 (where a 5 indicates ‘exceeds required standards’ with a 1 pointing to ‘does not meet required standard’). This IPMS is applied both during the mid-yearly formative review and the end of year assessments, with a composite rating out of five drawn up by the reporting manager or supervisor. The IPMS cycle has been identified through the IMPS policy and this involves four stages namely: performance planning; performance implementation, monitoring and development; performance review (formative); and performance assessment (summative). This cycle is supported by the Personal Development Plan (Unisa 2008b). For the academics, community engagement is included as a line item in the event where the staff member agreed to have this as part of the KPA.

Community engagement is also addressed in Unisa’s Institutional Operational Plan of 2012–2013 (Unisa 2012a, 11). This is done within the scope of goals two and three. Goal two stipulates the need to increase innovative research and research capacity. Under Strategy 2.3 dealing with sustaining a supportive, enabling research environment from the stated goal, Unisa commits to implementing effective research policies and procedures that maximise community engagement research, knowledge transfer and/or commercialisation. The Institutional Operational Plan also spells out performance measures and targets (milestones) for this (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Community engagement performance measures and targets 2012–13  
(Source: Author, based on Unisa 2012a, 11)

Strategy	Performance Measure	Targets/Milestones		Accountability/Responsibility
		2012	2013	
Sustain a supportive, enabling research environment	Number of research outputs generated by CE projects in Unisa	10 research outputs within Unisa	20 community engagement research outputs within Unisa and impact assessment conducted by June	Accountable: Principal and Vice chancellor  Responsible: VP Research and Innovation
	Percentage increase in university press publications	+5%	+5%	

Goal three from the Institutional Operational Plan deals with growing community engagement initiatives. Two strategies are further developed to achieve the goal namely: redefining the scope and extent of community engagement in context of ODL, and building an enabling environment for community engagement. Among some of the performance measures highlighted are: the development of a funding model, number of agreements concluded, number of international fellowships and ODL investigation completed. The milestones for 2012 include having college community engagement plans in place by June 2012 and the approval by management of the funding model. Milestones for 2013 include having at least five projects in operation per college and the implementation of the funding model. Top university management including the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Vice Principals all have accounting and responsibilities built in (Unisa 2012a).

### **Appointments and promotions of academics (including awards and recognition)**

According to Unisa Policy on Guidelines for Minimum Criteria for Appointment and Promotion of Academic Employees (Unisa 2009a, 2) as revised in 2011, a candidate's performance in this regard is evaluated in the following areas: academic qualification; tuition (not applicable to employees in research institutes); research; community engagement and academic citizenship. However, 'a candidate applying for promotion to professor or associate professor must not only meet the minimum requirements in all areas of evaluation but must also

excel in tuition and research’ (Unisa 2009a, 2). Whilst the appointment criteria are softer as these only stipulate ‘willingness to participate’, the promotions criteria for community engagement are much stricter for all other grades apart from the entry level (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Community engagement promotions criteria for academics (Source: Unisa 2009a, 10)

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Appointments</b>	<b>Promotions</b>
Junior Lecturer	Willingness to participate in community engagement and outreach	Not applicable
Lecturer	Willingness to participate in community engagement and outreach	Involvement in a community engagement project will be a recommendation (evidence from project leader of involvement)
Senior Lecturer	Willingness to participate in community engagement and outreach	Must be active in at least one community engagement project (evidence from project leader of involvement)
Associate Professor	Willingness to participate in community engagement and outreach	Must take a major or leadership role in a community engagement project (evidence from or as project leader of involvement)
Professor	Willingness to participate in community engagement and outreach	Must take a leadership role in a community engagement project and must produce evidence (academic or non-academic articles, radio interviews, curricula, etc.) of the impact of the engagement

The Policy on Guidelines for Minimum Criteria for Appointment and Promotion of Academic Employees further stipulates that the minimum criteria may not be applicable in disciplines where skills are scarce, as identified by the university.

