

The Changing Mission of Higher Education

Presentation for AESIS

Chris Brink

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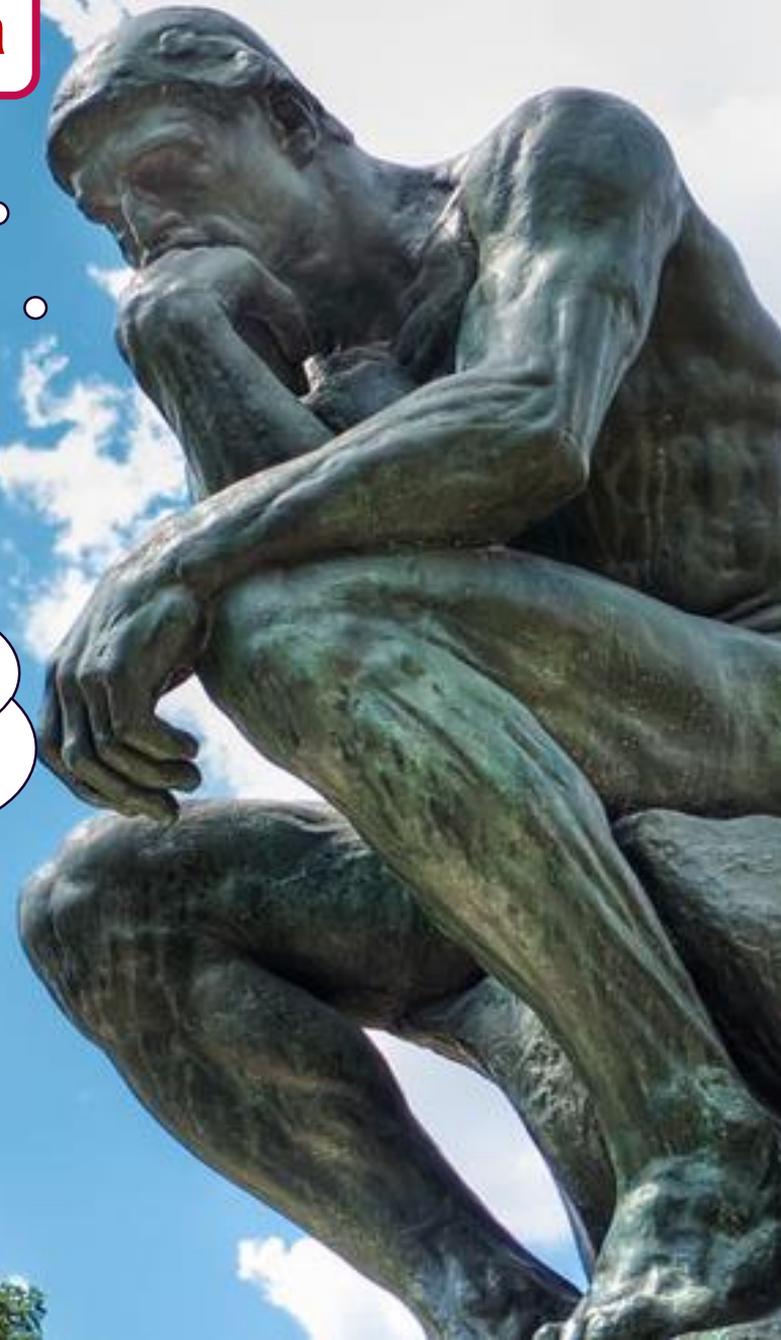
*“Research institutions need to
undergo a culture change ... to
stimulate societal impact of research”*
AESIS



Two key questions for academia

**What are we
good at?**

**What are we
good *for*?**

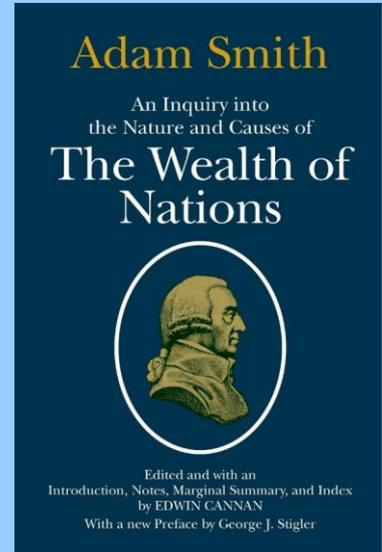


Our classic response to the ‘good for’ question

The ‘invisible hand’ argument: Free knowledge creation, if done well, will benefit society in the long run

