Opening Remarks - Vice-Chancellor, Prof Peter Sheehan

In opening the Forum, Professor Sheehan identified principles for true engagement, including -

- involve the community to identify action, and give some control to the community to influence change
- become knowledgeable about your community/communities and their perceptions; build trust and seek commitment
- recognise engagement as a process of mutuality: a responsive and dynamic activity involving staff, students and the community, which can be modified
- see the community as a “system” populated by groups with special interests and different member needs; build and preserve relationships; act ethically.

Prof Sheehan said the relationship of Church and culture broaden the concept of engagement. Engagement is the embodiment of charity. For ACU, community engagement is Charity and Justice energised by our Catholic Mission.

Program Overview and Introduction
Prof John O’Gorman, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Outreach), ACU National and Prof Mick Bezzina, Director, Religious Education and Education Services, Catholic Education Office, Parramatta.

Prof O’Gorman outlined that the morning sessions would explore the meaning of engagement to help understand and articulate it in a coherent and systematic way. In later sessions, some examples of existing ACU projects would be highlighted to help infuse good practices and act as a springboard to enrich and extend community engagement efforts.

Prof Bezzina stated that the Forum aimed to promote partnerships, including building them within ACU. The Forum had been structured to stimulate discussion through key presentations, followed by small group discussion and identification of questions for consideration during Plenary sessions. Prof Bezzina encouraged participants to think about the following three questions which would be re-visited at the end of the program:

1. What are you going to do when you leave the Forum?
2. How are you going to do it?
3. Who will you connect with to help you do it?
Prof Bezzina introduced Dr Fitzgerald. Key features of his presentation included -

- Community engagement highlights the distinctiveness and uniqueness of ACU, and ACU’s value to the community as an engaged University, Church and non profit organisation.
- Mutuality (community, the Church, business, and the University working together) and social engagement is about building social capital based on trust, reciprocity and empowerment.
- ACU shows leadership in the community (Peter Drucker’s Third Sector), not just through ‘service’ - and there are many examples of this within ACU - but through empowering the community, working from the premise that there is capacity within all people to make a difference.
- Consider a framework for developing the existing social capital within communities, starting from a basis of trust and reciprocity: build strong networks; help individuals and communities to work through problems and find solutions. Such a process promotes innovation and cooperatively based endeavour, and has the potential to lower welfare costs.
- Barbara Holland said that “Engagement is the mutually beneficial exchange, exploitation and application of knowledge, expertise and information”. At ACU, engagement must enrich, inform, enliven and expand the teaching, learning and research experience as well as respond to community identified needs and opportunities. It is a practical agenda.
- Engage with a range of communities, including local Parishes. Produce engaged citizens.

Prof Bezzina introduced Prof Brennan. Key features of his presentation included -

- Be “at home” and be engaged “as strangers”.
- University life is more difficult today, as students struggle with economic imperatives and government policy. It is more difficult to feel a sense of community.
- Challenges facing the University include -
  - To have an intellectual sense of being “outsiders” but to connect with the community.
  - To acknowledge the differences between intellectuals and University administrators (eg. the person who markets the image of ACU National)
  - To present the Catholic ethos while identifying as part of the University tradition.
  - To take things on trust and “be afloat” across disciplines. This requires sufficient shared experience to trust each other.
  - To acknowledge the University’s difference from the community at large and embrace it.

Prof Brennan listed the following six challenges for Forum participants as they consider community engagement opportunities, which had been identified by a 2005 Jesuit Taskforce on globalisation and marginalisation -

1. Espouse and cherish differences amongst ourselves as a privileged means of addressing the divisions in our marginalised and globalising world
2. Presume that God’s self-revelation will be disclosed amidst differences and not just in the resolving of difference.
3. Adopt one justice issue, inform yourself, and after close contact with the marginalised, take some political action (no matter where you leave nor what your work).
4. Ask yourself, when you consume resources, if similar consumption by all is sustainable. If it is not, ask yourself what you will do to make up or put right your excessive consumption of limited global resources.
5. Be an advocate for at least one culture different from your own.
6. Acquire an appreciative and advanced knowledge of at least one religion not your own.
Prof Bezzina opened the Panel Discussion with the question “What are your impressions of the Forum so far?”. The following responses were shared by Panel members -