The scarcity allowance for 2011 was paid for academics in accounting, statistics, engineering and computing. The different colleges are at liberty to spell out further criteria but within the framework of Unisa's minimum criteria. Most colleges have adopted the minimum criteria as they are.

With regards to awards and recognition, Unisa has policies in place for Excellence in Tuition Award (Unisa 2008c, 1–5) as well as the Chancellor's and Principal's Prizes for Excellence in Research (Unisa 2009b, 1–3). The excellence in tuition award is annual and given to one academic per school within Unisa. The Chancellor's and Principal's Prizes for Excellence in Research are biennial and these are also awarded to one candidate in each school. What is clear with both policies is that there are awarding criteria stipulated that help in dropping the policies to their lowest implementation levels. This is in sharp contrast to community engagement policies. Item 6.6 of the Unisa's Research Policy (Unisa 2006, 5) makes it clear that it 'rewards meritorious research in several ways'. This comes in the form of: annual awards of research output subsidy funds; the Chancellor's and Principal's prizes; promotions to senior positions that are dependent, *inter alia*, on a research track record; and by establishing incentive schemes for research outputs.

To show the emphasis on research within the university, academics are eligible to research and development leave up to a period of 11 months as per the Research and Development Leave Policy (Unisa 2007, 1–16) including taking it pro rata. For students, the university has a Policy on Graduate Excellence Award (2008e). The policy recognises 20 graduates that would have excelled academically in each college. In March 2009, Unisa approved as an annex to the Research Policy, the Research Professor post. The entitlements and duties of the Research Professor are reflected in Box 2.

Box 2: Entitlements and duties of a Unisa research professor

- A research professor will receive no additional remuneration for the appointment.
- Where feasible a research professor should be allocated a postgraduate research assistant from the College's 'Grow your own timber' project.
- A research professor will be relieved from undergraduate and honours tuition but will retain the core functions of postgraduate supervision, *community engagement*<sup>2</sup> and academic citizenship in addition to the increased research function.
- A research professor will be required to: (1) produce at least eight research outputs, as defined in the Unisa Research Policy, over a period of three years; and (2) mentor at least one junior academic employee.

Source: Unisa (2006, 8)

As of 2012, Unisa indicated that it would pay part of the subsidies from the Department of Education either into the researcher's personal account or pay the cash after tax to the researcher. Such policies may act against academics putting more effort towards community engagement. The Research Policy stipulates that as of 1 January 2006, academics at Unisa are expected to generate certain minimum outputs within five and three-year periodic cycles. A Professor is expected to produce seven outputs in five years (five in three years); Associate Professor, six outputs (four in three years), Senior Lecturer, five outputs (three in three years); Lecturer, four outputs (two in three years) and Junior Lecturer, three outputs (one in three years) (Unisa 2006, 6).

There has been an increase in research incentives for publications from 2011–2012. The highest rise is reflected for the supervision of master's degree until successful completion. The figure rose almost threefold from R7 500 to R20 000. This is also strategic in that there will be more master's students graduating than doctoral ones at Unisa. Incentives for the supervision of doctoral degrees until successful completion doubled from R15 000 in 2011 to R30 000 in 2012. Such incentives may propel academics to work harder towards areas where incentives have been stipulated through policy such as in research compared to community engagement.

### **Key performance area agreements for Unisa staff**

As indicated elsewhere in this article, Unisa staff members are measured and

evaluated based on their KPA agreements. The KPA agreement template for academic staff covers five KPAs namely: academic leadership (for Associate Professor/Professor grades only contributing 10 per cent and 5 per cent respectively of total annual time allocation), teaching and learning, research, community engagement and academic citizenship (contributing between 5–15 per cent of all grades from junior lecturer to professor). Analysis of figures regarding KPA agreement templates for the Professors and Associate Professors indicates that community engagement lags far behind. Whilst on average annual time allocation for teaching and learning as well as research is 40 per cent apiece, community engagement comes in at a distant average of 10 per cent. Both the Professor and Associate Professor grades are at liberty to commit a minimum of five per cent to a maximum of 15 per cent of their annual time allocation for their community engagement initiatives. This is certainly a huge shortfall for a university that has identified community engagement as one of its core functions together with teaching and learning as well as research.

