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Introduction

Can a university change the world? That's the big question we are asking on the Seattle Pacific University campus these days.

Does the academy today find itself on the margins of influence in the complex world in which we live?

We are witnessing social, cultural, technological, and economic shifts that are nothing short of seismic, breathtaking. The British novelist Ian McEwan says our world is one of "unbearable complexity." [The New York Times columnist David Brooks](#) says our young people face a world of "unprecedented ambiguity ... where it's not clear if anything can be said to be absolutely true."

Already in our decade, says Brooks, "Americans have had to acknowledge dark realities that it is not in our nature to readily acknowledge: the thin veneer of civilization, the elemental violence in human nature, the lurking ferocity of the environment, the limitations on what we can plan and know, the cumbersome reactions of bureaucracies, the uncertain progress good makes over evil."

Can a university change *this* kind of world? Surely our option, in the face of all this, cannot be to build more beautiful ivory towers, monuments to some kind of disconnected learning, or to sit on the margins wringing our hands, while we watch such a world go by.

At Seattle Pacific we believe, in extraordinary times like ours, we must equip our graduates to be fully engaged in such a world. Our research should be relevant and helpful. The values by which we operate should model something totally different. *We ought to have a plan that points the way toward a better world.*

That great story of David and Goliath has helped to frame for me some thoughts in all of this. As the story opens, David's people find themselves doing a whole lot of hand wringing, sitting on the margins, feeling powerless and irrelevant, afraid. They had thought their purpose was bold and noble and blessed by God, and here they were, faced with extinction.

Audaciously, perhaps foolishly, David proposes to run right at the problem. He shook off all of the old assumptions; he was smart and savvy and innovative. His approach was thoughtful, to be sure, but his plan was bold, aggressive, and active. He was not afraid.

But then the important part of the story just leaps off the page. David says he will run right at the giant so that the world will know there is a God. He believed he was part of a big, worldwide drama: God wants all of his children to flourish.

Can a university change the world? Yes, indeed, we can. But we have to believe we are participating in a very big drama. And we have to be thoughtful

"Our task ... is to announce redemption to the world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to the world that has discovered its brokenness, to proclaim love and trust to the world that knows only exploitation, fear, and suspicion."

N.T. Wright

New Testament Scholar, in
The Challenge of Jesus

about our plans; we too have to be smart and savvy, innovative and courageous. And then we have to run right at the challenge.

Can a university change the world? *2014: A Blueprint for Excellence* is our answer.

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