

Joining the Dots and Demonstrating Public Value: Next steps to build an evidence base toward 2020

Ani Wierenga and Gavan McCarthy, The University of Melbourne

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A proposal to Adrian Collette, Vice-Principal (Engagement) and the Engagement Executive of The University of Melbourne

Introduction

This paper follows our presentation to the Engagement Executive on 23 February, and builds on the interest, visions and papers¹ shared at that time. It outlines the scope of work that could be advanced in a Demonstration Project over the next three months, in the context of conversations around a broader project designed to chart, in a systematic manner, the structure, functions and achievements of the University of Melbourne over time.

The broader project was the subject of a conversation in 2017 between Gavan McCarthy and the Vice Chancellor, who has affirmed that such an undertaking should start from the final annual University Calendar (2009). This was the last complete documentation of the University's work in the model commenced in 1859.

In the interim, the Demonstration Project could form a basis to address a series of separate opportunities:

- Demonstrating public value towards 2020, with a focus on Engaged Students, linking to the development of Graduate Attributes (Global Citizens), the Sustainability Plan and the University's Global Strategy. This follows a conversation between Ani Wierenga and the Vice Chancellor, and the Vice Chancellor's subsequent request to Engagement to coordinate an inquiry across portfolios into possible next steps.
- Generating a systematic evidence base for demonstrating public value and impact across the Engagement portfolio.
- Supporting and evidencing more fully the University's engagement and contribution of value with particular communities.

Aim and expected outputs

This three month project will chart the emergence of Engagement at Melbourne. The project will generate:

1. the foundations of a **Knowledge Platform** (structure, functions and evidence) for Engagement at the University of Melbourne (the joined dots), starting with the last UoM calendar in 2009, mapping it forward to the present and laying the groundwork for mapping the future evolution of the University.
2. the foundations of a **Narrative Framework**, a process for demonstrating public value, and Seven Stories of Impact. It is here that we will be investigating the significance of lines between the dots – that is, the stories that can be told.

Throughout the Demonstration Project, visual representations (network graphs) of the genesis and growth of Engagement at Melbourne from 2009 to the present will be generated. These will help both the project team and Engagement understand the nature of the data, its limits and its possibilities, and help drive the project so that it meets its goals.

In this three month period, the activity is about building the resources and tailoring the processes with

key stakeholders. Monthly seminars for the Executive will provide opportunities to refine, demonstrate capability and build a community of knowledge and interest around the work.

Scope of work for Phase 1 (Demonstration Project)

To collaboratively build 'demonstration outputs' for Knowledge Platform and Narrative Framework.

The University Calendar is the gateway to a vast universe. In the 2009 Calendar, the last calendar, the Engagement portfolio does not exist as such, although the function does. This means it is an excellent place to begin to chart the story of Engagement at Melbourne. The process begins by documenting the entities that relate directly to Engagement and which are required to understand the context of UoM Administration. Filters prioritising particular key areas of engagement, e.g. Engaged Students and / or Cultural Partnerships¹, would further sharpen the immediate focus.

Outline of process: A broad description of the methodologies

Summary: We start at both ends, from history and now; uploading data from records and downloading data derived from the knowledge of key people. The necessary foundational entities and key evidential resources will be identified and registered. Concurrently, deep dives into the detail of Engagement activities through story and analysis will be explored.

1. Creating the Knowledge Platform: This involves two distinct processes:

- *Context Entity Analysis.* This methodology has underpinned the work of the eScholarship Research Centre and its predecessors for the last two decades. What we are doing here is defining the dots (the world of things) and the joins (the functional relations between the dots).
- *Evidence Resource Analysis.* Our goal here is to identify and register key evidence resources, published and unpublished. Also, much will be known anecdotally, so processes for transforming anecdote into enduring evidence will be enacted.

The Engagement portfolio will have key documents that explain who they are and what they do. The Context Entity Analysis of these key documents will help us identify the dots and joins.

Together, these iterative steps result in an extensible data model that will help define the parameters of the broader project. A focus on senior administration and key University staff, organisational units, people, roles, committees, faculties (now only at a high level), will help us understand what composes this University.

2. Creating the Narrative Framework: Articulate what has happened, what is significant and why, attributing meaning to the dots and lines.

- *Gather narratives:* Record the most salient things that have happened (with samples of chosen Stakeholder Groups) using four universal questionsⁱⁱ.
- *Analysis:* Assess structurally and functionally identifying the domains of story that matter substantively and strategically.
- Assess narratives qualitatively in a collaborative spaceⁱⁱⁱ, with an audience (e.g. Stakeholder Group or Executive). Meaning is assigned, values are articulated^{iv}, ready to be connected back to story and evidence framework.

