Dear University Administrations of the World,

As many of your University Charters promulgate, your institutions have a civic role and responsibility to "engage with and respond to the aspirations and challenges of the world and to the communities they serve, to benefit humanity and contribute to sustainability" (Magna Charta Universitatum 2020). Moreover, as an act that most of you welcome, students may play an instrumental role in achieving this mandate. After all, we are the largest stakeholder within the University community that also boast unique perspectives, energy and passion that through strategic partnerships with faculty, administration, and external stakeholders, may help transform our respective Universities into more impactful societal change agents. However, as I outline the specificities of such an endeavour I will also be highlighting the steps you will need to take to facilitate this.

Firstly, the most valuable characteristic of the student population that should be considered in contemplation of how we may help the University in impacting society positively, is our outlook as a result of our lived experiences. The students you cater to are a reflection of our society, and the issues we face of hunger, homelessness, inability to pay fees, mental health challenges etc are manifestations of larger social ills. Therefore, there must always be open lines of communication that meaningfully facilitate our feedback and suggestions, such as student surveys, town hall meetings and office/s

created to facilitate our engagement. In response, we should actively utilise these channels to express our opinions, propose solutions, and hold you accountable for your commitments to social impact both on and off our respective campuses.

We may also utilise our personal social media and digital platforms which in this current age, present as powerful tools to raise awareness, mobilize support, and influence public opinion. We may use them to share information, organize campaigns, and engage with a broader audience, including fellow students, alumni, and external stakeholders. An example of how powerful social media may be in the hands of a student seeking social change is a campaign I led during the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic in my country. I tweeted to the Prime Minister an idea of how to reduce the digital divide among low income students as we had to transition to full online learning due to social distancing protocols. Other students and student leaders were engaged to promote the tweet and it became a viral sensation. At the end of the campaign which also included the use of traditional broadcasting channels, all online learning platforms of publicly funded tertiary and secondary institutions were zero rated and we had a subsidised data programme being run by the two telecommunication providers in my country.

However, the University partnership was a key component to the success of the initiative as they also formally supported the campaign. Within my context, many times Universities shy away from

student led campaigns especially if it poses a challenge to long held status quos. I am challenging you as administrators teaching the leaders of the present and future to embrace the new ideas and the new challenges as only through open discourse and partnership can there be sustainable impactful change.

Therefore, you ought to employ continuous efforts that foster a culture of student involvement which will encourage student engagement and co-creation which leads to impactful policy and initiatives. This may manifest as collaboration with faculty and administration to plan and execute projects such as charity initiatives, workshops and forums that try to address particular social issues. But may also present as curricula reform where we can actively participate in curriculum committees or engage in dialogues with faculty to ensure that the curriculum reflects the needs and aspirations of society. It allows space for us to advocate for interdisciplinary approaches, inclusion of social justice topics, or experiential learning opportunities. Therefore, we can help shape the education we receive to be more relevant and impactful to society.

This latter suggestion is very important as aside from the social responsibility of universities, you also have the responsibility of stimulating social awareness through socially relevant curriculum. Therefore, it's a circular relationship whereby socially aware students develop a sense of social responsibility and whether through partnerships or our own initiatives set out to help the University in

making social impact. Examples of such a curriculum are those that include study material and discussions on current social issues, social research and or encourages/facilitates community service. We should be challenged to interrogate our world and brainstorm on how we may use our chosen professions to solve social issues.

As mentioned above, social research can be a tool used to promote social awareness and or assist the University in having a positive impact on society. I believe this is underused as much times social research is presented as something that students within particular programmes are pursuing and there are limited opportunities for others to get involved. However, if you facilitate more student led/student partnered research, we will be able to produce more evidence-based findings that can be used to influence academic discourse and policymaking at the University, community and even country level. Moreover, sharing research outcomes with relevant stakeholders and publishing in academic journals or presenting at conferences may amplify the reach of the recommendations.

However, we are not limited to partnerships in our attempt to assist the University in having more positive social impact as we are quite capable of leading our own initiatives. This may be achieved through the efforts of ad-hoc projects, established clubs/societies or the student government body. However, for more of these initiatives to be conceptualised and effectively executed, you need to institutionalise mechanisms that facilitate student independent

thought and action outside of the classroom. This may include formal recognition of and support to clubs/societies and student governance. Using my university as a case study there is a recognition of clubs/societies once they meet a standard that the student population would have agreed on. Free advertisement is provided for the clubs/societies to encourage enrollment, each club is entitled to some measure of funding once they have proved active and is allowed ownership of bank accounts to facilitate additional fundraising. Staff/teacher supervisor involvement is also recognized which encourages more support and student involvement is awarded and recognized on their transcript. This approach has resulted in an increased capacity of these clubs in comparison to those in other neighbouring Universities and as a result projects have emerged that have operated effectively in communities for decades, have won national awards and is sought after by the private sector as a valuable partner in their corporate social responsibility efforts.

Similarly, student government led initiatives tend to have great impact as student government organisations provide a platform for students and student leaders to advocate for policies and programs that align with societal needs. These needs may be student specific and or cater to the concerns of surrounding communities or the wider country. Using real examples from my experience as student government President during the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, I was able to successfully fundraise to support homeless students and those unable to return home due to border closures from March to

July 2020. I also led the development of virtual learning standards and concessionary policies that are still used at my University and across the region to date. However, this impact was only possible due to the formal recognition and respect of the Guild which was so institutionalised that it extended to how the central Government regarded the Guild and my post as President. Therefore, it was easier to pitch policies and execute projects with funding from our own coffers as well as get support from businesses. This remains the case of the student body and is testament as to how institutionalising student representation creates a culture of student led social change which reflects positively on the University as the home ground for these change agents.

In conclusion, students want to make positive change, in fact we are bursting at the seams with ideas and solutions to make our communities and countries a better place. However we can only can influence and assist our respective universities to make this chance if there is a welcoming environment that institutionalises our engagement and involvement.

If there is any doubt left after my letter, please reflect on the fact that we can only transform the world around us through transformative partnerships, projects and policies.

I look forward to the change we will make in the world together!

With respect,

A Student committed on positively changing the world

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

C.Williams