



OFFICE OF THE RECTOR AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

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VC Address at the Virtual Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact (SoE-SI) Colloquium, (22 October 2025)

1. Opening and Acknowledgements

Good afternoon colleagues, students, and guests.

It's a pleasure to welcome you to this Virtual Colloquium on the Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact (SoE-SI). We are delighted to host this event through our Community Engagement Unit. This colloquium brings together colleagues and community partners who continue to advance engaged scholarship across disciplines and sectors. It builds on UWC's proud tradition of connecting scholarship with social justice and societal impact.

I wish to recognise Professor Monwabisi Ralarala, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, for his support and leadership in advancing the scholarship of engagement across the University. I also wish to acknowledge Professor Priscilla Daniels, Director of the Community Engagement Unit, and her team for their leadership in convening this colloquium.

I further acknowledge Dr Samantha van Schalkwyk, who has coordinated much of the background work, and colleagues from across our University and partner institutions who are contributing to the discussions over the next two days.

I extend a special word of welcome to our keynote speakers, Professor Jennifer Fish from Old Dominion University in the United States and Dr Mzikazi Nduna from the Human Sciences Research Council. I also recognise the invited speakers and panelists who will share their insights throughout the programme.

Finally, I extend a warm welcome to our partners from the Western Cape Department of Health, Ilitha Labantu, and other community organisations joining us in this dialogue.

2. Framing the Colloquium Theme

The theme of this colloquium — *“Building Sustainable Pathways: Principles for the Scholarship of Engagement and Lasting Societal Impact”* — asks us to look carefully at what we mean by engagement in the context of higher education.

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A place of quality,
a place to grow, from hope
to action through knowledge

At UWC, community engagement has always been a way of seeing the University as both a place of learning and a partner in society. It connects our mission of access and equity with our responsibility to contribute to knowledge and policy. It also reflects our commitment to social transformation.

The Community Engagement Unit defines its role as facilitating opportunities that enhance and promote the *scholarship of engagement through equitable partnership and citizenship to promote sustainable communities*. This definition emphasises reciprocity and shared benefit. It reminds us that genuine engagement requires listening and collaboration. It also calls for accountability — not merely intervention.

3. UWC's Perspective: Values and Institutional Context

Our Institutional Operating Plan (IOP, 2021–2025) recognises that Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact is central to the University's transformation agenda in learning and teaching. It is equally important in advancing transformation through research and innovation. This approach reflects our founding principles. It also aligns with our goal to strengthen academic work that is locally responsive and globally relevant.

The Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact Project is funded through the University Capacity Development Grant. It demonstrates how these principles can be implemented systematically. It aims to integrate the scholarship of engagement into institutional systems and to measure its impact at departmental and faculty levels. Its influence also extends to executive levels of the University. This includes assessing engagement as part of academic promotion and curriculum development. It is also reflected in the way we evaluate research outputs.

Through this work, UWC is developing an assessment framework that evaluates its contribution to societal transformation. It reflects the view that engagement should be scholarly and integrated. Above all, it should be mutually beneficial. These qualities distinguish it from conventional outreach or volunteerism.

4. Pathways Toward Sustainability

The question of sustainability runs through all four guiding questions of this colloquium. These questions remind us that engagement cannot be sustained without strong institutional support, long-term partnerships, and shared ownership of outcomes.

As a university, we must ask what makes our engagement truly transformative rather than transactional. We should also think about how co-created knowledge and community immersion can strengthen belonging and mutual learning. We also need to consider what institutional capacities are required to make engagement central to our teaching and research culture.

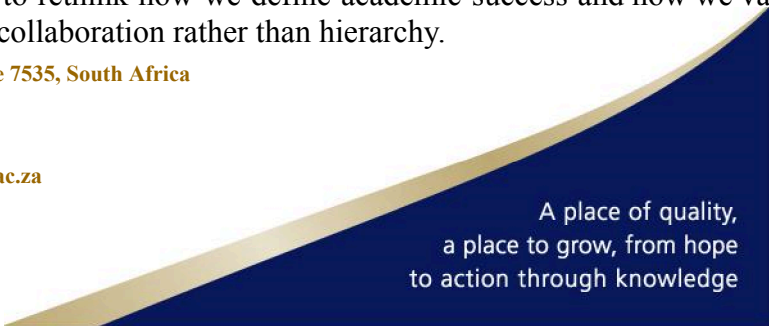
At UWC, we believe sustainability lies in relationships built over time — relationships grounded in respect and shared purpose. These relationships are also guided by strong values. They transform the communities we engage with, as well as our own institutional culture. They challenge us to rethink how we define academic success and how we value knowledge that emerges from collaboration rather than hierarchy.

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When we say that UWC is not only about the experience of campus life but also about life in our communities, we acknowledge that the University's meaning extends beyond its physical boundaries. Our learning spaces include classrooms, clinics, NGOs, and rural communities. Each of these is a site of knowledge production and mutual growth.

5. Closing Remarks

The challenge before us is to move from concept to practice. We must ensure that engagement is a continuous part of our work — not something that happens only occasionally, and not dependent on individuals but embedded in institutional systems.

The Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact framework offers a model for how this integration can happen. It does so through clear policies and shared metrics. It also recognises engaged scholarship in performance management and research evaluation. As the University prepares to enter the next cycle of its Institutional Operating Plan, the lessons from this project will be critical in shaping how we measure societal impact across all faculties and disciplines.

In closing, let me thank the organisers once again for the thought and care that have gone into this programme. I also thank all participants for the commitment you show in linking scholarship to practice and impact. This colloquium reminds us that engagement is a defining feature of what a university in South Africa must be — socially conscious, intellectually rigorous, and committed to justice.

I wish you meaningful discussions over the next two days. May this event strengthen our collective resolve to build pathways that are both sustainable and transformative.

Thank you.

References

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