

University of Nicosia Medical School
Students' engagement in the community
Implementation framework

1. Introduction

Student engagement in the community falls under the School's policy for student-centred education (Objective 3), whereby students are provided with opportunities to engage and develop a sense of belonging. Community engagement also reflects the School's value of social responsibility for contribution to society at the local, national, regional and international level. This document aims to provide a general framework of action and guide the specific implementation plan rather than a list of activities or detailed strategy of how students' engagement in the community can be enhanced.

2. Definition

There are many definitions of "community engagement" in higher education. In general, it refers to "sustainable networks, partnerships, communication media, and activities between HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] and communities at local, national, regional and international level" [1^{P1}]. Along similar lines, the European Commission published a detailed report and guide for HEIs and defines community engagement as "the range of ways in which university staff, students and management interact with external communities in mutually beneficial ways, either as part of teaching and research or as part of other projects and joint initiatives" [2^{P6}]. Students are one of the main stakeholders for strengthening HEI's community engagement [2-3], which contributes towards their learning and development [3-6].

3. Objectives

In order to achieve sustainable engagement of students in the community, the School has formulated the following objectives:

- Promote student engagement in the community.
- Provide support for enhancing student engagement in the community.
- Increase, measure and evaluate relevant activities for student engagement in the community at the Medical School, local community, nationally, regionally and internationally (wherever possible).

4. Implementation framework

A framework (see figure 1) is proposed for enhancing the engagement of students in the community locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally. The framework is supported by two other components. (a) “Promotion and Support”, which are the basis of the framework for mobilizing actions and establishing a relevant culture. (b) “Activities”, such as curricular, research and dissemination, and extra-curricular.

4.1. Promotion and Support

Community engagement should be promoted among students during their journey at the Medical School. Promotion could take place in the School’s website and promotional material, during induction, with the help of Heads/ Associate Heads of Departments, Programme Directors, Year Leads, Personal Tutors and student-facing staff, in relevant departments, through MSSS’ activities and initiatives, by the Student Services Centre, and by establishing recognition through Extra Curricular Awards.

In order to achieve sustainable student engagement in the community, support is needed. This can be achieved with the integration of community engagement in the School’s structures and procedures (e.g., training, staff appraisals, job descriptions, peer review forms, clubs/societies policy, etc), and with the availability of budget.

4.2. Activities

Community-based activities could be classified into three main areas namely, Curricular, Research and Dissemination, and Extra Curricular.

4.2.1. Curricular

Wherever possible the community could be involved in students’ learning within courses or lectures. For example, invitation of expert patients, visits to the community to talk with patients or vulnerable groups, consulting patients or patient groups for the development of the curriculum, interprofessional learning opportunities etc. Programme Directors, Heads/ Associate Heads of the Departments, and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs could be involved in this in order to enhance integration of the community in the curriculum.

4.2.2. Research and Dissemination

Students’ participation in research is a good example of community engagement, especially when research aims at social change. At the Medical School, students participate in research through their curriculum (e.g. Research Projects under the MED-405 Research Course (of the MD program) or Research Projects under the SSC-T in the MBBS programme or Research courses in the MScFM, MPH and MHSA programmes) as well as outside the curriculum (e.g., through the “Students in Research Programme” and through other research projects offered by faculty at the Medical School). Students also have the opportunity to publish their work in high quality academic journals and present their work in scientific conferences. If deemed necessary, the Associate Dean for Research may explore more opportunities for students to engage with research and contribute to society.

4.2.3. Extra Curricular

Student Services Centre (SSC)

The SSC may jointly organize thematic events with community organizations (i.e., NGOs). These events could have a thematic lead from the administration, should be organized in collaboration with students, and vary in order to attract as many students as possible and reflect School's diverse student body.

Mobile Clinic

The Mobile Clinic is an excellent case of students' engagement in the community and contribution to society and should be used as an example for enhancing students' community outreach in other structures.

Clubs and Societies, and the MSSS

Each club/ society should have its own academic or staff advisor and organize at least two community-based events per year, reflecting the objectives of each club/society. The MSSS may also organize at least two community-based events.

External student-led collaborations

Establish collaborations with other clubs/societies from other Universities in Cyprus, regionally (i.e., EU) and internationally for organizing joint community-based activities or projects.

Student-led School tours

Students could be involved in leading School tours as appointed student ambassadors under the supervision of an administrator. School tours should not only confine to open days or tailored for candidate students but could also reach out to encompass other groups in the community who might be interested in learning more about our School (i.e. Day Centres for the elderly, NGOs, schools, etc)

5. Measurable results

Curricular, and Research activities that pertain to students' engagement in the community could be measured, monitored and promoted by the Heads/Associate Heads of the Departments, Programme Directors and the Associate Dean for Research, respectively.