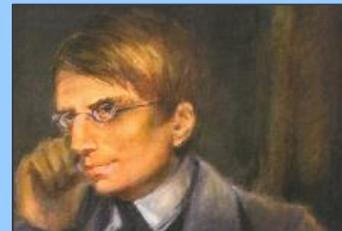
So, a strong response to the ‘good at’ question will suffice also as a response to the ‘good for’ question

In support of this argument, we have many examples – and a well-developed conceptual framework



Immanuel Kant: *Academic Freedom*

**John Henry Newman:
*Knowledge for its own sake***



Wilhelm von Humboldt: *Curiosity-driven research*

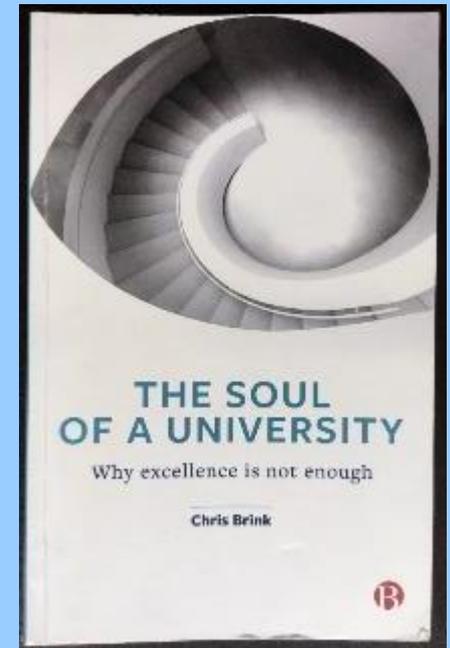
What we used to think

- Our academic job is to research and teaching
- If we do that well, then society will automatically benefit in the long run
- Therefore, we must strive for academic excellence

This is true – but it is not the whole truth!

What we now think

- Excellence is not enough
- Societal benefit delivered by academic excellence is slow in coming and unpredictable in nature
- In addition to doing research and teaching , we need to engage with society and respond to societal challenges



Two main trends in global Higher Education

'Good at' trend

Academic Excellence

- Research
- Teaching
- (Rankings and League Tables)

'Good for' trend

Societal Role

- Engagement
- Impact
- Social Responsibility

- Increasingly, universities are learning that the second trend is as important as the first
- And learning how to respond to it.

The invisible hand argument might be true, but it cannot be the whole truth.

The benefits of the invisible hand are slow in coming and unpredictable in nature

By definition, the invisible hand is not responsive to societal challenges

From the point of view of societal need, the invisible hand argument looks like an abdication of social and moral responsibility

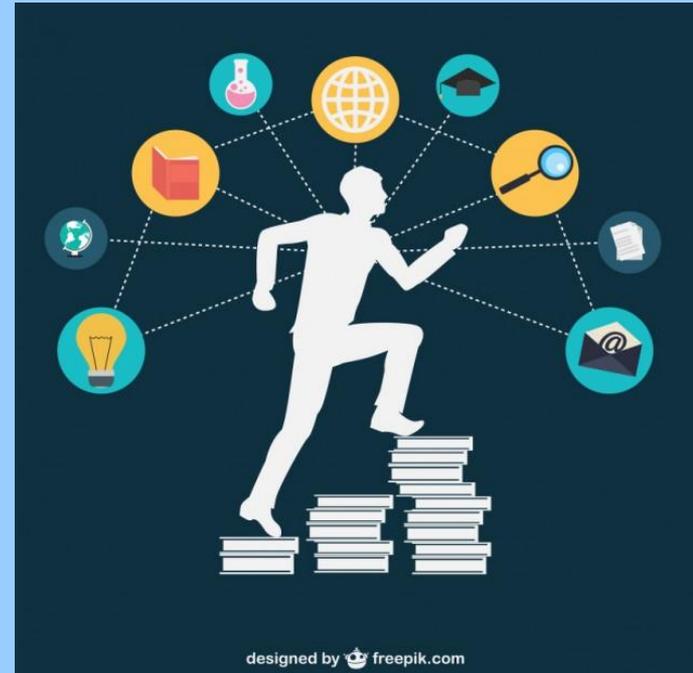
- Which raises the larger question of our academic responsibility to society



The Changing Mission of Higher Education

This change has been happening for some time ...

