

International Webinar: ‘Experiences of ‘Engaging with Diverse Communities and Key Leanings’

Convener & Moderator: Dr. Garima Kumar (Dept. of Psychology)

The IQAC, MSC organized an **International Webinar on Experiences of ‘Engaging with Diverse Communities and Key Leanings’**. The **Principal Prof.(Dr.) Harpreet Kaur** welcomed the panellists and shared her observations on the topic after introductory remarks by Co-ordinator IQAC Dr. Manisha Mathur. The panellists, **Ms Surpreet Cheema (Registered Psychologist with Australian & New Zealand Board) and Ms. Vinita Satija (Mental and Public Health Professional, India)**, two professional with firsthand experience of working with diverse communities at the grass root level, responded to a number of questions and concerns raised by **Moderator and Convener, Dr. Garima Kumar**, who highlighted the need for engaging with communities as a third important pillar of higher education in the new curriculum framework, apart from teaching and research. Pertinent issues discussed were; how to develop an effective approach to engaging with communities?; what strategies are needed to enhance participation?, how can evaluation mechanisms be made robust? How can community engagement be a mutually beneficial process for all, by collectively incorporating diverse perspectives and stories?, how can we remain sensitive to the needs of diverse stakeholders by not just incorporating privileged positions of a dominant few researchers/practitioners? How can we infuse the spirit of learning and serving in higher education institutions? In addition, more. Sharing real life examples, their challenges and dilemmas from the field, the panellists enriched over 170 participants across different universities of the country with their insightful observations. Some practical steps that emerged from the interaction include:

- Challenging ones assumptions of understanding of what the “other” party looks like or needs. Accepting that there is much we do not know or understand.
- Institutions of higher education,-students, academia, administrators and civil society - may begin by simply asking community members about their desires or objectives for a partnership and programme, to make all conversations and programme partnerships mutually meaningful.
- Significance of evaluating community perspectives, putting their voices at the centre of conversations on partnerships and incorporate the findings into the program design and development. Maintaining a posture of humility in all we do.

The session ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Harinder M. Sandhu.