

## **Catalysts for Change: Empowering International Filipino Student in Poland and the Philippines to Shape the Future of University Engagement**

### **Introduction:**

In today's dynamic and interconnected world, universities hold a tremendous responsibility to not only educate and inspire, but also to actively engage with the aspirations and challenges of society. As an International Filipino student pursuing my education in the vibrant academic environment of Poland, I have witnessed the transformative potential of student influence to enable universities to make a lasting impact on the communities they serve. Guided by the principles outlined in the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU) of 2020, which recognize universities' duty to benefit humanity and contribute to sustainability, I am compelled to explore how international Filipino students like myself can exercise greater influence to drive positive change within Polish universities. This essay delves into the critical question of how students can use their voices, experiences, and collective power to empower universities in Poland and ensure their effective contribution to society. Drawing from personal narratives, comparing the approaches of Polish and Philippine universities, analyzing their governing structures, and examining the practical implementation of these principles by professors and administrators, we will uncover the strategies and heartfelt experiences that have shaped my own journey as a student advocate. Together, we will explore the methods and approaches employed by Filipino students, whether through student unions, group collaborations, active participation in strategic processes, meaningful class activities, or even peaceful protests, to enable universities to achieve the vision set forth by the MCU. Furthermore, we will dive into the broader scope of university involvement, discussing additional steps that can be taken to foster stronger relationships between universities and society in Poland, while drawing lessons for the Philippines and other nations striving to enhance their own societal impact.

### **Comparing Polish and Philippine Universities' Engagement with Society:**

When comparing Polish and Philippine universities' engagement with society, it becomes apparent that both systems have distinct approaches and areas of focus. As an International Filipino student studying in Poland, I have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand the differences in societal engagement between these two educational contexts.

In Poland, universities place a ***strong emphasis on research*** and have embraced the ***MCU principles by actively engaging with society***. They actively seek collaborations with industry partners and engage in knowledge transfer initiatives to bridge the gap between academia and real-world applications. I have witnessed professors and administrators dedicating their expertise to projects that directly address societal challenges, such as sustainable development, renewable energy, and social inequality. Through my involvement in research projects and class activities, I have been able to contribute to initiatives that have a tangible impact on local communities.

On the other hand, Philippine universities often have a ***more community-centric approach to engagement***. They prioritize understanding the immediate needs of the local population and strive to develop programs and initiatives that directly address those needs. These universities foster strong ties with local government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to ensure that their efforts are aligned with the community's aspirations and challenges. I have been inspired by the dedication of my fellow classmates and professors in organizing community outreach programs, volunteering activities, and social entrepreneurship projects. These experiences have allowed me to witness the transformative power of university-community collaborations.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that both systems have their strengths and areas for improvement. ***Polish universities could benefit from adopting a more community-oriented approach***, placing a greater emphasis on understanding the needs and aspirations of the local population. This could be achieved through closer partnerships with community organizations and active involvement in grassroots initiatives. Similarly, ***Philippine universities can further enhance their research capabilities and promote a culture of academic excellence*** by fostering collaborations with international institutions, encouraging faculty exchange programs, and investing in state-of-the-art research facilities.

As an International Filipino student, I have strived to ***bridge the gap between these two approaches by integrating the best practices from both systems***. By actively participating in student unions, engaging in class activities, and collaborating with classmates on community-driven projects, I have been able to bring a unique perspective to the table. Through dialogues and exchange of ideas, I have encouraged my Polish counterparts to consider the importance of community engagement, while sharing the research-focused mindset prevalent in Polish universities with my Filipino peers. By ***blending the strengths of both systems and fostering cross-cultural***

**collaborations**, International Filipino students like myself have the opportunity to make a significant impact on universities' societal contributions. By **sharing our experiences, engaging in meaningful dialogues, and promoting the exchange of best practices**, we can enable universities in both Poland and the Philippines to enhance their engagement with society, fostering a culture of sustainable development, social responsibility, and meaningful change.

### **Methods and Approaches to Enable Universities in Poland:**

As an international Filipino student studying in Poland, I have actively searched for methods and approaches to enable my university to contribute more effectively to society. The joining of student unions such as **International Student Camaraderie** has been instrumental in providing a platform for collective advocacy. Through this student union, we amplify international student voices and advocate for initiatives that foster social engagement. This involvement allows us to address pressing social issues and raise awareness within the university community.

