

EXTENSION SERVICE WORK AT UNIVERSITY

UCT in the 1980s

Dave Cooper*

Introduction

What is special about service organisations at a university? The notion that university-based extension services are little different from those off campus was fairly representative of thinking amongst many on the left during the 1980s in South Africa. In contrast, in this paper I want to argue that there *should be* important differences in philosophy and practice of service organisations if they base themselves at universities rather than locating off campus. I shall use the term *university-based extension work* to describe the form of service or 'outreach' work appropriate to university-based projects whether undertaken by an individual or a group. University-based extension work will be distinguished from 'service organisation work in general', a broader and more diffuse category for groups off-campus.

The main discussion of this paper centres on the 'guidelines' ratified in 1990 by UCT Senate and Council as appropriate for university extension work. The UCT document includes a 'working definition of extension service at UCT'.¹ While I feel this definition needs to be further debated and fine-tuned, I believe it is essentially pointing in the right direction.

While these developments, including a working definition and a series of guidelines for encouraging support for such extension work on this campus (such as use of university library and other material and financial resources, possibilities of taking sabbatical leave in part to do extension work etc. etc.) have been in place at UCT for a few years, they are little known. A range of groups and individuals are directly and indirectly affected by the guidelines, yet few at universities or in off-campus service and mass-based organisations are aware of them or their implications. The purpose of this paper will be to begin to explore some of these issues.

Working Definition

I shall begin by outlining briefly how the UCT document emerged, and flesh out some of the central aspects of this working definition of university extension work.

In the early '80s in Cape Town and elsewhere, on and off campus, a range of progressive service organisations emerged, providing resources to trade unions and other mass organisations in a variety of fields such as health and safety, literacy, labour law and labour statistics, economic issues, etc. The groups that emerged at UCT were part of this wider movement, and were regulated on campus by ad hoc arrangements and vague guidelines within the different faculties and departments. In 1985-6, when the waves of civil unrest spread onto campuses, a loose ad hoc

organisation of academics formed at UCT - PEG (Progressive Education Group). At one point nearly 200 academic staff were involved in PEG, which took as its central task the need to discuss and gain greater clarity on what a progressive university would look like in a post-apartheid South Africa. The issue of what would be relevant socialist practices and institutions/structures within a Third World university were explicitly debated. Different subgroups were formed to consider and formulate guideline documents on a range of issues - democratising of the university structures, new teaching syllabi, university admissions criteria etc.

One subgroup of PEG formed to discuss issues in relation to what was called 'extending university professional services to off-campus groups'. It is significant that the starting point was never the idea of general service/resource provision on campus. Rather, the focus was on how existing academic staff on campus could make their 'professional services', i.e. 'expertise', more available to off-campus communities, particularly working class groups and organisations. Since some were uncomfortable with the concept of 'professional expertise', the term 'extension work/service' was agreed upon. Whatever the term used however, the key issue was always that of the extension of university-based 'scholarly expertise' to the wider community. This was contentious then, and now. And the dominant views in PEG in the mid-80s are reflected in the subsequent UCT guidelines.

After discussions lasting over a year, the professional services subgroup of PEG produced a 'Policy Statement on Extension Service Work at UCT'. This was taken to a meeting of the full PEG group which agreed to the document after some brief debate. With some small though important revisions (see below), this provided the basic content of the Senate/Council document which was eventually ratified in 1990.

Compared with the practices of most elitist universities in Europe and the USA, the guidelines at UCT are quite advanced in terms of commitment of university resources and finances to working class communities. These UCT commitments include official support for use of university rooms, telephones, library, audio-visual equipment etc. for extension services directed at off-campus communities and organisations. Staff members are encouraged to spend some of their working time on extension work, in addition to 'traditional' research and teaching duties. Departments are requested to produce annual reports of this work in addition to their routine research reports. Advertisements for academic posts 'may where appropriate' mention that *normal* academic responsibilities include extension work in addition to traditional research and student teaching and that a 'record of excellence in extension work, linked to research and teaching achievements, will be a recommendation' in the selection for academic jobs; and, very importantly in terms of how UCT currently operates, extension work will be included in the criteria for promotion. Thus,

Extension work should, together with teaching, research, administration, and other professional activity, be taken into consideration when *ad hominem* promotion decisions are made, or when a study and research (i.e. sabbatical) leave application is considered. In this context due credit should be given for publications aimed at non-academic readers which complement and are based on peer-reviewed research publications.

