

Academia absentia?



Universities have long been valued for their role in creating knowledge -- knowledge that can improve society. But are today's research and teaching institutions doing enough to make sure those ideas are entering and influencing the public domain? And if not, are they failing society?

That's the question that Professor Asit K Biswas and *New Mandala* editor James Giggacher tackle in the latest [Policy Forum podcast](#).

In it, the two discuss how universities are neglecting their duty to engage in public debate on crucial policy issues, and what needs to happen for scholars to make a difference beyond the ivory tower of academia.

As Biswas, Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, argues, academic research is mostly geared toward publication in high-impact journals.

“That is because of the incentive structure of the universities, all universities. We have to publish in

high-impact journals. If you want to publish in high-impact journals, the elegance of the theory takes precedence over application.”

Biswas also points to a disconnect between academics and policymakers.

“Even if you come out with a wonderful exposition of the problem and the solution, no one at the policy level is even aware of it.”

Another clear disconnect is in the realm of digital media, with universities not doing enough to take advantage of digital disruption and the opportunities offered by online academic blogging, says Giggacher.

“I fear that much like media, [universities] could be quickly left behind, and be left scrambling to be relevant... If handled correctly, digital disruption gives us the historic opportunity to change the way we research, the way we teach, the way we communicate that research.”

Part of the problem, he adds, is that universities aren’t recognising the value of online platforms in influencing society and policymakers.

“There are no incentives for academics to write an article on a blog... It won’t help them win promotion as it currently stands, it won’t help them keep a job. And as we see in some spaces, when academics are making controversial comments in public, it can even lead to them losing their jobs, which is a worrying development.”

Listen to the full podcast in the player below.

This recording forms part of *New Mandala*’s 2016 Horizons seminar series, exploring the role of modern universities in today’s societies, and celebrations marking the second anniversary of *Policy Forum – Asia and the Pacific*’s platform for public policy analysis, opinion, debate, and discussion.