



A U C E A Inc.

## **The 2007 AUCEA Inc National Conference Proceedings**

### ***The Scholarship of Community Engagement: Australia's way forward***

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## Introduction to the 2007 Conference Proceedings

The 2007 AUCEA Inc National Conference Proceedings is a refereed publication of the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance Inc, a not for profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the engagement capabilities of staff and universities by developing expertise, fostering collaboration and building their communities across Australia.

All papers have been double-blind refereed by a panel of national and international experts in the field of university-community engagement and higher education.

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## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual AUCEA Conference

### Preface to Conference Proceedings

**Linda Cuttriss, Conference Convenor, Charles Darwin University.**

The *Scholarship of Community Engagement: Australia's way forward* was the theme of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual AUCEA Conference hosted by Charles Darwin University at its Alice Springs Campus, July 2-4, 2007. The Conference brought together over 130 delegates from 35 universities and nine community and government organisations and included representatives from every Australian state and mainland territory as well as the United States, South Africa and New Zealand.

The Conference marked a turning point for university-community engagement in Australia. The 2007 Conference theme challenged speakers and delegates to venture beyond sharing good news stories, to reflect upon what is driving university-community engagement, how universities are responding at the institutional level and what is working in practice at the grass roots level.

Papers in the 'Policy Context' sub-theme explored the links between scholarship and place, policy and practice and education and public good. Policy Context keynote Dr. Sherril Gelmon (Portland State University, U.S.A.) reinforced that, "Staff and community partners should be encouraged to share the results of their individual and collective learning early and often, using community-based collaborative research strategies, in order to help to advance the scholarship of engagement in Australia".

The 'Institutional Responses' sub-theme revealed a range of institutional structures, processes and approaches rather than a 'one-size fits all' recipe for strengthening community engagement. Dr. Barbara Holland (PVC Office of Community Engagement, University of Western Sydney) moderated the Institutional Responses Panel and concluded that, "The "Way Forward" modelled by the universities is to develop an intentional engagement agenda that aligns each university's strengths with specific goals and needs of its community context".

The 'Perspectives on Practice' sub-theme included a diverse spectrum of engaged teaching, learning and research in health, teacher education, creative arts, the environment and community service as well as perspectives on Indigenous engagement, access and pathways, mentor programs and partnerships with community groups, local government and regional organisations. The Conference coincided with the announcement of interventions for the Northern Territory Emergency Response to protecting Aboriginal Children. 'Perspectives on Practice' keynote Dr. Mark Rose (Director, Indigenous Education Centre, University of Melbourne), commented that, "The Conference is so timely given the 'Emergency Response' ....[and that] ...community engagement by universities is definitely part of the solution".

University-community engagement is fundamental to Australia's future; it enriches student learning and enhances the social, economic and environmental well-being of communities and regions. The Conference was a powerful reminder that continuous scholarly inquiry about university engagement theory and practice is critical to Australia's way forward. The 2007 AUCEA Conference Proceedings and e-journal articles provide a wealth of ideas, approaches and experiences that I hope will inspire and motivate others to build and strengthen the scholarship of engagement in Australia.

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## **Action research in action: a partnership approach**

**Tricia Munn**

University of South Australia

**Abstract:** Centacare Port Pirie Diocese is the largest provider of human services in rural South Australia and has a geographical spread incorporating some 91.6% of the state. With the Commonwealth's release of three new funding initiatives in late 2006 aimed at providing suicide prevention community based initiatives, a family relationship centre and early intervention services, Centacare explored ways of providing an innovative service delivery model which would meet the needs of the community. To this end, the funding proposals for the new programs included a partnership between Centacare and the Centre for Rural health and Community Development (CRHaCD) through the Social Work and Rural Practice Unit at UniSA's Centre for Regional Engagement whereby the Unit would assist the organisation to further develop their program evaluation strategies. The funding submissions were all successful.