Moreover, an ad hoc UCT Extension Service Committee which in 1987 replaced an older Development Projects Advisory Committee, had by 1990 become a fully recognised Senate subcommittee with budgetary spending powers. This encompassed a small initial budget of around R50000 from the university (in addition to external donations/ grants to extension groups in terms of their own funding). One of the main functions of the Extension Service Committee, similar to the UCT Research Committee, is to receive requests for funds for extension service projects from groups or units or individuals within UCT, and to allocate its small UCT budget on a priority basis.² The committee has elected representatives from each faculty, a student representative, as well as provision for some representatives from off-campus groups/communities. Administratively, the Extension Service Committee is located under the umbrella of the Research Administration, as a third committee alongside the existing Research Committee (which deals with 'peer-review' research applications and issues) and the Organisation for Applied Research (OAR, which deals with matters pertaining to paid consultancy work).

The current potential overlap and ambiguity between these three committees is part of the ambiguous nature of the new concept of Extension Work itself at UCT. This ambiguity was present at the time of the drafting of the original PEG document, and it is relevant to elaborate on this and to link the issue to the 'working definition' of extension service at UCT which became part of the final guideline document.

While the components of the definition derive essentially from the original PEG subcommittee discussions and policy statement, when this subcommittee approached the UCT administration with the aim of establishing extension work activities on a better and more coherent basis within the university, there was some support but also reservations. Although it might be thought that the reservations were based on a general reticence and even suspicion towards progressive extension work, I do not believe this was fundamental. If anything, during 1986-87 the UCT administration was extremely concerned about its non-racial image in the wider community in Cape Town. It was aware that progressive extension service work was contributing positively in this regard.

So why the reticence? I feel the main reason was that the PEG subcommittee was treading on issues that had long been an area of contention and debate in much more conservative circles and in a quite different context. This revolved around the question: what can be considered legitimate university work to be done during university time and utilising university resources? To be more specific, this had long been an issue in academic fields such as medicine and accountancy and engineering. For example, an academic specialist in paediatrics potentially faces endless requests to fill up his/her time with routine work undertaken by paediatricians not based at a university; an accountancy lecturer faces daily (very remunerative) requests from commercial companies to do routine work of accountancy performed by the average non-academic accountant, so does every engineering lecturer. Thus PEG 'progressives' were stumbling unintentionally onto a minefield of fundamental questions, of the nature of a university, the legitimate boundaries of work paid for effectively from the university academic budget, as well as the nature of scholarship

and its associated practices.

It became clear that the UCT administration would support the broad thrust of extension work towards 'disadvantaged communities', as long as it conformed to two criteria which had previously emerged in the context of medicine, accountancy etc.³ The criteria were:

- that extension work is 'made possible by the expertise and knowledge of the academic discipline of the staff members who are providing such service and is rooted in rigorous academic work of the staff members concerned'. In other words, university-based extension services embody 'best practice' and 'state of the art' knowledge which is available because the academic is keeping up with the most advanced knowledge in that specific field or subfield (internationally and in the context of the South African situation). This would mean that a university accountant could advise companies (or mass organisations) concerning recent 'state of the art' (i.e. academic in the true sense) accountancy theories/practices. But it would not be legitimate to use university time and resources to undertake services which simply involved routine practices (i.e. to transfer 'information' or routine knowledge rather than new knowledge). This raises problems for university-based service work which merely provides a resource or informational service.
- that extension work 'enhances the teaching and/ or research done within the university'. I would interpret this as something to strive for rather than an absolute rule. For example at times extension work might involve very little feedback into research or teaching eg. an extension project of writing a new history text book for matrics might not feed back in any immediate way into undergraduate teaching or new research. But in general, university extension work should seek ways to create an interconnectedness between (i) the extension side and (ii) undergraduate teaching (iii) and peer-review research publications. For example a *research* project into the history of Cape Town which generates 'traditional' research articles might interface with *extension* work involving communicating the research findings by means of a popular booklet and a play or video, as well as taking the findings into *teaching* via undergraduate lectures on local history and research methodology. The interconnectedness between these three components of academic work would apply as much to past extension practices in medicine/accountancy/engineering etc. as to recent 'progressive' extension work in the social sciences. Actually when viewed in this light, in many respects the PEG document was simply formalising what medics and engineers have been doing for decades! Perhaps the only significant difference was a new stress on extension for 'disadvantaged communities' rather than university services which have historically been oriented much more towards commerce and the South African elite.

