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ANU HASS Impact Framework

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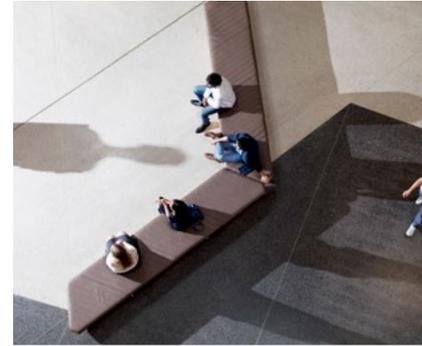
ANU HASS Impact Framework

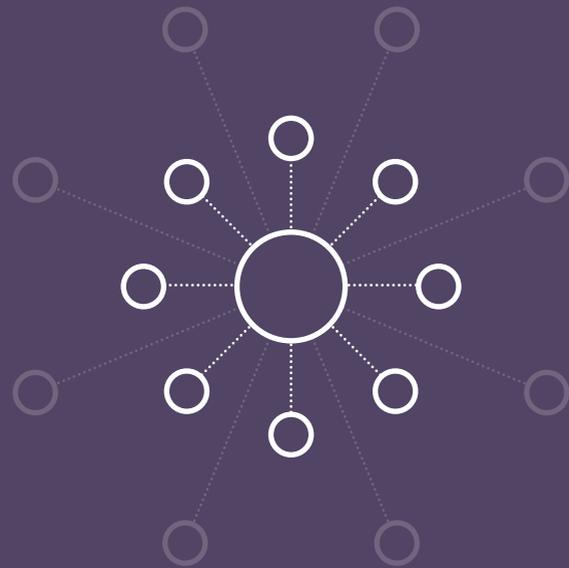
Nationally and internationally, universities are increasingly required to demonstrate their value to the social good. While engineering and the natural sciences can rely on measures such as patents and innovation-based revenue, the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) often struggle to demonstrate their positive contributions, for a range of reasons.

Focusing on the humanities, arts, and social sciences, the following framework aims to help scholars imagine, plan, document, and evaluate their engagement and impact activity.

The framework consists of three elements:

- › Our understanding of engagement and impact and why they are important
- › Guidance on planning for impact
- › A framework for assessing impact





Understanding engagement and impact

What do we mean by engagement and impact?

Engagement

Engagement is fundamentally a dialogue between scholars and their wider communities, focusing on knowledge or on values, in pursuit of public or environmental benefit. It may take place in a context of partnership or of critical inquiry.

We imagine engagement in these terms for several reasons. We see engagement not as a one-way street, but as a two-way dialogue through which scholars and their communities communicate with each other. This dialogue may focus on how we understand the world, or it may concern the values we use to shape our communities. We emphasize that engagement may be either collaborative or critical in nature.

Impact

Impact is the contribution that scholars and their wider communities make to the security, prosperity, environment, justice, cultural richness, or education of the world outside the academy as a result of academic research and/or engagement.

This definition of impact reflects several underlying beliefs. Impact emerges from the actions of scholars and non-academic actors in combination; scholars do not simply impose their views upon society. Impact may generate a wide range of “goods,” including some that are intangible. Last, a given instance of impact may stem from engagement with society, from academic research, or from some combination of the two.

What are some of the outcomes that impactful HASS research aims for?

- › Enhanced security
- › Economic prosperity and fairness
- › Gender equality
- › Cultural richness
- › Individual empowerment
- › Improved governance
- › Improved environmental quality
- › Human rights and justice
- › Social cohesion

What are some of the ways in which HASS research can have impact?

- › Contributing to positive change in public policy, social practice or environmental stewardship.
- › Providing support for the design and delivery of current policy.
- › Preserving and broadening awareness of cultural heritage.
- › Creating public art and promoting broad engagement with it.
- › Capacity-building in the public, private or not-for-profit sector.
- › Seeding or reshaping public debates outside the academy.
- › Changing public discourse or vocabulary.
- › Mediating cultural or linguistic boundaries.

Why develop our capacity to assess and report impact?