An analysis of data regarding KPAs for the lectureship grades (Senior Lecturer, Lecturer and Junior Lecturer) reveals a similar trend. On average, community engagement still lags far behind. Whilst an average of 40 per cent apiece for teaching and learning as well as research can be attained, community engagement comes in at a distant average of 10 per cent for Senior Lecturers and 7.5 per cent for the Lecturer and Junior Lecturer grades. Whilst the Senior Lecturer grade is also at liberty to commit a minimum of five per cent to a maximum of 15 per cent for their community engagement, the Lecturer and Junior Lecturer grades can even opt to do nothing in this area. Unisa sets a minimum community engagement of zero per cent for these grades although the maximum remains at 15 per cent. Given that there are certainly more academic staff in the Lecturer and Junior Lecturer grades, a lot of community engagement potential is lost through policy stipulations.

Linked to staff KPAs are job descriptions that normally come in the form of an advertisement first floated inviting applicants to occupy certain positions within Unisa. Advertisements were therefore retrieved and analysed in terms of their conformity to the KPAs as stipulated. True to the KPA agreements, some advertisements did not require community engagement as a key requirement. In the event that there was reference to community engagement, the least space and wording was allocated for it. One of the five advertisements retrieved that was calling to fill in the post of Professor in a research chair at Unisa revealed the bias against community engagement. An analysis of the advert showed that of the 14 criteria set as requirements, only one made reference to community engagement and outreach whilst the remainder dealt with research as well as teaching and



learning. The advertisement went further to elaborate 13 areas of responsibility where community engagement also featured only once. The advertisement, thus, stipulated that the potential candidate should be able to participate in curriculum-related community engagement and/or research-related community engagement.

The KPA agreements for chairs of departments (CoDs) who fall in the academic sector show very little requirements for leadership in community engagement. Their KPA agreements stipulate a straight figure of 5 per cent of their annual time allocation. This figure also falls far short compared to teaching and learning requiring 30 per cent and research that requires 25 per cent. As the grades go higher, the KPA agreements do not explicitly mention community engagement. The grades falling in this category include those for managers, Executive Deputy Directors and Executive Directors, Deputy Executive Deans and Deans as well as Vice-Principals. An exception, however, exists where an Executive Director or Deputy Executive Dean could be allocated responsibility for community engagement. By the time of completing this article, Unisa was revamping its job descriptions for academic portfolios linking them to the KPAs. The percentage shares as well as the number of items as described in detail under each of the five KPAs in the draft document are shown in Table 4. Although community engagement is now allocated a separate slot on the revised job descriptions, its coverage compared to the criteria of tuition, student assessment and support as well as research is very low. A new development from the proposed job descriptions is the allocation of community engagement to Junior Lecturer grade. Not only is there a definite allocation for community engagement to the Junior Lecturer grade, but this comes with the highest number of bullets in the job description compared to all the other academic grades.

**Table 4:** Reworked job descriptions for academic portfolios effected June 2012  
(Source: Adverts supplied by Unisa, May 2012)

KPA	Weight (%)					Bullets Covering KPA in Job Description				
	Prof	A/Prof	S/L	L	JL	Prof	A/Prof	S/L	L	JL
Tuition, Student Assessment and Support	30--50	30--40	35--55	45--60	55--65	21	21	24	23	16
Research	30--50	40--50	35--55	30--35	25--35	18	12	8	6	9
Community Engagement	5--10	5--15	5--15	5--10	5--10	3	2	2	2	4
Academic Citizenship	5--15	5--15	5	5	-	6	6	4	4	-
Academic Leadership	5--10	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	55	41	38	35	29

Key: Prof = Professor; A/Prof = Associate Professor; S/L = Senior Lecturer; L = Lecturer; J/L = Junior Lecturer

The total number of Unisa academic staff in the categories junior lecturer through to full professor stood at 1 689 as of December 2010. In terms of percentage share, the distribution is as follows: 5 per cent junior lecturers, 28 per cent lecturers, 34 per cent senior lecturers, 15 per cent associate professors and 18 per cent professors. These figures have a bearing in terms of how community engagement plays out on the ground, especially in relation to the analysis done earlier.