Around the world, in various ways and under various names



I will give some examples, and then summarise them under one heading – academic responsibility

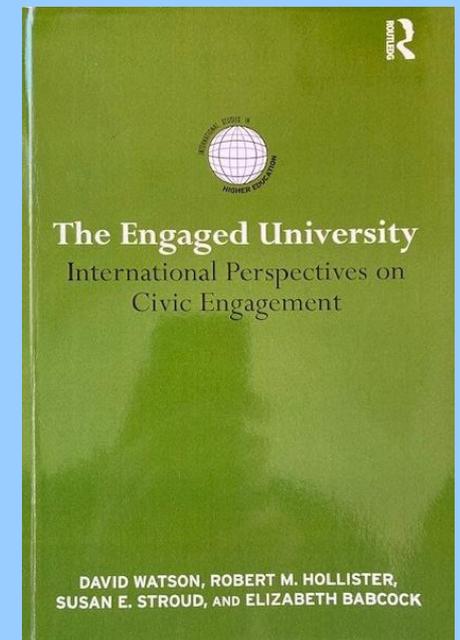
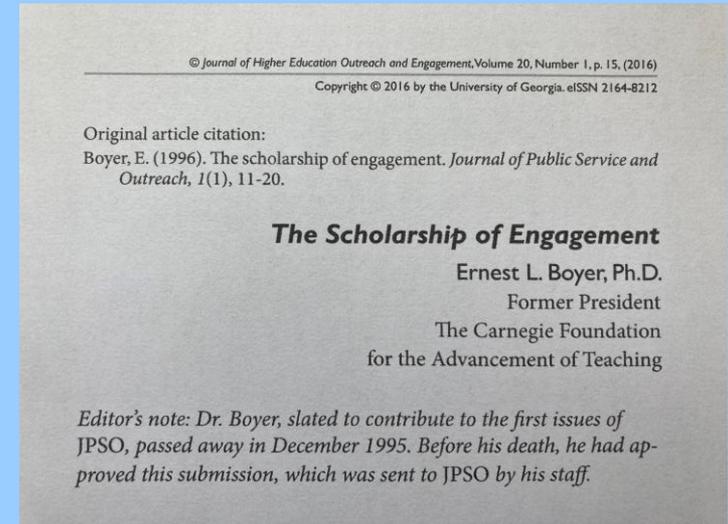
Example 1: The idea of engagement

“[Our] outstanding universities and colleges remain, in my opinion, one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country. I’m convinced that for this hope to be fulfilled, the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement.”

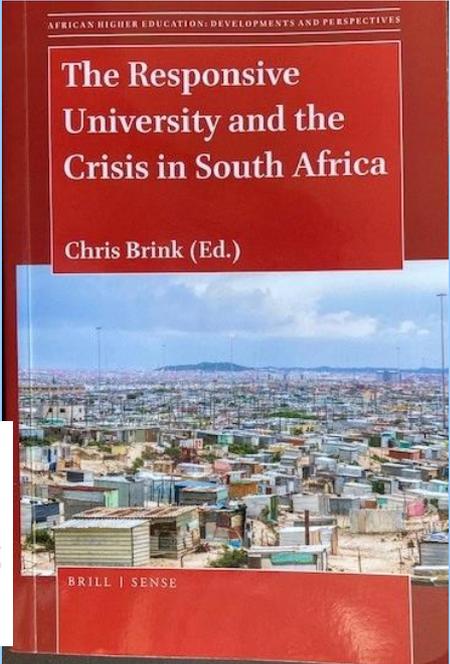
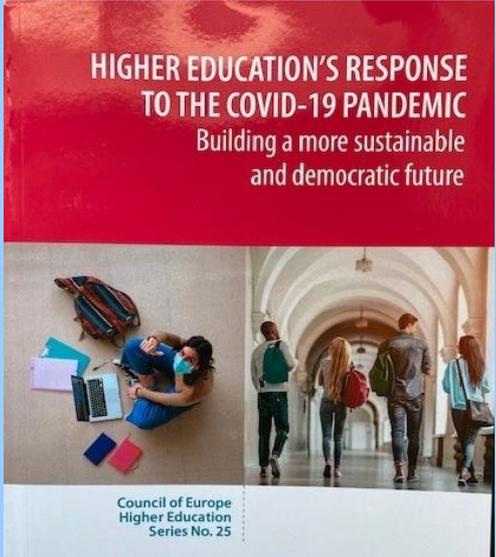
Ernest L Boyer, 1996

