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## **Universities as Guardians of Democratic Values: Nurturing Engaged Citizenship in the Global South Amidst Global Challenges**

### **Setting a Level to Fulfillment**

I think that the whole world is suffocating because of many things. They all fall under one word, interpreted under various truths, FULFILLMENT.

When the first humans began identifying words, elements, and feelings..., there was a failure to acknowledge the importance of setting a boundary or limit to our needs and wants. They were unable to discuss ethical boundaries when it threatened their satisfaction.

When will enough be enough?

What even is more than enough?

What is the bare minimum?

For longer than we can remember, greed has been eating us alive. In a sense, humans are ready to self-destruct at the cost of feeding their appetite for money or power.

The first instinct a child develops is *possessiveness*. If we carefully analyze the psychological translation of a child's behavior in different settings around different types of people, it becomes clear that each kid will 'claim' a toy, person, or any concrete object accessible to them.

"that's mine", "that's my mommy", "give it back it's not yours".

The obsession for power is born within us and is nurtured throughout our lives.

Some people find their satisfaction, maybe not truthfully, but they do practically come to a stop at some point. These 'engaged citizens' classified in democratic societies play an active and informed participation role in the civic life of their community, nation, and, by extension, the broader global society. It goes beyond the mere fulfillment of legal obligations and encompasses a proactive

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commitment to contributing to the well-being of the community, advocating for social justice, and participating in democratic processes. Others? Well, if I were to get into that I'd say the people ruling the world, making globalizing decisions don't care about the well-being of the population. They balance well-being against their wealth at all costs. It doesn't matter if civilians, the 'unsatisfied' 'less hungry' people are deprived of everything they have, as long as the numbers in their bank accounts double, the oppression I want to call it, 'bullying' occurs.

I don't want to be biased.

Or do I?

Honestly, I'm not holding any grudges, but some issues need to be discussed on an international scale when it comes to politics and *world domination*

How can several very limited human beings get appointed to make decisions that influence the whole world? Don't misinterpret what I'm trying to say, by limited I mean quantity not quality.

The world is too big and diversified to be ruled by 1 person, 1 culture, 1 childhood, 1 background, 1 perspective, 1 ideology... you get the point, right?

This is where universities should intervene. The saying that 'a university is a smaller representation of society' was not uncalled for. Universities raise and teach generation after generation to think and do the same thing in the same way and we still expect different outcomes to play out in our governments and societies. When we attempt something and it fails, why do we continue to do the same thing and expect different results?

It makes no sense. How can our lives improve if we do not change? How can we improve if we do not expose ourselves to new circumstances and people?

I know my introduction is political, but we fail to understand that to raise proper and engaged citizens in our civic societies the environment they are meant to 'serve' needs to be addressed and changed. Our elected politicians were and still are part of the society we all live in. Most of them were brought up in our neighborhoods, went to the same schools, ate the same food, and rode the same bus. We cannot blame them, this very selective group of people, for everything wrong in our society. We need to start owning up to our consequences. We are a society. We made these people. We nurtured them. We educated them. They weren't born greedy, and if we consistently continue to resist change then how are we expected to move forward?

Some people feel that nothing should be done unless everyone agrees that it should be done. The trouble is that it takes so long to persuade everyone and by the time they agree to change, it's time to move on. It's no surprise that some individuals assume that progress implies going backward slowly.

### **Change, what can be done?**

As aforementioned, universities are a crucial entity in the development of individuals and the acknowledgment of their civic privileges and responsibilities that are interconnected in the sense that the rights granted to individuals within a society come with corresponding

responsibilities. The alignment of citizenship privileges with responsibilities for civic engagement is a fundamental aspect of participatory democracy.

Voting in elections, engaging in public discourse, participating in community activities, critically analyzing information, seeking diverse perspectives, making decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, challenging discriminatory practices, and actively supporting initiatives that foster equality are qualities that should be enhanced at institutions of higher education.

How?

Create a campus that values these qualities. Not just values but prioritizes them.

For most of us, reality is something we tend to avoid.

The truth hurts.

It would be easier for us to believe our lies and disconnect from authenticity.

This notion is especially prominent in the global south.

'Global South', geographically the term is accurate. Socially? That's what the 'Global North' likes to use to undermine nations that share commonalities in terms of historical experiences, economic challenges, and development issues. Many countries in the Global South were formerly colonies, and they continue to face issues related to post-colonialism, such as economic dependence, political instability, and social inequalities.

