



ENHANCE-GSL

Beyond the Classroom Walls: Community-Engaged Learning for Social Justice

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*Education is never neutral!
It either serves to domesticate
or to liberate.*

(Paulo Freire)

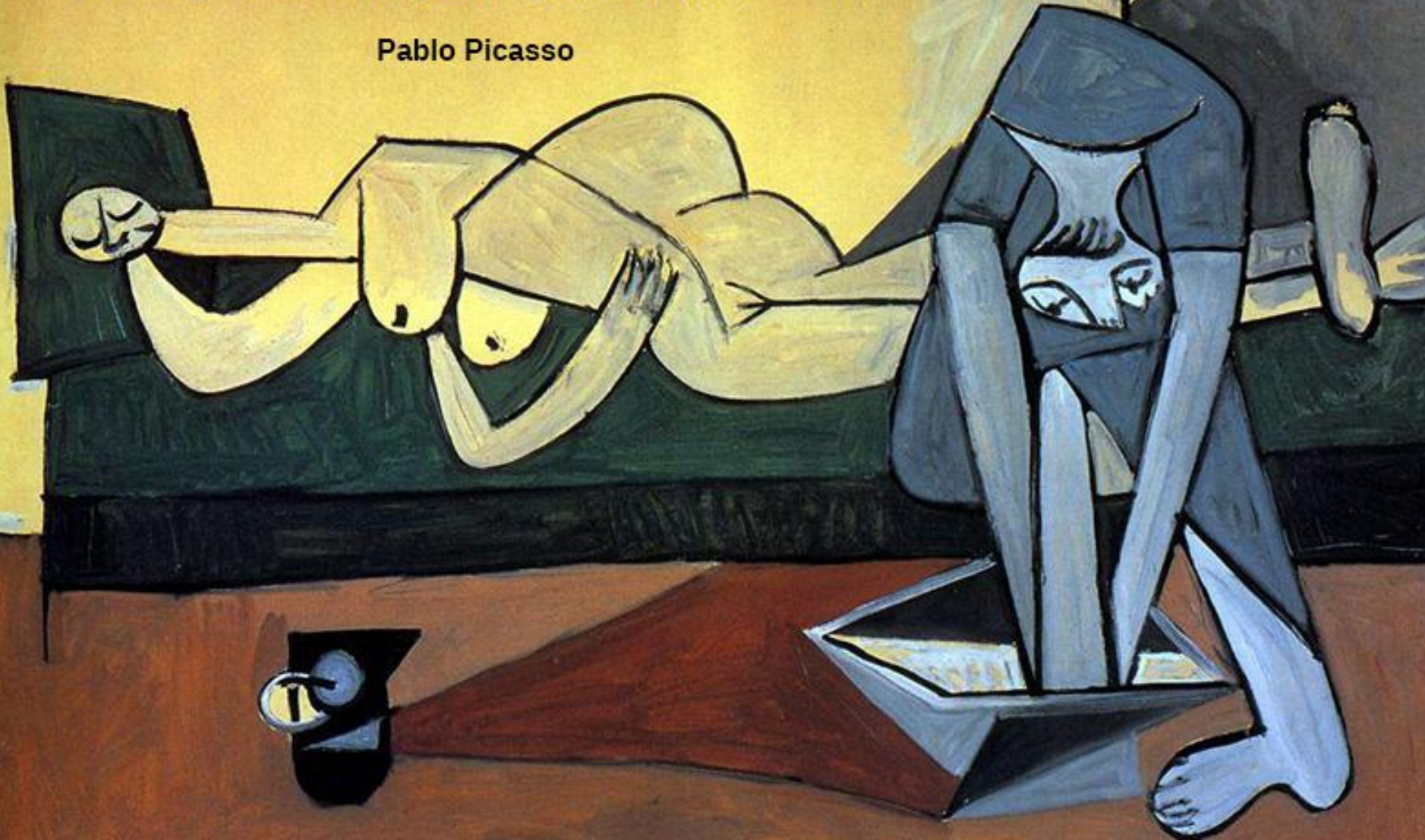
Freetown // FBC // Oct 21, 2025

UNIRI



The world today doesn't make sense,
so why should I paint pictures that do?