By now, the idea of engagement is a standard part of the academic lexicon, and academic practice

- A whole literature on this topic; Conferences, etc
- International networks of engaged universities
- Sometimes characterised as the ‘third mission’ of HE (but the terminology is problematic)

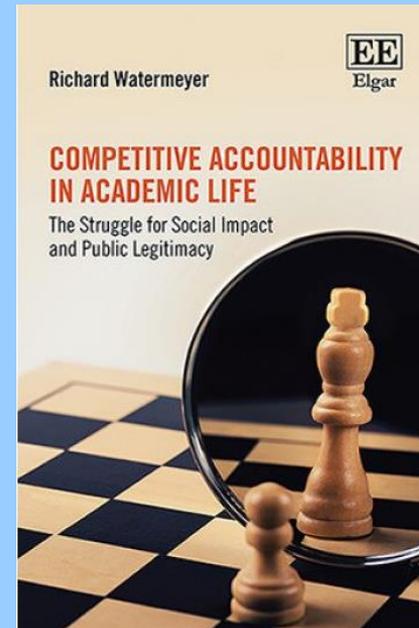


Example 2: The idea of responsiveness



Example 3: The idea of research impact

- A new and additional category of research evaluation:
 - ‘What beneficial impact has the research of your university made on society at large?’
 - ‘And what evidence can you provide of such impact?’
- **Impact is about improving people’s lives. It could be in terms of the economy, technology, industry, innovation, health, culture, policy, services, ...**
- Already in place in a number of countries, and happening in others
- Not just ‘What are you good at?’, but also ‘What are you good for’



“ Political decision-makers worldwide commit substantial amounts of public funds to support and foster scientific research on behalf of and for the society they represent. In return, they expect publicly funded research to generate some measure of impact. ”

Global Research Council, 2019

Example 4: The idea of university social responsibility

“University social responsibility (USR) extends the traditional mission of universities in an endeavour to develop solutions for economic, social and environmental problems in society.”

<http://www.usrnetwork.org/about-usrn/background>

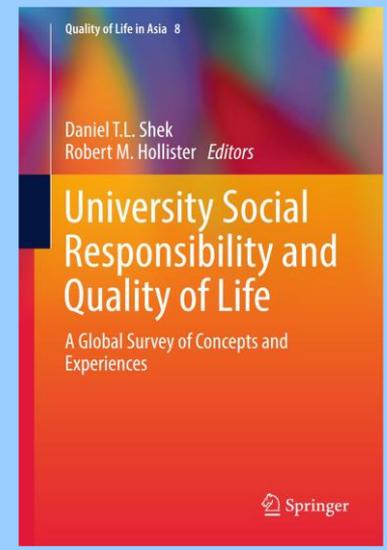


THE TALLOIRES DECLARATION On the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education (2005-09-17)

<https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/who-we-are/talloires-declaration/>

EACEA. (2008). *University Social Responsibility: A Common European Reference Framework*, Final Public Report of the EU-USR Project, February 2015.

www.eu-usr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/D1.4-Final-Report-Public-Part-EN.pdf



“Sharing a culture of intellectual social responsibility”

<https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/member-institutions-unai-inspire-action-sustainable-development-goals>



Example 5: The defence of democracy

“I believe that universities should be recognized as standing firmly among the institutions critical to securing the full promise of liberal democracy and sharing in the responsibility to protect it when its legitimacy and its durability are at risk.”