Currents in Opposition to the Existing Definition

Despite the establishment of an Extension Service Committee (ESC) to oversee implementation of the 'guidelines', experience over the past two years has shown that many at UCT, including applicants to the ESC for funding for extension projects, are not clear about the concept of university-based extension work, nor about some

of the implications flowing from the working definition. While most academics have been found to support the guidelines, with one or two reservations about nuances or phraseology, there seem to be two currents of thought which are consistently opposed to the broad thrust of these guidelines. These might be called the 'ultra-right' and 'ultra-left' positions. Both serve to marginalise and peripheralise progressive extension work. These approaches, I believe, could potentially set back the advances that have been made.

The ultra-right position, coming from groupings of more conservative academics, does support extension for 'disadvantaged communities', commonly viewed as 'the poor'. However, this extension work is seen as a side-line, something to do in one's spare time as a form of charity or welfare work. 'Real' academic work is perceived to be generating peer-review publications. It is assumed (incorrectly) that writing a popular text or undertaking consultancy work for a working class community (e.g. a health survey) does not require the highest academic standards. There is no conception, for example, that writing up an academically-based piece in simple language requires the most sophisticated grasp of the core theoretical and empirical issues.⁴ If we take the working definition seriously however, it is clear that all good university-based extension work should contain a serious research component - either original research for the project at hand or synthesising and making available recent research findings of others. This derives from the fact of providing a service 'rooted in rigorous academic work of the staff members concerned'. Yet the ultra-right position views the academic component of extension work as 'mickey mouse' stuff, not to be taken seriously.

I believe that it is important for those doing university-based extension work to counter this ultra-right position, by asserting the complex interrelationship between the 'extending' side and the research side of extension projects, and by ensuring that extension work always conforms to high academic standards.

The 'ultra-left' position encompasses individuals both on and off campus. I would argue it derives from a much wider current of 'anti-academicism' which has been particularly prevalent amongst progressive groupings in South Africa throughout the 1980s. This anti-academicism rears its head in many areas such as debates about gender issues, antagonism towards 'academic' critiques of the internal colonialism thesis, questions about progressive art and culture etc. In other words its occurrence within the debates about extension work at universities is simply one aspect of a much larger ideological current.

The essence of the 'ultra-left' position towards extension is the argument that one is simply doing 'service work in general' from a university base, service work/resource provision which is no different from practices followed if one were based off-campus. There are a number of sub-themes to this position. Firstly there is a stress on extension work as demand driven: one must be accountable to mass organisations which know what they need (and academics know very little about these needs) and one must respond to requests as they arise. This raises particular problems when (a) a request doesn't fall clearly within the academic specialism in which the particular academic individual or group is located (e.g. a labour history group is asked to do a

study of a contemporary housing problem); or (b) a request is essentially one requiring basic information or resources which many non-specialists or undergraduate students could provide. In both cases the issue revolves around 'the expertise and knowledge of the academic discipline of the staff members'⁶. This leads to the second sub-theme of this position. The 'ultra-left' response to dilemmas (a) and (b) is to argue that the whole idea of academic 'specialism' is a bourgeois university construct which needs to be combatted. Moreover it is asserted that 'specialism/ expertism' is elitist and anti- socialist and needs to be rejected. The practices flowing from this approach result in the extension work undertaken becoming less and less specialist and academically rooted - one fulfils the function of a 'service group in general' or a 'community resource group', though based on campus. This dynamic is reinforced and further justified by a third sub-theme: that the 'struggle' requires meeting immediate needs and addressing current issues, that the time is not right for significant time to be spent on longer term research needs and issues (for example, a two year project on the need for a national health service must yield place to a study of an immediate health problem in a certain factory). Thus one (but not the only) important element of academic research - its longer term questions and perspectives - is subordinated to strong currents of 'immediatism' which blow across the extension projects undertaken. Finally a fourth sub-theme tends to be superimposed on all these aspects. If conflict breaks out over these issues, the 'ultra-left' position often argues that most academics in South Africa are white and thus have little real contact with the needs of the mass of the people in South Africa, and that this is shaping the 'overly-academic' nature of the extension work being pursued.

