MAGNA CHARTA OBSERVATORY

World Café Table 1
Student Perspectives on Engaging with Society and Reconstruction:
- Student essay competition winners to present and discuss their essays on student involvement in universities serving society
- Student involvement in reconstruction
- Students engaging with society as part of their programmes

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Background

The Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU) has always emphasised the pivotal role of students in universities. This sentiment, rooted in its 1988 version, has been further endorsed and expanded upon in the 2020 version. Recognising the importance of student involvement, the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) has consistently integrated student representatives in its governing body and various activities. With an aim to further amplify the voice of students and enhance their impact within universities, the MCO initiated the Essay Competition 2023.

This competition sought to understand from students themselves how they can wield more influence in ensuring their universities play a more significant role in society.

The theme of the competition was: **"How might students exercise more influence in enabling their universities to make a more effective contribution to society?"**

This theme resonates with the MCU 2020 statement, which emphasizes the responsibility of universities to engage with global aspirations and challenges and to serve their communities for the betterment of humanity and sustainability.

The competition witnessed a plethora of insights, reflections, and innovative ideas from students worldwide. They delved into their universities' current practices, governance structures and shared personal experiences that highlighted both the successes and challenges faced in their academic environments. Many essays shed light on the tangible ways in which universities were living up to the MCU 2020 statement, while others critiqued the gaps and proposed actionable solutions.

They shared stories of student-led initiatives, both through formal structures like student unions and class groups, as well as grassroots movements and individual efforts. These narratives ranged from involvement in strategic university processes to active participation in class activities and even to peaceful protests advocating for change.

The winners of the competition, selected for their relevance to the question, innovative approaches, and potential impact, are now poised to present their essays at the 2023 Magna Charta Anniversary. Their presentations promise to not only share their insights but also to spark discussions, debates, and collaborations, furthering the MCO's vision of a student-centric approach to university governance and societal engagement.

It is evident that the future of universities and their role in society is not just in the hands of administrators and professors but equally in the hands of the students. Their voices, ideas, and actions are shaping the future, and the MCO's Essay Competition 2023 has provided a platform for these voices to be heard and celebrated.

Guiding Questions for the World Cafe Session:

1. In what ways do you believe universities currently make effective contributions to society, and where do you see room for improvement?

2. How can students, both individually and collectively, influence university governance structures to better align with societal needs?

3. Reflecting on the MCU 2020 statement about universities' responsibility to engage with society and its reconstruction, how can students play a proactive role in ensuring this responsibility is met?

4. What innovative methods or approaches have you encountered or propose that students can adopt to enable universities to engage more effectively with society?

5. Considering the various ways students can engage (e.g., student unions, class groups, protests), which do you believe has the most significant impact on university policies and practices, and why?