Pablo Picasso



POLY-CRISIS SOCIETY

CASCADE EFFECTS

MULTIPLE CRISES
INTERTWINED

36 COUNTRIES IN
CONFLICT/WAR + 78
COUNTRIES ENGAGED

ECONOMIC CRISIS

GROWING POPULATIONS

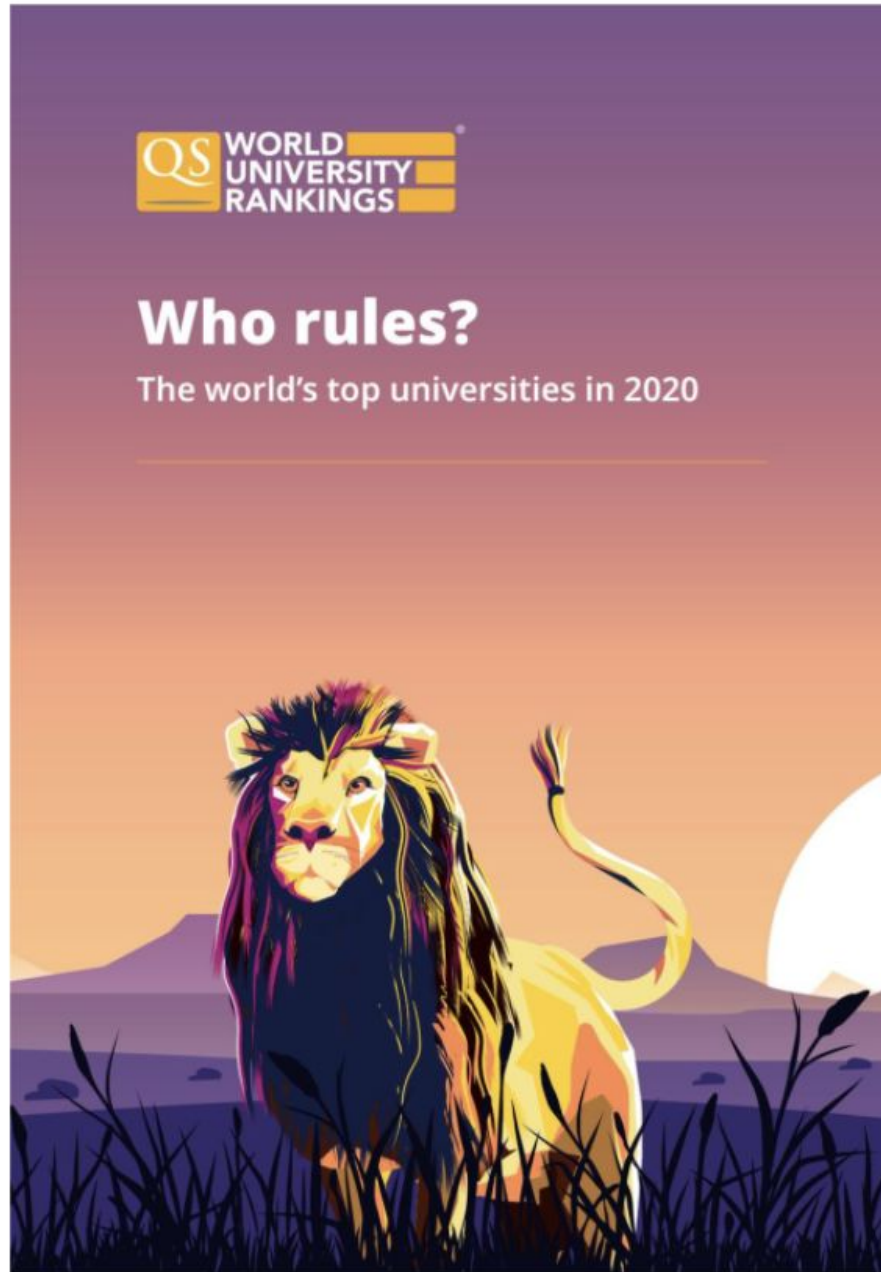
ENERGY

FOOD SECURITY

CLIMATE CHANGE -
NATURAL DISASTERS

...

“GAMIFICATION” OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE



What is going on in HE?