These sub-themes, when condensed together, form an extremely powerful and beguiling package which can easily paralyse extension work attempting to orientate itself within the working definition outlined earlier. The 'ultra-left' position is powerful for a further reason: while historically, 'anti- academicism' has often been coupled with currents of anti- intellectualism (e.g. Nazi Germany in the 1930s), in South Africa in the 1980s it was not generally anti-intellectual. Rather, it argued that intellectual work was important, but should not (and could not) take place within white, racist and elitist universities. Thus it was asserted, 'either get off campus or use the place expediently to do whatever extension work is most demanded'.

This is not the place to develop a serious analysis of different ideological subcurrents during the 1980s. Suffice to say that elements of immediacy, suspicion of whites and males and academics (all dominant in university extension work), stress on working class consciousness/demands and self-reliance, accountability to mass organisations etc., all played a part in shaping the critique of extension work undertaken at universities. Nor do I wish to argue that the 'ultra-left' position does not have some important points to make. It raises complex issues that have no easy solutions. But ultimately I believe its overall effect is to peripheralise and marginalise university-based extension work. By rejecting or not taking seriously the need to root university extension work in academic scholarship, the effect is to play into the hands of the ultra- right position which tolerates progressive extension work

on the margins, as a mickey mouse affair not to be taken seriously. Like all ultra-left positions, it does the work for the conservatives without intending to do so.

My own position is nearer to that of Ernest Mandel who has written numerous non-specialist books for worker education, and yet asserts strongly:

What a university must offer the young workers is first of all the product of theoretical production, that is, scientific knowledge, nothing so sterile as the masochistic populism of some students who want to 'go to the workers' with empty hands and empty heads to offer them their muscles and vocal cords. What the workers need most of all is knowledge, a radical critique of the existing society, systematic exposure of all the lies and half-truths projected by the mass media. It is not easy to put this knowledge into words that can be understood by the masses. Rhetoric and academic jargon are as sterile as populism. But the job of popularisation comes after that of assimilating real knowledge. And it is in this latter realm that a really critical university can make its prime contribution today to transforming society. It can offer a critique of existing society as a whole and of its parts that is all the more radical and relevant for being serious, scholarly and incorporating a large amount of factual material...

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I draw out the implications of the most contentious issues raised above.

- There is no way of avoiding academic specialisms in a university (though the specialist field might be multidisciplinary in terms of historical boundaries). In many ways the defining issue of a university is precisely that the scholarship of its academics is based on expertise in a particular field, in which the academic keeps abreast internationally with the 'state of the art', 'best practice' knowledge and its applications. Thus if an extension unit is located within an academic department or faculty (as opposed to being located in say, Student Affairs, as one or two resource groups are), by definition it will be required to perform extension work within a certain academic specialist area.
- Flowing from the above point, university-based extension work cannot simply be demand driven i.e. accountable to wider community organisations. This it has to be - but it *also* has to be accountable to the academic/ intellectual community of specialists in the field, in terms of research ethics, validity of theory, rigour of research techniques used, familiarity with the latest findings and debates etc. The implication of the definition of extension 'made possible by the expertise and knowledge of the academic discipline of the staff members...' is that university-based work has to restrict itself to certain specialist tasks, and to ask other service organisations off-campus to meet many demands which are probably more urgent in the immediate sense - but which are not 'rooted in rigorous academic work of the staff concerned...'
- One of the most important battles to win at universities, in terms of extension work, is the explicit recognition that academic work involves three, not two components: teaching (post-graduate and undergraduate), 'traditional' research

whose output takes the form of journal articles, books etc., and extension work which involves making the scholarship available to the non-specialist, in the form of 'popular' booklets and articles, videos, plays, consultancy reports etc. The UCT guidelines are an important advance in this regard, in their recognition of all three aspects in terms, for example, of academic staff appointments, promotions and sabbatical leave. It is important with respect of extension work that where possible 'it enhances the teaching and/or research done within the university'. All three aspects are integral to good scholarship, they enhance and in general positively reinforce each other. In many ways this seems so 'normal' (engineering and many other applied departments have been doing this all along) that one wonders why there is any fuss about so-called 'new extension'.

