

The Conference Theme

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Innovation and Creativity: Collaborating with Communities to Tackle Problems across ASEAN, Asia and Beyond

As ASEAN is moving forward to the ASEAN Community 2015 goal, ASEAN Secretary General H.E. Le Luong Minh envisions the ASEAN Community as one that is “able to keep our peace and stability, an ASEAN Community that enables our economies to flourish and our peoples to have a better quality of life in dignity” (H.E. Le Luong Minh, 2013). Yet, increasingly complex and borderless challenges, like environmental questions, economical challenges and humanitarian issues that affect communities in ASEAN, Asia and beyond, require shared solutions from the “collective and concerted effort of all stakeholders from both public and private sectors” (H.E. Le Luong Minh, 2013).

There has not been a more opportune time for higher education to engage with society to benefit local, national and regional development. The well-being of our planet and our people are no longer perceived as the responsibility of the government alone. Growing societal demands for accountability from higher education and the private sector, requires them to provide more tangible evidence of their benefit and contributions to society.

With all its knowledge, higher education is particularly well suited to bring together particular expertise and resources of the diverse stakeholders to address those challenges that communities face – initiatives to find innovative and creative, and most importantly shared solutions that benefit society. Community engagement has tremendous value in enhancing the core missions of a university – research, education and service and volunteerism – while at the same time bringing about a positive contribution to the community. This is done in alignment with the needs of the NGOs, government agencies and communities, and outcomes from these collaborations are perceived to be far more sustainable due to shared ownership.

Community engagement is not new – it has been carried out over the years by passionate academics and specific programmes the world over. What is relatively new are efforts by universities to move this in a direction that is coordinated, systematised and professional across faculties, research institutes and colleges of the university. Universities across ASEAN are at varying levels of development with regards the degree of collaboration and the innovative approaches taken to develop sustainable and impactful engagement. There is a need to bridge this great divide.

This conference aims to help. This will be done by sharing of experiences and lessons learned in five identified sub-themes. All of these sub-themes will be instrumental to develop the body of scholarly work essential for recognising and mainstreaming this field in institutions of higher education. This will also be essential for identifying and recognising innovative practices that can be replicated regionally to create the multiplier effect of solving problems across borders that impact on ASEAN and Asian communities.