INDIVIDUAL
COMPETITIVE
PARADIGM

VS.

SOCIAL
COLLABORATIVE
PARADIGM

Changing HE paradigm?

When education is rooted in social justice, it produces more than employable graduates - it educates and empowers changemakers.



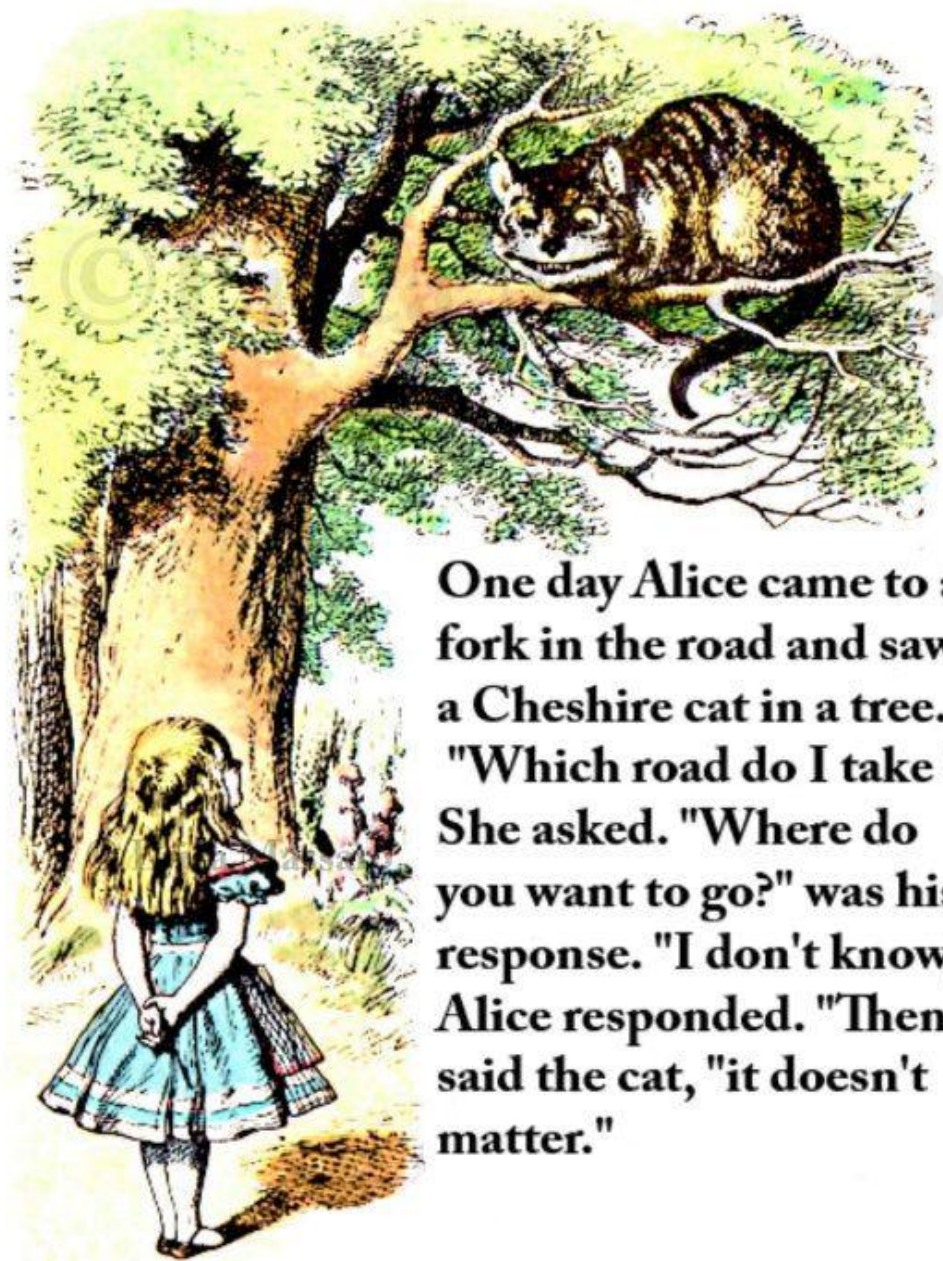
Engaged universities

Engaged academics

Engaged students

**Engaged (non)
academic
communities**

COMMUNITY - ENGAGED LEARNING



One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. "Which road do I take?" She asked. "Where do you want to go?" was his response. "I don't know," Alice responded. "Then said the cat, "it doesn't matter."