An aspect of interest enshrined in the revised Community Engagement and Outreach Policy (Unisa 2013, 5) concerns the recognition of time spend on activities. The policy recognises that community engagement activities are both time and labour intensive. To this end, 'The time spent on community engagement should therefore be considered and recognised as a factor in the division of labour and promotion criteria by departments' (ibid, 5). In addition, colleges are mandated to 'consider incentives and award systems for community engagement along the same lines as those applied to research and teaching and learning'.

### **Community engagement cases at Unisa**

There is no central point at which community engagement activities at Unisa can be viewed and assessed. To this end, initiatives are reported ad hoc in institutional documents including the Vice-Chancellor's annual review reports, the United Nations Global Compact Report, research papers, research reports from interested academics and at times conference presentations and workshops. To date, the most comprehensive assessment of community engagement activities at Unisa was done in one of its major colleges and featured in a comprehensive report (Uys and Pienaar-Steyn 2012). The college concerned is the largest college out of the seven comprising Unisa. As of 2010 there were about 1 689 academic staff at Unisa and the concerned case college employed 660 (39.1%). Hence an assessment of community engagement activities in this college implies a significant percentage in terms of Unisa-wide activities.

From the survey conducted by Uys and Pienaar-Steyn (2012), 368 academics in the concerned college (more than half) took part and 219 (about 60%) of them indicated they were involved in community engagement projects. This means that about 40 per cent of the respondents were not involved in community engagement activities. A further analysis of the report revealed that the authors included academics involved in remunerated Short Learning Programmes (SLP) and workshops, which according to the Unisa Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach must be excluded. If one takes this into account, the number of academic staff involved in recognised community engagement in the concerned

college drops significantly. There were 72 such SLPs and workshops identified in the survey.

Overall, a total of 69 community engagement projects were identified in that college. The projects were shared across the 13 departments. The highest number of community engagement projects were from the Department of Management Accounting (34 projects), followed by Business Management (with 29 projects). The Department of Financial Accounting came in third place with 24 projects and Department of auditing was in fourth place with 16 projects. The Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology was ranked fifth with a total of 14 projects. The least number of projects were recorded in the Department of Taxation that had two projects with a tie for six projects apiece for the Departments of Decision Sciences, Economics as well as Marketing and Retail Management.

A further analysis of the community engagement projects in view of the number of academic staff involved reveals that the majority, 60 out of 69, involve between one and two academic staff. Four projects involved between three and four academic staff with two projects involving between five and six academic staff. There were single projects in each of the categories involving between seven and eight, nine and 10 as well as those with 11 and more academic staff involved. This picture demonstrates how community engagement is playing out in the college concerned and the limited impact it might have given the numbers involved. All in all, a total of 136 academic staff out of the 660 (only 19.7%) of academic staff in that college are involved in community engagement projects.

The author's interest was aroused by the desire to get deeper and check the nature of typical community engagement projects from a Psychology perspective. From the list of projects provided and brief description by Uys and Pienaar-Steyn (2012), the Career Improvement in Industrial Psychology project stood out. The project helps to rehabilitate patients to re-establish their lives after being discharged from a substance abuse clinic. Unfortunately, only one staff member was involved.