- The concept of “mutuality” - community engagement is about relationships, which means really listening to others; going in and out of their lives; having conversations and dialogue with which to enrich and sustain engagement.
- Your partners are not only the community, but also the agencies with whom relationships need to be built and sustained.
- Reflection is vital: reflect on what happens to you during the process; identify the unjust structures; help others understand and overcome the unjust structures.
- Frameworks for reflection can include art therapy (multi-modal), writing journals to describe and record feelings, identify key words, come to an understanding of what you are learning, and help you decide on actions.
- Student perspective - ACU is a rich and diverse academic community, not an “us / them” organisation, but one that can work together.

The following questions were addressed to the audience and the Panel.

**Question - Where is the emphasis: University and community, or University in the community?**

- The University exists within a community and engagement seeks to move you more to working with the community. Engagement is a transforming process, with an equal partnership being the aim … but it’s a challenge.
- ACU also is building community within ACU itself. Students at first don’t feel they belong and don’t know until exams on how they are coping. They also feel economic pressures. It is necessary to build a community of support within ACU. “The Big Event” helped to build a National identity.
- Student perspective - ACU National is less bewildering than other Universities - that’s an advantage.

**Question - How do we motivate ACU staff to get on board?**

- You can’t motivate all. The objective must be to get a critical mass; to convert a critical minority to get an idea over the line.
- Community engagement can’t be seen as an additional burden for staff. It must be part of everyday work and life at ACU.
- Convert the heart and mind and institutionalise engagement - must be done together if it is not to be seen as an “add on”.
- Example from Frank Brennan about a Boston University program that was “institutionalised”: students who were going on placements were provided with readings and information prior to the placement, then engaged in structured reflection with peers first and then academics. The program required significant institutional financial support.
- Students going into vulnerable situations in the community can be supported if relationships are built with agencies in the same area. You can clarify joint goals for projects and go into the community together. Build in a process for reflection as agencies do not do this. There also is a need for longer term engagement in a sustainable way.
- Student perspective - learning about the community into which you would be placed is necessary. It adds perspective and enriches the process.

**Question - How long is a “longer term commitment” - one semester or one year seems to be the norm.**

- Young volunteers want to have a clear understanding of their role, the skills needed, time based constraints and anticipated outcomes. Programs with agencies must not be a burden, so responsibilities and obligations need to be clear. Agencies don’t have the time to engage in reflection - that is a skill with ACU could bring to the table.
- Programs of 10-12 months are good as that provides time to build a strong relationship with the agency. Contact could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly.
- Jim Tobin, Smith Family commented that the cost of accepting volunteers is enormous. Sustainability requires agreement on a program, time frame and evaluation. He suggested that a Memorandum of Understanding or articulated plan that identifies obligations and mutually beneficial outcomes is
necessary for both partners, as it provides a basis for evaluation and can form the basis of future engagements.

- Terms of engagement must be clear. It is particularly helpful if key players or expectations change, as it helps avoid conflict. Not for profit organisations are not easy to work with.
- “Corporate social responsibility” could be seen as a tool of engagement at ACU, with the aim of making community engagement a core activity, not an extra.
- Students perspective - they would like to be involved but can experience lifestyle constraints such as timing and the pressure to study and finish a degree. When they do become involved, it enriches their life experience eg Outreach Program, North Sydney. Raise awareness that engagement is not about giving money, but giving a hand.

**Question** - *The role of NGOs is political advocacy but fear that graduates do not have an advocacy mindset now. How can NGOs get back to their advocacy role, and how can ACU help?*

- It's a fundamental role for NGOs to be strong advocates. While the political environment may make it difficult, strategies such as setting up Foundations can be utilised to make it happen.
- It can help with longer term philanthropy if Universities are courageous and articulate. There are risks, but they must be taken. ACU has not abrogated its role: the Gospel message is to be an advocate and it is inseparable from the University role.
- The challenge today is to make a difference in a political and media environment. Advocacy is not loud and noisy. It is nuanced and youth will find a way. Today it may be using the internet, not marching on the streets, and it can change almost daily.