MATTER OF FACT

“GAME
CHANGER”

The **move toward community engagement** is in part driven by the recognition that **inclusion of diverse** and both **academic and non-academic perspectives** in multidisciplinary teams is **essential to addressing complex societal problems**.

ARCHITECTURE OF CONCERN

UNIVERSITY
TEACHING &
RESEARCH

ARCHITECTURE OF FACT

“SOCIAL JUSTICE IS AN UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE FOR PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS COEXISTENCE WITHIN AND AMONG NATIONS.” (UN)

**SOCIAL JUSTICE BEGINS WHERE
EMPATHY TURNS INTO SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY**

**RELATED TO CEL, SOCIAL
JUSTICE MEANS...**

LISTENING AND UNDERSTANDING BEFORE ACTING

WORKING WITH, NOT FOR, COMMUNITIES

CO-CREATING KNOWLEDGE, NOT EXTRACTING IT

CRITICALLY REFLECTING ON PRIVILEGE, POWER AND POSITIONALITY

SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS BEYOND THE 'PROJECT' TIMELINE

Social justice is not an abstract concept in CEL. It's something lived and practiced - in the neighbourhood, the shelter, the local school, or environmental initiative where our students engage.

When students work *with* communities, not *for* them, education becomes more than the transmission of knowledge - it becomes the co-creation of meaning.

THE CONTEXT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CEL

*While society has problems,
university has departments...*



UNIVERSITY

TODAY - 300 mil
students worldwide



COMMUNITY

2030 - 415 mil students worldwide

ACADEMICS & RESEARCHERS & STUDENTS

READINESS TO CHANGE & COLLABORATE & BUILD TRUST & SOCIAL CAPITAL

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN

Acts responsibly in the community

Works and pay taxes

Obeys laws

Recycles
Gives blood
Volunteer to lend a hand in times of crisis
Contributes food, clothes

To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character, be honest, responsible and law-abiding members of the community.

PARTICIPATORY CITIZEN

Active member of community organisations

Organises community efforts to care for those in need

Knows how government agencies work and strategies for accomplishing collective tasks

Helps to organise volunteering and humanitarian actions

To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ORIENTED CITIZEN

Critically assess social, political and economic structures to see beyond surface causes

Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice

Knows about democratic social movements and how to effects systemic change

Explores why people are homeless and acts to solve root causes

To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

DESCRIPTION

SAMPLE ACTION

CORE ASSUMPTIONS

GLIMPSE OF RESEARCH ON CEL IMPACT...



**“I FEEL LIKE
ANOTHER I
HAS GROWN...”**

CEL RESEARCH STUDIES 'NARRATIVES'

Prosocial attitudes and behaviours

CEL contributing to...

...and so much more :)

STUDENTS' PROSOCIAL ATTITUDES

STUDENTS' LEVEL OF ACCEPTANCE
OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND
REDUCTION OF PREJUDICES

CHANGED ATTITUDES & INCREASED
AWARENESS OF THE SOCIAL ISSUES
AFFECTING PEOPLE WITH WHOM
THE STUDENTS WORKED

INCREASED EMPATHY

GREATER SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY

INCREASED SENSE OF
SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

MORE CARING
RELATIONSHIPS WITH
OTHERS

INCREASED VOLUNTEERISM

TRANSFORMATIVE AND
RADICAL HABITUS CHANGE

Simons and Cleary, 2006
Sass and Coll, 2015
Augustin and Freshman, 2016
Cabedo et al., 2018

Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011
Porter, 2011
Warren, 2012
Clark et al., 2013
Moely & Ilustre, 2014
Sydnor et al., 2014
Levkoe, Brail, & Daniere, 2014
Bettencourt, 2015
Fullerton, Reitenauer, & Kerrigan, 2015;
Hatcher & Studer, 2015
Alston et al., 2016
Beatty et al., 2016
Mann & DeAngelo, 2016
Cotten & Thompson, 2017
Lawson & Firestone, 2018

Blyth et al., 1997
Anderson, 1998
Billig et al., 2005
Lucy-Bouler & Lucy-Bouler, 2012
Hatcher & Studer, 2015
Campbell & Oswald, 2018
Ćulum Ilić & Miloš, 2022

CEL RESEARCH STUDIES 'NARRATIVES'

Future / long-term perspective

Students who participated
in CEL courses show...