As the author, I was also worried about other projects classified as community engagement projects that from an individual perspective and Unisa policy might not have qualified. Such could have possibly have rather fallen into the category community outreach rather. Such projects include: Unisa Shuttle to a nearby campus; Winter Day; Winter Warmer Project; Abraham Kriel Orphanage's Sponsor a Child/Christmas Wish List (with seven academic staff involved); Churches Sports Association; clothing collection; donation to Itumeleng shelter in Pretoria; public lecture; Light and Love Home Organisation; People Upliftment Program (with 14 academic staff involved); and sending religious books to prison. If the numbers of academic staff involved in these disputable

projects is subtracted from the 130, this figure goes down significantly, in turn pushing down the 19.7 per cent noted earlier. Needless to say, there are other community engagement projects of note from the concerned college like the 'Yes I Can' which engages Grade 8 and 9 learners from previously disadvantaged schools and tests them for proficiency in English as well as mathematical skills. Career guidance is also provided. The other project of importance is the College's Going Green. In April 2010, the college launched the Going Green initiative. The initiative is driven by a committee, which is a subcommittee of the College's Community Engagement Committee (Unisa 2011b, 43). The Going Green Committee is tasked to drive and sponsor practical sustainability projects in line with the college's Community Engagement goals and aspirations. Since the approval of the Policy on Community Engagement and Outreach for Unisa in 2008, the colleges across the Unisa have developed their community engagement plans.

Another example of a recognised community engagement project is the Bright Site of Sunnyside Service Learning Centre, which aims to tackle challenges that threaten the livelihoods and wellbeing of society specifically in the Sunnyside high density suburb. To engage with its African and international community, Unisa has also established an Institute for Applied Research on the Family and Poverty. Furthermore, a group of staff in another department in one of the colleges is involved in a community engagement project in the North West Province. The grassroots-driven rural development project is premised on the fact that communities can take the lead in identifying their own problems and the solutions to those problems (Unisa 2011b, 27).

At the time of finalising this article, Unisa management was consolidating the plans to formulate an institutional community engagement plan. The Institutional Community Engagement Plan is aligned to the MDGs and Unisa's strategic initiatives. The university has also established a strategic fund for emerging strategic initiatives, among which is included initiatives addressing community engagement. The management was also tabling the revised Community Engagement and Outreach Policy as this should be reviewed every three years.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article revealed gaps between community engagement policy and implementation at Unisa. In as much as Unisa clearly identifies community engagement as one of the core functions, the disaggregation of such policy to the lowest implementation levels still lags behind. However, the revised policy of 2013 seeks to address these gaps. Analysis of the KPA agreements that form part

of the IPMS revealed that community engagement occupies a smaller portion compared to teaching and learning as well as research. Whereas the foregone core functions of the university on average take up 80 per cent of the academic employees annual time, community engagement takes on average 10 per cent of the time allocated annually for Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors and Professors. The percentage is even lower for Junior Lecturers and Lecturer grades. It also emerged that the academic staff required to undertake community engagement might not reach the required critical mass to place community engagement fully on Unisa's map of achievements as these comprise a small percentage of total academic employees in the university. Needless to say, community engagement is not explicitly stipulated in administrative employees' performance agreements.

The article further concludes that for community engagement to find its rightful space at Unisa it needs to be benchmarked, measured, monitored and verified as well as evaluated and recognised just like teaching and learning as well as research. What this implies is that appropriate procedures drawn from the Community Engagement and Outreach Policy to act as subsidiary policies must be developed. In as much as teaching and learning as well as research brings income to Unisa through fees and subsidies based on outputs from the Department of Higher Education and Training, management and academic staff should realise and accept that community engagement might be a net cost to the institution. Hence resources for community engagement should be allocated as such. Whereas there are policies in place to promote research such as research and development leave, appointment of research professors and increase in research output subsidies to researchers, community engagement is not viewed or prioritised in the same manner.

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## **NOTES**

1. Exchange rate averaged US\$1 = R8 in the first half of 2012.
2. Emphasis added by the author. However, there still remains a bias in the duties towards research.

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