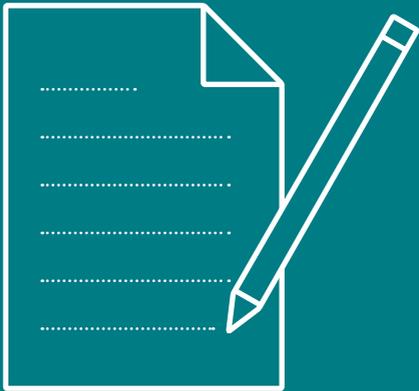
If HASS scholars don't lead in defining and measuring impact, others will do it for us. The result could be that HASS disciplines are disadvantaged vis-à-vis other disciplines.

Ill-defined impact assessment frameworks carry twin risks:

- › Encouragement of exaggerated impact claims, leading to a widening credibility deficit.
- › Proliferation of underwhelming impact claims, resulting in a devaluing of HASS scholarship.

In contrast, a compelling impact assessment framework can help to:

- › demonstrate the public value of HASS research to funders;
- › deepen our understanding of how academic inquiry can contribute to positive social and environmental outcomes;
- › broaden public understanding of “valuable” research past conventional commercial frameworks.



Planning impact

It is useful for scholars to think about impact at the outset of their research and engagement activity. Such reflection increases the likelihood that scholars' research and engagement will ultimately generate impact. It can also enhance the ability of scholars to attract support for their research.

We outline below several questions scholars may consider as they plan for impact, even as we recognize the potential for serendipity in this process and the importance of flexibility as research and the outside world evolve.

What is the motivation of my research or engagement?

There are many possibilities in this regard, some of which include:

- › To address a basic conceptual or methodological problem.
- › To contribute to the improvement of a policy, social or environmental situation, and the capacity of public and private organisations to work for social and environmental good.
- › To assess or critique a prescribed approach to improving social or environmental wellbeing.
- › To preserve and broaden awareness of cultural heritage.
- › To enrich social life by creating public art and public engagement with it.
- › To seed, enrich, or reshape public discourse in the collective good.
- › To help mediate cleavages and boundaries within and between societies.

Toward this end, how can I engage the world outside academia?

The most productive engagement often develops when researchers establish and nurture relationships with wider communities. We acknowledge the value of spending time to develop these relationships. They frequently serve as the foundation for robust dialogue and long-term connections.

In some cases, scholars may engage with non-academic stakeholders while designing their research. Such engagement at the outset of the project can increase the relevance of the research to those stakeholders and the likelihood that it will generate impact.

As the research process unfolds or after it has been completed, there are a number of ways in which scholars may engage the outside world in pursuit of impact. Here, we highlight three basic ways to demonstrate the range of possibilities:

- › Partnerships with non-academic organisations: private briefings, commissioned research, membership on panels/boards, co-creation relationships, university-industry research programs, secondments
- › Expert content: commissioned art, media commentary, major speeches, public testimony, popular writing, best practice guides, podcasts
- › Education: organising or teaching non-degree short courses and programs, delivering 'in-house' training for external organisations, co-designing training programs to be delivered by an external partner

How is my research and/or engagement likely to be received outside academia?

This question can be addressed by considering a series of additional questions, including:

- › Who are the appropriate and influential next-users and end-users of my research or engagement?
- › What is my plan for drawing the attention of next-users to my research? How are they likely to influence end-users?
- › How are my next-users and end-users oriented toward my research or engagement?
 - › Partners
 - › Sympathetic but unaware
 - › Opposed
- › How do I know whether my next-users and end-users are paying attention to my research or engagement?

How will I document my impact?

Scholars should start thinking about how to document their impact at the beginning of their research and/or engagement activity. We should take advantage of opportunities to build into our research methodologies and partnerships processes for recording the relevance and influence of our research beyond academia. In addition, baseline data concerning the status quo may need to be collected prior to the start of research. We also need to keep in mind that some forms of evidence may be impossible to collect after the research or engagement has concluded. In other cases, scholars may need to wait years before their impact can be documented.



Assessing impact

Individual HASS scholars must also consider how to document the impact that arises as a result of their research and engagement. We have developed the following questions as a guide for HASS scholars seeking to develop their own impact portfolios:

- › *What is the source of my impact?*
- › *What is the societal benefit of my impact?*
- › *What is my impact pathway?*
- › *What is the evidence of my impact?*

We discuss each of these questions below.