**MORE LIKELY TO BECOME
VOLUNTEERS UP TO FIVE
YEARS AFTER GRADUATION**

(Astin et al., 1998; Shiarella et al., 2000; Hatcher
& Studer, 2015)

**CLEAR INTENTIONS TO
BECOME MORE CIVICALLY
ACTIVE BY VOLUNTEERING**

(Astin et al., 2000; Howard, 2001; Hebert & Hauf,
2015; Lawson & Firestone, 2018)

**CLEAR INTENTIONS TO SEEK
A JOB THAT OFFERS
WORKING WITH
DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**

(Hebert & Hauf, 2015;
Lawson & Firestone, 2018)

**CLEAR INTENTIONS TO SEEK
AND HOLD A JOB IN A
SERVICE-RELATED FIELD**

(Jacoby, 1996; Astin et al., 2000;
Howard, 2001)

**POSITIVE ATTITUDES
TOWARDS OWN PERSONAL
AND SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY**

(Jacoby, 1996; Astin et al., 2000; Howard, 2001)

**CLEAR INTENTIONS OF
HIGHER PERSONAL
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

(Jacoby, 1996; Astin et al., 2000;
Howard, 2001)

**GREATER GAINS IN ATTITUDES
INVOLVING POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARENESS
AND CIVIC ACTION**

(Moley et al., 2002)

CEL RESEARCH STUDIES 'NARRATIVES'

Comparative quasi experimental studies

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF
COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Astin and Sax, 1998
Ćulum Ilić, Brozmanova
Gregorova & Ruso, 2022

HIGHER SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY
AND RESPONSIBILITY

Kolenko et al. 1996
Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006
Cabedo et al., 2018
Shin et al., 2018

MORE DEVELOPED CIVIC
COMPETENCE

Conrad and Hedine, 1981
Segal, 2011
Greenwood, 2015
Richard et al., 2016
Langhout and Gordon, 2019
Liu and Hsiung, 2019

HIGHER APPRECIATION OF AND
FOR THEIR OWN COMMITMENT TO
FUTURE ENGAGEMENT IN THE
COMMUNITY

Markus et al., 1993
Eyler and Giles 1994
Reed et al., 2005
Ngai, 2009
Richard et al., 2016

GREATER GAINS IN ATTITUDES
INVOLVING POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARENESS AND
CIVIC ACTION

Moely et al., 2002
Ćulum Ilić & Miloš, 2022

Students who
participated in CEL
courses show...





GLOCAL SUSTAINABILITY CITIZENS

community-engaged pedagogy -
linking academic courses &
research with community
needs/problems -
academic activism

HE as socially responsive,
responsible and engaging learning
environment!

**Educating students - future leaders - with a worldwide
vision for social justice and positive change!**

Community-engaged learning is not a magic wand :)

Educators are (not) wizards :)

***"THE EDUCATOR HAS THE DUTY
OF NOT BEING NEUTRAL"***
(Paulo Freire)

CEL is critical, transformative and
empowering pedagogy!

The '*magic*' of that pedagogy lies
within all of you students, and all of
us educators!



REIMAGINING THE UNIVERSITY...
SO, WHAT MIGHT A UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE
LOOK LIKE?