Embedding new knowledge, for demonstrating value and informing strategy

Stories generate new entities and links (dots and lines) which can be added to the Knowledge Platform. Stakeholder responses to stories – heard and seen – also generate new entities (concepts, ideas,

¹ The latter suggestion follows a project meeting and conversation between Margot Eden and Gavan McCarthy, about the potential value in this method to Melbourne's engagement with communities, and interest in offering these partnerships as key sites for testing the mapping and modelling.

themes and values) and these too can also be linked in the Knowledge Platform. Meanwhile in the Narrative Framework, individual stories are linked to stakeholder responses about this evidence in the context of their value(s). Domains are revisited and the framework is refined to reflect links to strategic vision and to inform planning.

In the broader project, these steps are repeated continuously (iteratively) to create a living, learning knowledge system^v.

In practical terms, what does it mean?

As an example, the University has prizes, grants and fellowships, but rarely keeps a systematic record of outcomes and impact. Impact can be tracked right down to the story of people who received the awards and what they did, what happened next and why it matters. Unless such stories can be connected back to the activity of the University, they disappear from our view. With a system for organising these stories and the rigor of an enduring Knowledge Platform underpinning them, knowledge like this can be retained. Adding a system for key stakeholders to assign value, the same stories become part of a methodology for demonstrating public value, supporting organisational learning and strategic planning.

Resourcing

- The eScholarship Resource Centre has the OHRM (Online Heritage Resource Management System)^{vi} and other resources already, to enable us to do this work.
- The resources for the Narrative Methodology are available online, open source.
- Margot Eden has expressed an interest in offering Indigenous cultural partnerships as a key site.
- We are able to start any time from confirmation of funding.

Key Personnel

Role	Specification	Contribution
Project Management	Senior Research Fellow, full time (Dr Ani Wierenga or equivalent)	Drive context, data modelling and analysis. Identify tasks and focus for Research Assistant. Implementation and testing data model with real data. Engagement of stakeholders, in generating narratives and assigning value
Research Archivist	HEW 7 or 8, full time seconded – Research Assistant with PhD or equivalent experience.	Data entry, data management
Expert Consultant	A/ Prof. Gavan McCarthy	Systems Architect
Selected expertise from outside Engagement, includes but not limited to:	Research and Collections: Digital Scholarship, Digitisation Centre; Legal and Risk; Record Services; University of Melbourne Archives; Mark Fallu	Specific input and advice

Budget: \$90k covers (1) project manager and (2) research assistant, salary and on-costs x 3 months, plus a relatively small allocation for technology, design and associated project consumables.

Monthly agenda: to report what we have seen so far, analysis of implications for future work. We are thinking about where this goes, continuously. This needs to be socialised in all aspects from inception, with a view to what would be possible. Implications, discussed with key people will evidence recommendations for how the University can manage its evidential resources in a better way, particularly for the public facing resources. Part of what we are beginning to build is that framework.

Implications / stakeholders: This work will have implications for other administrative divisions where the socialisation of the project will also be important: Legal and Risk, University of Melbourne Archives, Chancellery, Murrup Barak. It sits at the junction between University, its context and feedback, e.g. in the context of the Reconciliation Action Plan and targeted communities, preparing a public knowledge archive and a framework to which everybody has access, addresses perceived and actual knowledge imbalances. Examples of this in action include the Find and Connect Project, establishing a more equal playing field and ability to access information, with this dimension creating the impact and public value, such as becoming a foundational resource in the recent Royal Commission.

Logistics: The Demonstration Project could be initially located within the Chancellery. The Digital Studio in the Faculty of Arts have agreed, in principle, to provide office and desk space. The broader project (the University of Melbourne Perpetual Calendar) and the Knowledge Framework may be better placed within Academic Services.

Notes

ⁱ 'The Scholarly, Teaching, Research and Engagement History of The University of Melbourne', by Gavan McCarthy. (see Appendix 1); 'Joining the Dots and Demonstrating Public Value': Engaged Students (and Impact) Toward 2020' by Ani Wierenga (see Appendix 2)

ⁱⁱ Here drawing on Dart and Davies (2003; 2005) 'Most Significant Change' Methodology for outcome evaluation and assessing impact.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dart and Davies' methodology asks four uniform questions to generate narratives; engages stakeholders in analysis and makes their values central in assigning meaning. From the same data / stories, this method can be deployed across different domains (themes or portfolios). Rigor is exercised through method, in the common questions and steps.

^{iv} For addressing with the Engagement Executive and key stakeholders: What are the most salient stories and why are these valued? What does impact mean in terms of the things that they do? What do individuals' stories mean and what do they demonstrate? The Narrative Framework allows us to make this assessment.

^v Building here on Yoland Wadsworth's Living Systems Methodology: facilitating human inquiry for living systems.

^{vi} The OHRM is the work of Gavan McCarthy.