NOTES

- * The views/interpretations expressed in the paper are those of the author alone
1. A working definition of extension service is as follows:
 - I - it is a service or function offered by an individual or a group directly to the community or to those whose work would directly benefit the community;
 - II - it is made possible by the expertise and knowledge of the academic discipline of the staff members who are providing such a service and is rooted in rigorous academic work of the staff members concerned;
 - III - it enhances the teaching and/or research done within the University; and
 - IV - it is responsive to expressed or perceived community needs.
2. Extension service is *not* work that is normally included in diploma or degree teaching or research prompted solely by developments in a discipline and it is also *not* paid private or contract work. In general, it is natural that much extension service is aimed particularly at the disadvantaged community.
3. Most extension work at UCT, like most research, is funded by external sources; and just as the UCT Research Committee monitors research practices and funding of research in general across the campus, so the new Extension Service Committee will perform a similar function for university-based extension services.
4. These two criteria became implicitly embodied within the working definition of extension work, and I believe this was a positive development - a university is an institution based on scholarship, and one cannot have one set of rules for 'extending' one's scholarship to commercial companies or capitalists, and a quite different set of rules for extension work to mass organisations like trade unions.
5. My own experience has been that it is often easier to write an academic journal article, where some of the blurred areas can be fudged with footnotes and nuances. Writing up something for the non-specialist usually forces one to highlight the essences - and if one is unclear about the core points, the simple style soon reveals this quite starkly.
6. A problem faced by the UCT Extension Service Committee has been that many projects submitted to it for funding require new research to be undertaken within the parameters of the project itself. One solution has been to refer the 'research' aspects to the UCT Research Committee for funding and for the ESC to fund the 'extending' aspects (eg. the costs of producing a popular booklet for the non-specialist, incorporating the research findings). Yet this solution deliberately segregates out the two components which are generally better seen as part of an integrated whole. The interrelationship of these two committees clearly therefore needs more debate and attention.
7. See working definition point II above.
8. See Mandel in C. Bundy, A. Coetzee, A. Kraak, P. le Roux and A. Redelinghuis, (1990)
9. I use the term 'traditional' research in place of the UCT 'peer-review research' terminology, because in my opinion good 'popular' extension work should also stand up to peer-review. For example, 'popular' booklets on labour movements of Bolivia and Tanzania in which I was involved, had their drafts sent to specialists in the area who suggested important changes in theoretical and empirical details before publication i.e. the booklets underwent a review not dissimilar to the reviews of drafts of journal articles prior to publication in international journals. In other words, extension work for non-specialists should stand up to the most rigorous scrutiny of specialists - the working class has no need for inferior work (see Mandel above).
10. Obviously, different academics will lay different stresses (in terms of time and commitment) on the three aspects, just as currently there is a variation on the commitment towards teaching in relation to research. The principle of recognising all three components is what is important.

REFERENCES

- C. Bundy, A. Coetzee, A. Kraak, P. le Roux and A. Redelinghuis, (1990) 'Theory is the Most Practical Form of Knowledge: academic excellence and the ideal of a people's university', in *Forum* No. 1: UWCADE (Univ. of Western Cape) pp56-63.

DISCUSSION

EDDIE WEBSTER: David Cooper's interesting presentation captures the naivety of the left. At Wits we also have a document around extension work, which sets down rules as to how much time you can spend consulting with business and industry. The overwhelming pressure there is to get out into the marketplace and sell, to commoditise knowledge. Is not the extension document that you prepared overtaken by this market-driven pressure? Do you get sabbaticals if you spend time doing extension work and don't get paid for it? Do you get promoted for those positions? The 1980s was quite a protected period because we weren't hit by the financial crisis; now people are talking about rationalisation, deteriorating salaries, not keeping up in the marketplace. Are people willing to go out into the community and do things for the disadvantaged and not get paid for them? Aren't they going to say, 'Well, if it's unpayable then I can't get my housing mortgage and so on.'