PERHAPS NOT JUST A CAMPUS - BUT A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS

NOT ONLY A SPACE FOR KNOWLEDGE - BUT A SPACE FOR CONCERN AND CARE

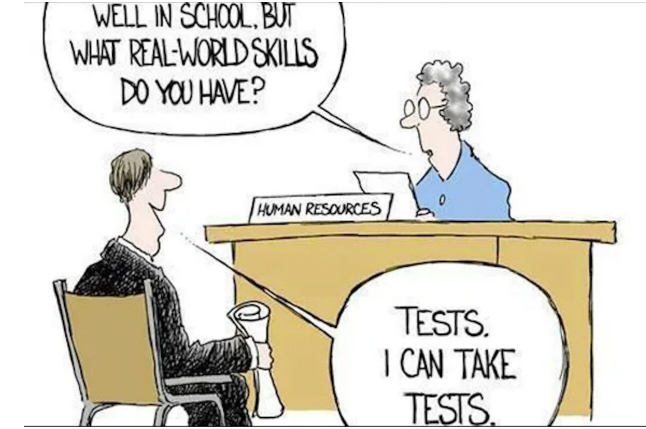
NOT ONLY A PLACE OF LECTURES - BUT OF DIALOGUE, EMPATHY, SOLIDARITY AND CO-CREATION

I think, that is what going *beyond the classroom walls* truly means.

It's the courage to open our doors - and our hearts - to the people
and problems around us.



When universities learn
to care,
societies learn
to change.



IMAGINE UNIVERSITIES AS GLOCAL CENTRES -
GLOBALLY AWARE, LOCALLY GROUNDED

IMAGINE UNIVERSITIES AS PLACES WHERE
COURAGE MEETS COMPASSION

IMAGINE UNIVERSITIES AS PLACES WHERE
STUDENTS LEARN NOT ONLY TO EARN A LIVING -
BUT TO BUILD A LIFE THAT MATTERS

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

**APPRECIATE YOUR INTEREST,
PATIENCE AND ATTENTION :)**

Non Nobis Solum

-Not for Ourselves Alone-

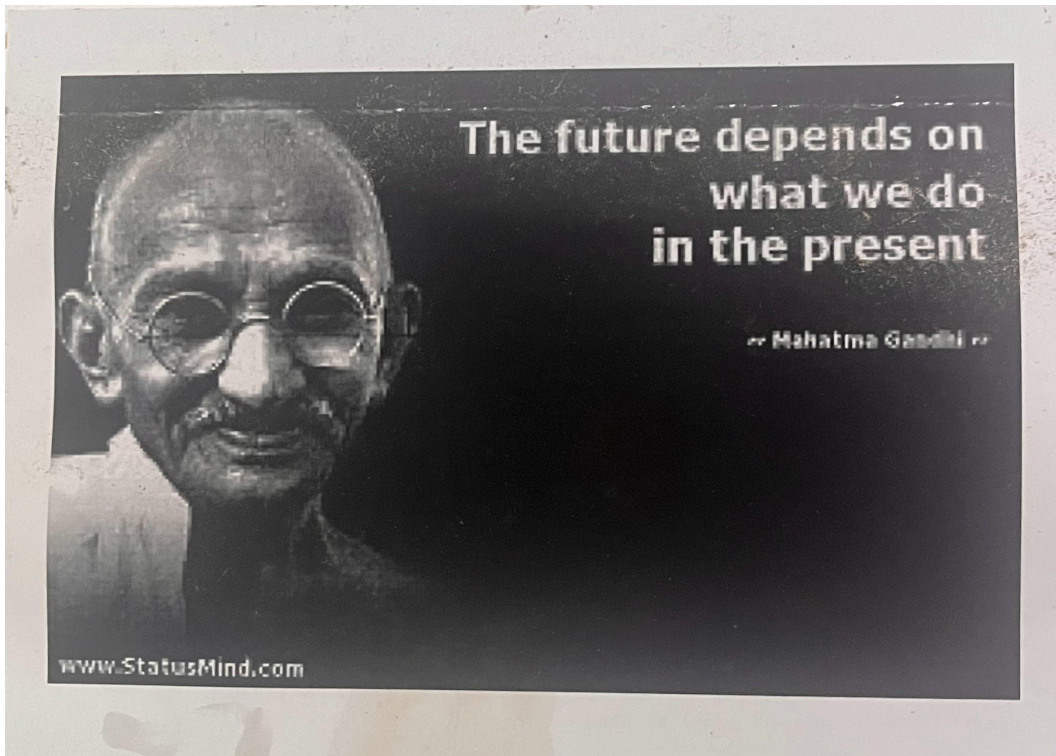


*photo taken on Oct 20 @ the FBC library cafe