

The University of the World

A Learning Structure to Transform How People Live their Lives

A Concept Paper from the Future Generations Graduate School

Gems of transformation flourish around the world amid poverty, illness, racism, and strife, being the vehicles for communities to move toward justice, wellbeing, and environmental restoration. These gems are typically the work of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and grow where there appears to be little to work with. They are making the world a better place.

Calls come for more such voluntary programs; clear evidence that formal services of health, education, income generation are not able to do the whole job. This parallel system of social change is at work all over the world. In places of poverty often there is little else to work with. These gems are often termed civil society—they are indeed what makes us civilized for they are the results of our actions. What is extraordinary is that this important contributor to making the world a better place has no formal incubator.

The University of the World is proposed as a formal incubator. It will be composed for its academic departmental structure as an aggregation of these now *in situ* outstanding gems. In its process, to these world-class demonstrations students will go to receive structured education. Organizations will voluntarily chose to join as departments in primary health care, poverty alleviation, food security, early childhood education, and the like—and agree to rigorous academic standards established by the University of the World.

These civil society organizations are synthesizing across disciplines and using sophisticated social mobilization processes. New fields of expertise are growing. The objective of the University of the World is to learn from, to replicate, and to expand these gems, to evolve best practice. The name defines the focus: world relevant learning. The name also points toward where instruction will be: the classroom will be the world.

This new university will not seek to replicate or displace established essential university roles such as basic research, development of scientific theory, homes for scholarship, repositories of knowledge, and the like. What the University of the World will advance is the core human quest: to alleviate poverty, change health behaviors, pursue justice, raise children, establish food security, create more effective schools, protect the environment (locally and larger)—the list is the fabric of life. These are now inadequately taught in their implementation.

Teaching these is not best done by class-based learning. To achieve the transdisciplinary learning and mastery of skills a different pedagogy is needed from that developed to instruct in scientific theory, the arts and humanities. What will work better will utilize the events of daily living, structuring them from random occurrence into rigorous education. Experiences of living become the textbook rather than lessons being by taxonomies and elaborations of taxing theory disconnected from life.

Instead of the university being a place to which students go for study, where they leave the world, *the University of the World will establish a structure of learning in the world.* In a parallel fashion

to the way traditional universities create their organization through human-made campuses, defined class periods, a yearly calendar, the University of the World will create its structure through a softer form of design utilizing electronic technologies, in-place organizations, real world experience, and the discipline provided by the students themselves.

This structure will be rigorous, mentored and tested. It will be defined by lateral integration of student-to-community with professor as mentor instead of vertical orientation teacher-to-student. It will cross disciplines with a transdisciplinary synthesis creating synergies in peer-to-peer learning. While individual students will be enrolled, they will be representatives of wider communities who are the ultimate participants in the learning experience.

This university structure plays to the age now upon us of global connectedness—proven in Internet social networking, globalization of economics, and our growing understanding that the planet is one. Earlier ages were characterized by industrial production, and before that food production. And while manufacturing and agriculture both are still important, a shift has occurred toward global connectedness. To utilize this age, a new educational structure has opportunity; it will not replace the old just like factory did not replace farm and the electronic world is not replacing buildings, but the new university extends the reach of education more effectively into communities.

The University of the World will open access both into new knowledge and hopefully also in participation in higher education allowing people worldwide to earn Master's and Doctoral degrees—but they will be degrees of practice where people learn the skills and knowledge to practice new behaviors, supporting each other and moving forward together. Steps have started in this direction of non-classroom based university. Distance learning is promoted where students take classes from their homes using the Internet to connect to the university. Steps are also being taken toward applied learning structures. Universities have promoted part-time students who work on degrees while continuing work. Many have set up classes in on-the-job training.

The University of the World goes a further step. It will aggregate the outstanding NGOs of the world into a global campus; each NGO like a departmental home. Students will gather at these to learn that experience and use these as portals into planet-wide knowledge. Learning will focus in the locale—but it will be connected. Once isolated hamlets will become rooms in the world campus. To join is voluntary. But when groups do, and agree to the standards, the result is collective knowledge more transformative than the sum of the parts. Instead of directing learning to the student, direction is of the student out to changing the communities where he or she happens to be. The University of the World will pioneer an in-society, applied approach of higher education. It will build the skills in people who then grow these in community so they can become like the gems that are now too few but which prove what societies can be.

The University of the World is possible because the pieces are now almost all there.

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