Collaborating with my **interdisciplinary classmates** on group research and projects has provided opportunities to address the needs of local communities. By combining our diverse skills, knowledge, and perspectives, we can develop innovative solutions to social challenges. These projects allow us to bridge the gap between theory and practice, applying our academic knowledge to real-world situations, and making a tangible impact.

In addition, actively participating in the **university's strategic processes** has been a transformative experience on my part. Serving on university committees and working closely with professors and administrators has given me the opportunity to voice student perspectives and contribute to decision-making processes. This involvement ensures that international students have a seat at the table and their viewpoints are considered when shaping university policies and initiatives.

Furthermore, **peaceful protests** have served as a powerful tool for raising awareness of social concerns and urge the university administration to take action. I have also been part of peaceful protests, standing alongside fellow international students, raising awareness about pressing societal concerns, and urging our university administration to take action. These experiences have been transformative, as they have shown me the power of collective action and the importance of advocating for change.

### **Suggesting More Steps to Enhance University Engagement:**

While Polish and Philippine universities have made commendable efforts in engaging with society, there is always room for improvement. I greatly believe that to further enhance university engagement and enable them to make a more effective contribution to society, the following steps can be considered:

- ***Strengthen Community Partnerships:*** Universities should actively seek partnerships with local communities, NGOs, government agencies, and industry stakeholders [1]. By fostering strong collaborative relationships, universities can better understand the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. This can lead to the development of more relevant and impactful initiatives that address pressing social issues.
- ***Expand Experiential Learning Opportunities:*** Universities should provide students with ample opportunities to engage in experiential learning, such as *internships, fieldwork, and service-learning programs* [2]. These experiences allow students to apply their knowledge in real-world settings, collaborate with community members, and gain a deeper understanding of societal challenges. By integrating theory with practice, universities can nurture socially conscious graduates who are equipped to make a positive difference in the world.
- ***Promote Interdisciplinary Collaboration:*** Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration among students, faculty, and researchers can lead to innovative solutions and holistic approaches to societal challenges [3]. By breaking down disciplinary silos and fostering a culture of collaboration, universities can create spaces where diverse perspectives converge, fostering creativity and cross-pollination of ideas.
- ***Establish Social Innovation Hubs:*** Universities both Poland and Philippines can establish dedicated spaces or centers that serve as hubs for social innovation and entrepreneurship. These hubs can provide resources, mentorship, and funding opportunities for students and faculty members to develop and implement socially impactful projects [3]. By creating a supportive ecosystem, universities can nurture a culture of innovation and empower students to address pressing societal issues.

- ***Embed Social Responsibility in Curriculum:*** Universities should integrate social responsibility and sustainable development principles into the curriculum across various disciplines. This can be achieved through dedicated courses, modules, or project-based learning that expose students to real-world challenges and encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills [4]. By embedding these values in the educational experience, universities can produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also socially conscious and ethically responsible.
- ***Embrace Technology and Digital Platforms:*** In today's digital age, universities can leverage technology and online platforms to extend their reach and impact. This includes utilizing virtual learning environments, online community engagement platforms, and social media channels to facilitate dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration between students, faculty, and external stakeholders [5]. Technology can enable universities to transcend geographical boundaries and engage with a wider audience, amplifying their societal impact.

## **Conclusion:**

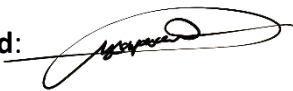
As an international Filipino student studying in Poland, I am committed to making a difference and allowing my university to contribute meaningfully to society. Through my experiences in student unions, group projects, strategic processes, class activities, and peaceful protests, I have witnessed the potential for positive change through student influence. Although Polish universities have shown a commendable dedication to social engagement, there is always room for growth. ***By fostering collaboration, forging community partnerships, empowering students, and creating platforms for participation, universities in Poland can amplify their impact and inspire change within their institution and beyond.*** On the other hand, the Philippines can draw inspiration from these approaches and work towards a more inclusive and socially responsible university system. ***Together, we can shape the future of university engagement and create a positive impact that reverberates beyond the walls of academia. Let us seize this opportunity to empower universities as catalysts for positive change and work towards a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society.***

**References:**

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4. Fonseca, I., et al., *Developing Social Responsibility in University Students*. Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Education Technology and Computers, 2019.
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***I hereby certify that the above essay is entirely my own work and that I have acknowledged any reference that I have made to other work.***

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. J. ...', written over a horizontal line.