DAVE COOPER: The paid thing is really important. This is not just about extension. This is about scholarly work in general. If the basis of it is that the universities are doing routine consultancy work which is easily able to be done, then we have to have an academic debate about what is routine and what is state of the art knowledge. I think that there are lots of people within universities doing things which should not be done at universities, and they are being paid for that. We can't argue and win that case if half the left are doing that as well. This is a general definition of work at the universities, and we need to be vigilant about people on both the left and the right who are actually using the resources for inappropriate purposes.

ERNEST WAMBA-DIA WAMBA: In terms of extension, I realise that these are free services. I was thinking of Zaire, where increasingly the professors of the universities are basically accused of being sell-outs, because they teach in the morning; they are at the Presidential Office in the afternoon. They have been basically accused of consolidating the forces that the poor masses are struggling against. So I am wondering whether extension has aimed at particular groups in society or simply the criteria of being free.

DAVE COOPER: Extending is really not whether you are getting paid for it or not paid, because for many decades, a hundred years at UCT or slightly less, people have been extending their work and being paid for it. It also doesn't matter whether you extend into the working class. This discussion involved us having to go back to first principles; that basically everybody who's in an academic department in a university is involved in three activities: teaching, extending, and what I call traditional research.

CAROLINE WHITE: What are going to be national research priorities? How, and by whom, are they going to be set? Where is research funding going to come from? How much is it going to be? Who's going to decide? Who are the researchers going to be? What research bodies are we going to have? Are we going to reform the big national organisations that we already have? What about the little local ones on the university campuses and off the campuses? Should research be based at the universities?

BILL FREUND: People aren't sufficiently strategic. There tends to be a collapse between a very high moral object, what a total transformation would be like, and very concrete, very narrow things of how do we function a little better tomorrow in our present situation?

MALE VOICE: Firstly, universities are complex institutions, and within them service organisations are very marginal. They will continue to remain marginal because universities will continue to be an expression of dominant class interests. Secondly, because universities are so deeply hostile to fundamental structural change, we are increasingly being forced to accept the ideology of creeping incremental change. Gone are the days when we were there to talk in bold and visionary terms about radical changes and the institutional reform of the universities. Thirdly transformation does imply incremental change. There's nothing wrong with incremental change whatsoever but it must lead to much more fundamental change. A fundamental issue is access: for whom? to whom? at what level? New curricula, new approaches to the definition of research and research agenda, a new social view of the composition of universities as an institution within society, a new plan and goal. Finally, we're increasingly intimidated by the rational voice of market ideas - cost effectiveness, professionalism. Revolutionary ideas are much too disruptive. But if we make that the end of our engagement, then I'm afraid that the project of transformation of universities goes right out of the window.

JAIRAM REDDY: The universities now are under pressure from the outside, from large number of community organisations who want to locate within the universities. And if I heard Imraan correctly, that this leads to indiscriminate squatting within the universities. How do we cope with this? Who do we try to locate? Simply we do not have the capacity to accommodate everyone.

MOSES NGOASHENG: I think there's a recognition on the part of people that structures like the CSIR and so on in universities, are institutions which are in place and there are certain issues which are needed and which we cannot change overnight. We're not going to rupture those institutions; we're not going to wish them away. They're going to be existing, and we need to be struggling for tactics and strategies of an incremental nature.

DAVE COOPER: The university is about best-practice state-of-the-art knowledge. So a synthesis of existing knowledge will involve new knowledge, state of the art of that field. The extending of scholarship must be about the advanced knowledge in that field. That's what groups and lecturers and people should be mainly doing at universities. Work which is not around that is best placed in another institution outside either a technikon or a university.

IMRAAN VALODIA: The essential role that we are playing is as conduits between academic and mass organisations - to synthesise their ideas and present them in a more accessible way. The challenge that we face is to develop some way of fitting service organisations in more appropriate way. Perhaps we need to develop some journal here which need not necessarily conform to academic standards, but which would allow us to publish the material that we've got and to interact in a much better way with everyone.