**Question** - *How do we handle the tensions of “catholicity” and being a public university, particularly when we have internal diversity?*

- Raise awareness, encourage advocacy and action. Recognise that difference is not a division, and there is strength in diversity (“more than one way to skin a cat”). Taking more than one view gives strength.
- Graduates who accept diversity and see it as a strength will take this into their employment and spread the value of their education into the workplace.

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### Session One - Summation (Prof Mick Bezzina)

In summarising small group discussion, Prof Bezzina reported that the following key words were frequently used in small group discussions -

- Relationships, mutuality, and responsibility
- Community and difference, and the tension between them
- Catholic responsibility and commitment, and
- Challenge.
Prof Bezzina introduced Ms Hampshire and Assoc Prof Howard as joint presenters for the session. They gave their shared and individual perspectives on existing projects, including Clemente and Catalyst. Key features of his presentation included:

- Mission Australia has a strong role in research and social policy, investing $3/4m annually. The interactions of research, policy and practice are very important now and have been recognised by the ARC.
- Mission Australia has moved from providing services to the “poor and helpless” (Deficit model of welfare) to building on the capacities of clients in a “strengths based” model of engagement.
- There are new roles for business, the media and universities to help break down mindsets and find new ways of engaging and of “doing” business.
- Community engagement allows you to modify theory and practice. Working with communities is in ACU’s “bones” - being advocates for those without a voice.
- Community building requires passion and a shared value base, often associated with social justice.
- Clear and open lines of communication are required. Key personnel can identify tensions and act as facilitators to resolve issues and keep the project moving forward.
- You interact with systems, and bring a multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary approach that fosters learning through experience and reflection eg. Big Event, Clemente and Catalyst Project (delivering University education to the homeless).
- Structures must accommodate changes in personnel, changing projects.
- Developing a shared language takes time, varies across and between agencies as well as communities, but is crucial.
- Shared ownership and collaboration bring great rewards eg research papers, granting opportunities. Beware of competitiveness (“our” students). Be able to move quickly (“scrambling”) and re-focus to save a project (a new definition of “resurrection”) because while universities like to plan, agencies or communities may not.
- Neither partner (ACU or Mission Australia) could achieve the outcomes without the other.
- Target projects - can’t do everything with limited resources. Burnout on all sides is possible where there is lack of organisational support - re-think organisational purpose and structures.
- There has to be a presence and a clear purpose and agreement on levels of sustainability for projects.

Plenary Panel Discussion (Session 2)
Moderated by Prof Mick Bezzina, with Panel Members: Ms Anne Hampshire, Assoc Prof Peter Howard, Sr Rosemary Crumlin (ACU Staff member) and Assoc Prof Nasir Butrous (ACU Staff member).

Prof Bezzina opened the Panel Discussion with the question “Any burning issues so far?”. The following issues were identified from the floor:

- The word “community” had been used only to include Humans and not the rest of Nature. The participant would like the definition broadened to include, for example, ecological justice.
- Engagement should occur not only with the disadvantaged but also with the advantaged eg includes projects working with elite athletes.

In response to the question “Is there a place for engagement with the advantaged?” the following responses were shared:

- The Catalyst Project involves corporate volunteers because it is important to break down societal divisions. For example, Minter Ellison lawyers get a lot out of the project. Participants bring different strengths. A “strengths based model” allows for sharing of experiences.
- Dialogue, or knowing the other, getting a better understanding and respect, helps builds trust. You need to start on an equal basis - get and give a helping hand. Engagement is inclusive of all communities.
- ACU National staff are reasonably advantaged. They have understanding and professional knowledge to bring to projects, and experience new relationship opportunities with people they normally would not encounter.
- Engagement also is occurring with the environment through the Murray/Darling River project.
**Question - How do you facilitate student engagement and the benefits to staff?**

- The critical mass at ACU is informed service, outreach and engagement but ACU may not be good at sharing expertise. Need structures in place - possibly internet or website - to bring together accumulated knowledge and skills, both locally and internationally.
- There are formalised engagement opportunities throughout courses. For example, in the Bachelor of Business and Information Systems program in Brisbane, three units are provided for students to engage with the community. The students engage in problem solving in the local community, and reflective practice. Third year students reflect on their leadership skills, complete journals and write essays based on their learnings which are shared with their peers.