Ronald J Daniels

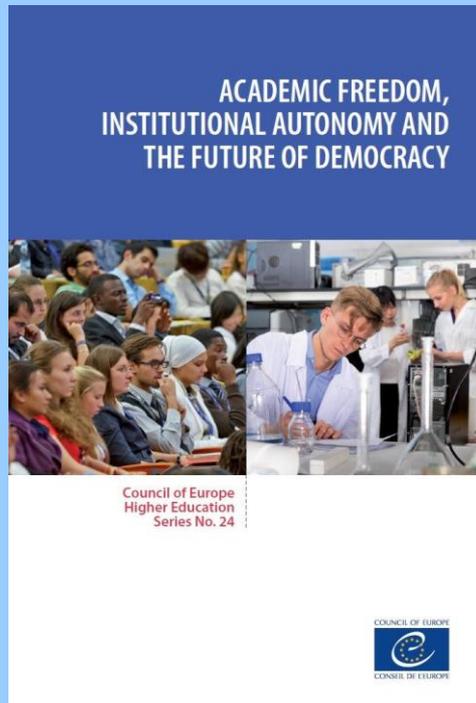
<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/64/what-universities-owe-democracy/>

What Universities Owe Democracy



RONALD J. DANIELS

WITH GRANT SHREVE
AND PHILLIP SPECTOR



“A new kind of university is needed whose primary mission would be advancing democracy democratically on campus, in its local community, and across the wider society.”

Ira Harkavy and Rita A Hodges

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2022.2030156>

Example 6: The updated *Magna Charta Universitatum*



MCU 1988:

- Autonomy
- Independence
- Academic Freedom

Updated MCU 2020:

- Reaffirms the 1988 principles
- But adds the principle of responsibility to society

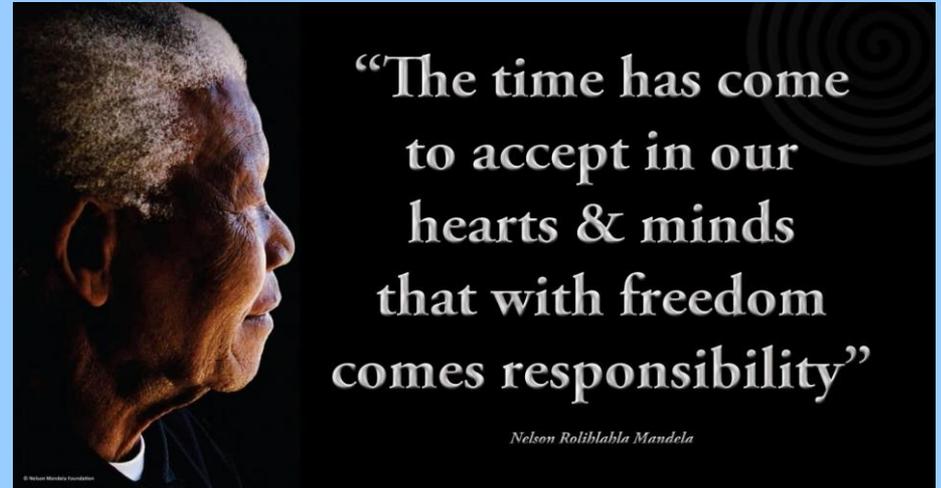
MCU 2020:

“Universities acknowledge that they have a 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.”

In Summary: *The idea of Academic Responsibility*

No freedom comes without responsibility

Why should we think that academic freedom is any different?



We spend lots of time talking about academic freedom

It is time to give equal attention to academic responsibility

A Conceptual Framework for Academic Responsibility

<https://www.magna-charta.org/activities-and-projects/mco-research-project>

Caveat: Of course there are risks

External risks:

- Others might be keen to tell us what our responsibilities are
- Infringement of academic freedom on the grounds of an external view of responsibility

Internal risks:

- Self-censorship
- Blind loyalty

IN PRINCIPLE:

Each university should be free to decide for itself where its civic responsibilities lie, and how to exercise them.

- *But it should not neglect doing so.*



Thank you