What is the source of my impact?

Our understanding of impact envisions that it can emerge in three distinct ways. First, scholars may engage with the outside world and generate impact simply or primarily through that engagement. Such impact is possible, for example, when a scholar is seconded to a government department for a period of time.

Second, scholars might generate purely through their research. Their research might be cited and applied by other scholars or by the media, for example.

Third, scholars may generate impact through a combination of engagement and research. In this case, the scholar in question follows up their research by engaging with the outside world in a way that promotes impact based on that research.

What is the societal benefit of my impact?

There are a wide range of possible benefits emanating from research. As noted above, some possibilities include:

- › Enhanced security
- › Economic prosperity and fairness
- › Gender equality
- › Cultural richness
- › Individual empowerment
- › Improved governance
- › Improved environmental quality
- › Human rights and justice
- › Social cohesion

In each of these cases, there is value in both breadth and depth of impact. Some instances of impact may offer a limited degree of benefit to a wide range of people, for example. Others help smaller numbers of people in more profound ways. Both forms of impact are important.

What is my impact pathway?

Scholars should strive to convey how their research and/or engagement resulted in impact. Toward this end, it may be useful for scholars to refer to the basic means of engagement highlighted above: partnerships, expert content, and education.

Scholars should also keep in mind that their impact pathway may not be simple and direct. The following list identifies and explains a few types of indirect pathways:

› Cumulative

Research → impact → more impact

In this case, the research directly generates some type of impact, and this impact subsequently helps generate a new kind of impact.

› Synergistic

Multiple research projects → interaction or synergy → impact

In this case, a given research project generates impact not by itself, but through some kind of interaction with other (perhaps complementary) research projects conducted around the same time.

› Research-mediated

Research → subsequent research → impact

In this case, research influences subsequent academic research, and this latter research generates impact. The case must be made that the original research had a sufficiently important influence on the subsequent research to deserve a share of the credit for the impact.

› Student-mediated

Research → teaching → impact

In this case, scholars employ research in their teaching. This research, in turn, may be shown to influence the behavior of students pursuing non-academic careers following their graduation.

Scholars should feel free to imagine and describe other types of impact pathways, drawing on their own individual experiences.

In each case, scholars may elaborate as appropriate on the specific activities they undertook.

What is the evidence of my impact?

There are many tools scholars may use to provide convincing evidence that their research has been influential beyond academia. Some possibilities include:

- › **Discourse analysis:** tracing the growing prevalence of approaches, terminologies or frameworks advocated by my research.
- › **Audience data and surveys:** compiling data on audience sizes and reactions to the presentation of research outcomes or artistic exhibitions.
- › **Student and alumni surveys:** tracking the influence of research-based education through the actions and advocacy of former students in the course of their careers.
- › **Citation analysis:** tracking the influence of conceptual or methodological innovations, or new interpretations, through their uptake by other researchers, policy makers, or social and environmental activists.
- › **Process tracing:** developing verified accounts of the transmission, influence and operationalisation of research ideas, through the use of end-user testimonials and other forms of evidence.
- › **Counterfactual analysis:** constructing case studies of the likely trajectory of an issue without the intervention of my research.
- › **External assessments:** organising evaluations of research impact by independent experts.

A final word: “normalising” impact

Currently, the impact “agenda” is externally-driven and uncertain in design and outcomes. Our challenge is to integrate more sophisticated impact planning and assessment into our research process. Several distinct challenges stand out:

› **Research initiation**

We must be aware at the outset of a research project of the impact motivation behind the questions we are asking.

› **Research planning**

We should define explicitly the positive outcomes our research is intended to have beyond academia, and be realistic about degrees of difficulty or receptiveness.

› **Impact partnership and pathway planning**

We need to put in place relationships, opportunities and frameworks that help shape our research design and convey its results to next-users and end-users.

› **Research design**

We can build into our research methodologies and partnerships processes for assessing and recording the relevance and influence of our research beyond academia.

› **Impact evaluation methodologies**

We must identify the most rigorous and feasible methods for documenting our impact.