*Sr Rosemary Crumlin shared four Images of religious paintings.
“Artists are pushing us to extend images of God and Christ, and to leave a secure place.”*

**Question - How do you balance the “Huddle and Muddle” approach with an outcomes focussed business or university?**

- “Huddle and Muddle” is coming to know one another, and it takes time.
- Universities, business and communities want to be strategic - they won’t engage without it. However to be strategic you must explore why you want to do something and the possibilities, so you need dialogue as well.

**Topic #5 - The meeting of University and community - moving forward**
(Sister Sandra Lupi rsm, Congregational leader of the Sisters of Mercy.)

Prof Bezzina introduced Sr Lupi. Key features of her presentation included -

- A community development framework can be used to underpin and move engagement forward. Community development is a way of working to change a system, not the people or the social arrangements.
- Universities can adopt a brokering role, acting between the vertical structure (government, Church, university) and horizontal structures (communities, neighbourhoods, work places). The tension between the two structures creates the energy for engagement. It implies face-to-face interaction in the places where people feel at home.
- The university advocates on behalf of one to influence the other eg a migrant accessing services at Centrelink needs assistance; the University/broker advocates for provision of ethnic counter workers. The University/broker identifies the needed structural change.
- Work where you have most influence. Not much structural change is possible at the top government level.
- Healthy communities have capacity, resilience and leadership to engage with issues.
- Engagement is more than community service. The ideal is partnership, reciprocity, and a commitment to sharing.
- Clear goals and a clear purpose are required, as well as processes appropriate to the community with which you plan to engage. There are often barriers and communities need incentives, as they may have been “consulted to death”.
- Goals can be specific or broad and you must manage both. Be clear that you are willing to engage with community goals even if they are not your own. Be clear whether you are partnering or sharing control.
- To be an effective broker, you need to become knowledgeable of the community and be able to resolve conflicts.
- An “assets based community development” framework can be useful as it looks at what’s already in a community (resources, institutions, networks; community talent and skills) and seeks to work with them rather than focussing on problems and needs.
- Respect the diversity of the community and build relationships based on the highest ethical standards. A community is not homogeneous; there may be factions and power plays. Help sensitise the whole community to the diversity of its members.
- Evaluation is important at all levels to measure outcomes in context. Universities can teach communities how to participate in evaluation to improve projects.
Prof Bezzina introduced Ms Cummins. Key features of her presentation included -

- Community engagement starts with who we are and how we define our humanity.
- Consumerism is a barrier to accruing wisdom - it targets our neediness. We live at a frenetic pace and the focus is on the individual and individual wants. People now are seeking new ways of finding meaning.
- Universities can share the traditions of protecting and presenting the truths of an era. They can bring people to a deeper meaning in life. They offer leadership through all their activities, including working with other faiths. Programs like Clemente and Catalyst bring people into the tradition of learning.
- The passage through puberty is dangerous now. Parents are struggling to fulfil their roles. There are growing aged care needs. There is a role for ACU in the formation of people who are happy and fulfil their potential.
- ACU has a role as a contemporary institution in advocacy and in driving policy development based on scholarly knowledge. There may be risks to working with diverse views.

Plenary Panel Discussion (Session 3)
Moderated by Prof Mick Bezzina, with Panel Members: Sister Sandra Lupi rsm, Ms Anne Cummins; Dr Tracey Sanders (ACU staff member), Ms Alana Travisan (ACU student).