The colonized being ridiculed by their colonizers is ironic isn't it?

What's worse, we, the global south, give them every reason to do so.

Why do I never feel like I can freely express my opinions and thoughts about criticizing political regimes, laws, and how they are applied?

The colonized people are further oppressed by their communities that do not want them to learn the vitality of democracy. This way, they can control us with no consequences.

No international interference.

Good things take time, don't let anyone tell you, 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'. A lot of dog trainers have proven otherwise.

We need to break this vicious cycle internally.

Awareness is our weapon.

The future minds of our society are getting their degrees to embark on their career journey.

Use that opportunity.

Teach your students how to actively listen and debate. Their time at university is when their ripe mind is looking for answers to questions they couldn't ask growing up. Create a safe space, with no judgment only guidance, resources, and mentorship. Infuse social justice principles into various academic disciplines. Educators need to strive to equip students with the critical tools necessary to analyze and address systemic inequalities. Whether through history, literature, sociology, or the sciences, integrating social justice themes fosters a deep understanding of the historical and contemporary issues faced by marginalized groups. This approach not only broadens students' perspectives but also encourages them to engage with diverse voices and perspectives, promoting empathy and a commitment to dismantling injustice. It empowers students to become informed advocates for social change, encouraging them to question societal norms, challenge discrimination, and contribute meaningfully to building a more equitable and inclusive society. Incorporating social justice into curricula is an investment in fostering socially responsible citizens who understand the interconnectedness of knowledge and the imperative of addressing injustice in all its forms. Incorporate community-based learning into the curriculum to connect academic knowledge with real-world issues.

Remember the obsession with power I talked about? Let's mold this trait into something useful. Let's hypothetically give students the idea that they can change by establishing mechanisms for them to propose and advocate for institutional changes. Foster partnerships with local policymakers to connect academic knowledge with practical policy solutions.

Forge partnerships with external organizations dedicated to civic engagement by facilitating internships and opportunities for students to work with NGOs, advocacy groups, and governmental agencies.

Because we are talking about students, let's think, what do they care about?

The desperate need to attain high grades. In today's competitive academic landscape, where success is frequently measured by GPA and academic achievements, the pursuit of high grades has become a pervasive concern for students. The emphasis on high grades reflects a deeper desire for validation, self-worth, and a sense of accomplishment. The prevailing narrative linking success to academic performance intensifies the desperate need for high grades, leaving students grappling with stress, anxiety, and an unrelenting pursuit of perfection.

So how do we keep them engaged?

Monetary compensation, no, civic grade compensation. CVC recognizes and values students' active involvement in community service, advocacy, and civic initiatives as integral to their overall educational experience. This concept reflects a commitment to acknowledging the importance of civic engagement and social responsibility within the academic context, allowing students to not only excel in their coursework but also contribute meaningfully to the betterment of society. The CGC system could involve incorporating civic engagement-related projects, service-learning experiences, or community-based research into the grading structure, fostering a holistic approach to education that prioritizes both academic achievement and civic responsibility. Universities could

add CVC as part of the general requirements to graduate with a minimum score to achieve. Not in the sense to make students feel obliged to complete it and add to their crippling anxiety, but in a sense that the higher their score the more privileges/points they earn.

In conclusion, the ongoing relevance and importance of addressing citizenship privileges aligning with responsibilities for civic engagement are paramount for the flourishing of democratic societies. As we navigate a complex and interconnected world, universities play a pivotal role in shaping informed and engaged citizens. The dynamic interplay between citizenship privileges and responsibilities necessitates an educational approach that equips students with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and ethical awareness to balance these aspects effectively. Freedom of thought and expression stands as a cornerstone of democracy, contributing to the vitality of diverse perspectives and the robust exchange of ideas. Universities should actively foster these democratic values by creating environments that encourage open dialogue, respect for differing opinions, and the cultivation of informed, **independent** thinkers. Moreover, in the face of current global conflicts that shape our understanding of citizenship, democracy, rights, and freedoms, universities in the Global South must respond by promoting inclusivity, social justice, and global awareness. By embracing these principles and preparing students to navigate the complexities of an interconnected world, universities contribute not only to the intellectual growth of individuals but also to the resilience and adaptability of democratic societies on a global scale.