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Reflections on University-Community Engagement at the University of Georgia

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UNIVERZITA MATEJA BELA V BANSKEJ BYSTRICI

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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UNIVERSITY OF MAKINI

UNITY SERVICE LEARNING

University of Georgia (UG) – Key Facts

- Location: Tbilisi, Georgia
- Established: 2004
- Students: 7,500+ (from 70+ countries)
- Staff:
  - 300 academic staff
  - 700 invited lecturers
  - 400 administrative staff

საქართველოს უნივერსიტეტი
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Programs

77 degree programs across 6 schools:

- Business and Administrative Studies
- Science and Technology
- Arts and Humanities
- Law
- Social Sciences
- Health Sciences

Community Engagement in UG Mission and Vision

- **Mission**: Contribution to democratic development and societal progress by fostering a culture of civic responsibility and active participation in societal progress

- **Vision**:
  - Be a beacon of liberal thought in the region and actively participate in the creation of values.
  - Engage in international cooperation, research, technology transfer, and internships

Country wide community engagement

The Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia for 2022-2030 identifies the community engagement (third mission) of the universities as a new challenge for the higher education system. The strategy describes this as increasing the role of higher educational institutions in the social and economic development of society, meeting the needs of different regions and realizing opportunities.

Government plans to make it an integral part of the university life by

1. Including it in the legislation
2. Making it part of the authorization requirement
3. Requiring funding as other university activities

Community Engagement Activities at UG

Charity and Social Projects:

- Free classes for high school students in law, economics, technologies, philosophies and political ideologies.
- Monthly support for canteen & “Katarzisi” charity
- 1 million GEL donation to Ukrainian aid (2022)
- Free vaccinations (COVID, Flu) for staff and families
- Support for Turkey earthquake victims (2023)
- The dental clinic of the University UG DENT holds periodic charity events like “Healthy Gum Day”
- School of Health Sciences always has regular activities regarding blood transfusion, raising awareness about health sciences
- Tolerance week - annual event fosters discussions on tolerance and equality, promoting social cohesion and public dialogue on important societal issues

Teaching & Learning – Societal Needs Focus

Programs addressing societal issues:

- The Law program includes a Legal Clinic, which provides free legal services to the community.
- The Psychology program features a Psychology Clinic, where individual and group consultations and therapies are offered.
- The school of social sciences has annual conferences in Global Security open to general public
- The School of Science and Technologies organizes annual Cybersecurity festival, where challenges in the field of cybersecurity are discussed and also society gets information how to be protected from cyber threats.

Research on Societal Needs

The university conducts research that focuses on the societal needs of its external communities through its structural unit, the Scientific Institute.

Key research projects:

- "A Smart Village Based on Social Responsibility and Digital Competences"
- "Development of State Policy for Strengthening and Supporting Families with Children, Including Labor Migrant Parent Families"
- "Criminal Law and Human Rights"
- "Maximizing the Use of Social Media to Increase Vaccination Confidence and Uptake"

Student-Led Community Engagement

- Students independently communicate closely with the representatives of various organizations and become involved in different projects.
- These initiatives are also facilitated through students' clubs, which provide additional opportunities for involvement and engagement.

Gaps in Structural Support for Engagement

- No formal office/personnel dedicated to community engagement
- No incentives for staff or students to engage in community activities
- Lack of structured planning, resource allocation and evaluation
- Limited awareness within and outside the university
- Lack of direct budget
- Lack of time
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of training
- Activities tend to be initiated sporadically and without a comprehensive strategy.

Recommendations & Improvements

- Enhancing institutional support and funding
- Establishing clear policies for engagement
- Expanding training programs for faculty and staff
- Strengthening partnerships with external organizations
- Sharing knowledge and best practices
- Building capacity and raising awareness among university actors regarding the importance and potential of community engagement.
- Integrating service-learning into curriculum

Community engagement activities

- Didactics of the Transversal Competence of Entrepreneurship for school Teachers
- First Aid Sunday School
- Community Blood Pressure and Blood Glucose Screening Day
- Empowering School Graduates through Free Training and Testing for Unified National Examination
- Child Rights Awareness and Empowerment Project: Law Students as Advocates for Children’s Rights
- School-Family Partnership Initiative - Supporting Schools and Families in Establishing Meaningful Partnerships to Help Students Achieve Their Full Potential in Academic Progress and Character Development

Thank you
Dankie
Diolch
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Grazie
Ďakujem
Danke
Takk
Kop khun
A dank
Sinukran
Gracias
Hvala
Do jeh
감사합니다
Toda
Kiitos
Tak