Prof Bezzina opened the Panel Discussion with the question “What does ACU need to do to eradicate internal barriers?” and the following responses were shared -

- Build relationships and engage in dialogue. There is another facet of asset based community development and that is the “appreciative enquiry method” where you ask “What’s been your best experience of …. in this organisation?”. It forces attention out of a deficit model and on to what has worked.
- “Spring clean” and put resources where they are most relevant. For example, be selective and minimise frenetic start up activity in return for longer action and outcomes.
- Look for collaboration around “quality” projects. Don’t manage the passion or “can do” attitude out of projects.
- Barriers can be trying to do too much. Look for opportunities to use the “Time, Talent and Treasure” of the organisation, not just the individual. Ask “What will ACU invest of its time, talent and treasure?” and not just its finances.
- Everyone is expected to participate in community engagement - it should not be seen as an add-on. Ensure this is clear in recruitment - spell out what community engagement will mean for staff and students and how it applies at ACU.
- Student does not feel that having to undertake a unit that has no credit point value is of benefit - the students and staff just want to get it done. Staff aren't giving it their all.
- A concern was raised that nothing had been said about the Spirit or the Apostolate. Dr Sanders replied that she saw teaching as an act of hospitality and through her teaching she was living the Church’s mission, being driven by a sense of Spirit. She felt respect was necessary to give authenticity to the way we teach and how we respond to each other.

Question - Is there a distinction between personal and ACU actions?

- Yes, there is a distinction but both are necessary. Generosity and commitment of people matters, and it matters that ACU takes on a role which is part of the nature of a university - in teaching, research and engagement. One is not better than the other.
- As a corporate entity, ACU needs to espouse and model community engagement.
- While there is an institutional imperative, resources are needed for community engagement, just like grants are needed to fund research. Today begins the process internally of how to awaken consciousness and find more structured ways of promoting community engagement, such as being highly selective in what will be supported.
- Community service, such as serving on boards and giving expertise, has a profound impact. However community engagement has a richer feedback loop into teaching, research and social change.
- Student perspective - doing an internship with Mary McInerney and homeless people was life changing. The program also provided the necessary support through reflection to make sense of what was happening to the individual through the process.
**Forum Summation (Prof Mick Bezzina)**

Prof Bezzina reiterated the three questions posed at the beginning of the Forum and asked members to spend five minutes in silence to consider their responses.

In conclusion, Prof Bezzina referred to three ethics for leadership (Boston College) that he felt provided a useful organising construct for community engagement -

1. authenticity - live out truth and integrity; sustain others’ authenticity; connect with real concerns of the other. Uniqueness and difference are required.
2. presence - be truly open and engaging. Have a sense of self. It is not just net working, but engagement that has depth and breadth.
3. responsibility - acknowledge responsibility to self and others for realisation of the mission: be engaged.

**Reflections (Prof Peter Sheehan)**

The Vice-Chancellor’s role from the Forum will be to explain and operationalise four principles for positioning ACU National - relationships, mutuality, difference and respect.

ACU must remain engaged with local and international problems as an agent of social transformation, and elaborate on working paradigms for the philosophy of community engagement. There is no single approach that will work. ACU must be an advocate, take the risks, and be heard - as is the case with its work with the homeless, interfaith, the Indigenous community which is a community within a community.

A new Institute for the Advancement of Community Engagement is being developed to move things forward, with a CEO to be recruited. Constraints to be faced include prejudice and political correctness. Community engagement must thread through research, teaching and learning. Programs must articulate with teaching and research, and be a resource for enriching ACU. There are other tensions in helping government recognise what ACU does, and we must take up the challenge of evaluating our engagement - what are the indicators, what is the evidence base? We must selectively focus what we do and where we do it eg Timor, homeless. Prof Sheehan completed his reflections by saying “Thank God ACU has a passion for Community Engagement.”

**Closing Remarks (Br Julian McDonald cfc AO, Chancellor of ACU National)**

Community engagement is an attitude of mind and heart; how we value the self and value and respect others. It is central to ACU’s Mission and that of all universities because it is a proclamation of the value of everyone in the community. It will be a reality when the Big Event is a series of little events which acknowledge that we have ability to empower others, to determine our own futures, and renew the whole community. ACU can create a fearless and open space to demonstrate the value of all members of our community.