The SSC is going to keep record and statistics of students' non-academic engagement in the community for measuring and evaluation purposes.

Internationalization of students' engagement in the community might take longer to achieve as collaborations with organizations or engagement with activities abroad take time to explore and implement.

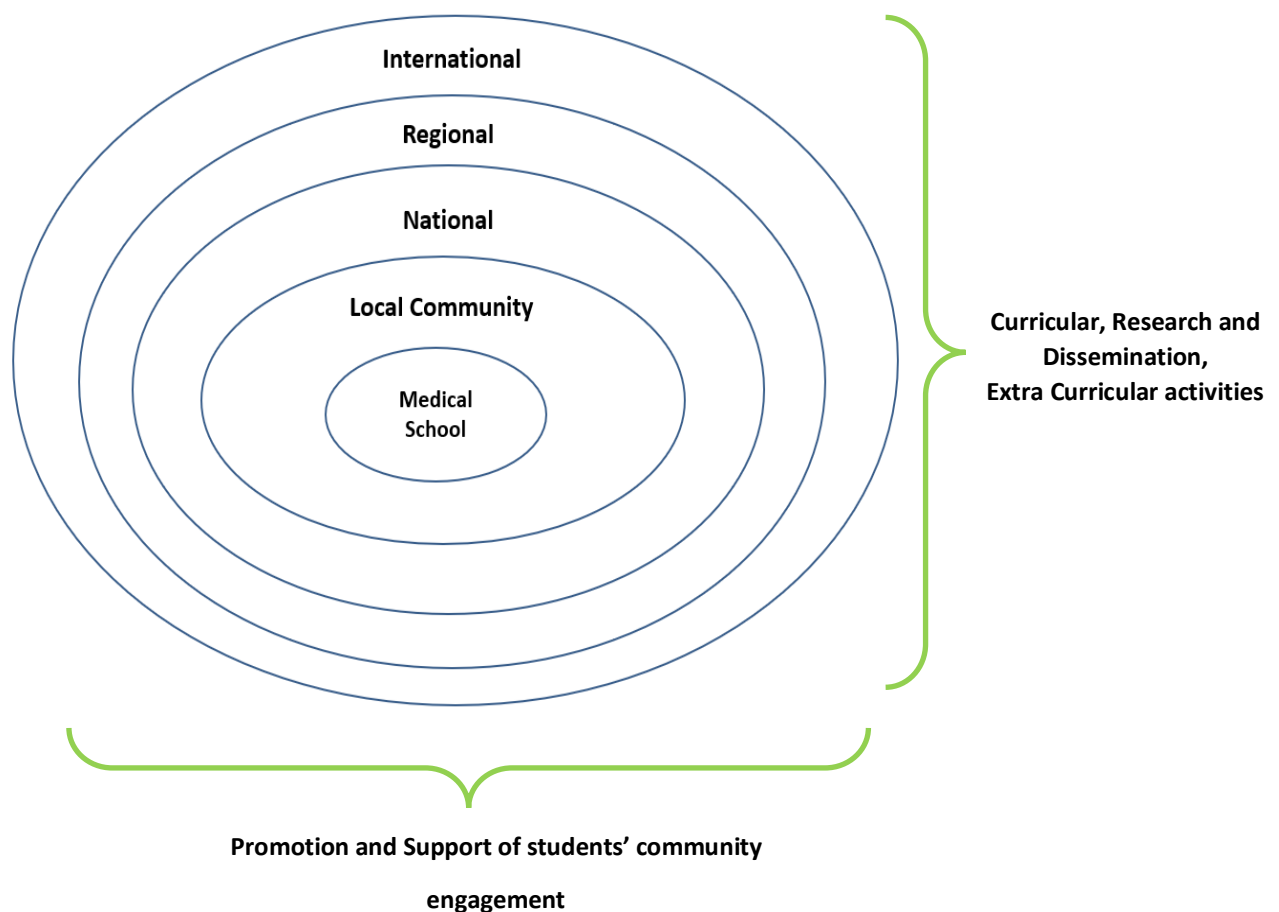


Figure 1: Framework for enhancing community engagement. This is based on the Pittsburg's Model of Community Engagement in Higher Education.

Note

The content of the framework in this short report has been informed by the student sections of the Farnell's (2020) report "Community engagement in higher education" and Farnell et al's (2021) TEFCE community engagement toolbox.

References

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