The model has a strong participatory action research focus in the design and implementation of service delivery processes and outcomes. This is to assure ongoing continuous improvement in meeting client and community needs, and the objectives of the service agreements. Action research believes that the needs of individuals should be determined through consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders, community of interest groups and community members (Hart & Bond, 1995, Farrin 2001 cited in Munn 2005). Thus key stakeholders will be closely involved and consulted at every stage. Whilst the funding agreement focuses on the CRE using participatory action research to evaluate and improve the services offered by Centacare, the same approach will also be used in exploring the relationship which has developed between the two organisations, the processes involved, the lessons learnt and how universities might engage more meaningfully with community service providers.

### **Introduction**

The Centre for Regional Engagement at Whyalla has been given the mandate by UniSA to lead the university's commitment to strengthen its education, research and community links with regional SA. This has been discussed in previous papers (Munn 2005, Munn and Pullin 2006). Over the past four years, the CRE has worked collaboratively with human service organisations in the region, at times assisting them with management and training needs, policy development, funding applications and so on. This paper explores a new partnership agreement between the university and Centacare Port Pirie Diocese as a result of two successful funding applications. Whilst the two new projects are still in their infancy this paper using action research principles, explores the relationship which has developed between the two organisations, the processes involved, the lessons learnt and how universities might engage more meaningfully with community service providers.

### **The university's role in community**

In recent years there have been significant changes to what was traditionally seen as the core business of the university. Boyer (1996 in Munn and Pullin 2006))

advocates for universities to have a greater involvement in communities by developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships. From Boyer's perspective (1996), the scholarship of engagement connects a university's resources to areas of community need at one level, and on another level it creates a climate of continuous and creative communication between the academic and the civic culture. While Boyer (1996) argues that the scholarship of engagement will enrich the quality of human life, the challenge for both universities' and the broader community is how they can achieve the potential mutual benefits that can arise from such relationships.

In regional areas there is often a shortage of experienced professionals. Universities can help address this by partnering relevant organisations providing them with knowledge and expertise thus assisting them to meet their objectives (Cumpston, Blakers, Evans, Maclachlan, and Karmel 2001)). The same authors state that whilst a number of higher education institutions have research centres involved in sustainable development agenda few of these focus on 'engaging with the region that they are located in to achieve sustainable regional development objectives'. The partnership between the CRE and Centacare is an example of how this might be done.

### **Service provision**

The direct provision of community services is predominantly through not-for-profit organisations. In the 1990's, there was a move from the grants based funding model to the competitive tendering model as part of the government's economic reform agenda. This change in the focus of funding had some significant consequences for the rural community sector. Under the competition model, the government becomes the purchaser of services and the organisation the provider. With the emphasis on outsourcing and economic rationalism, human service agencies faced major changes to their funding arrangements. According to Taylor (1999) this put enormous strain onto rural community organisations. The time taken to research and complete a tender document can be considerable, time which is unfunded and takes service providers away from providing services.

In order to achieve on-going funding non government organisations are expected to be efficient, effective and accountable for the way in which their services are offered and are expected to deliver outcomes and outputs hence the need for appropriate program evaluation.

Centacare Port Pirie Diocese is the largest provider of human services in rural South Australia and has a geographical spread incorporating some 91.6% of the state. With the Commonwealth's release of three new funding initiatives in late 2006 aimed at providing suicide prevention community based initiatives, a family relationship centre and early intervention services, Centacare explored ways of providing an innovative service delivery model which would meet the needs of the community. To this end, the funding proposals for the new programs included a partnership between Centacare and the Centre for Rural health and Community Development (CRHaCD) through the Social Work and Rural Practice Unit at UniSA's Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE) whereby the Unit would assist the organisation to further develop their program evaluation strategies. The funding submissions were all successful.

### **Action research**

The evaluation model has a strong participatory action research focus in the design and implementation of service delivery processes and outcomes. This is to assure

ongoing continuous improvement in meeting client and community needs, and the objectives of the service agreements. Action research believes that the needs of individuals should be determined through consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders, community of interest groups and community members (Hart & Bond, 1995, Farrin 2001). Thus key stakeholders will be closely involved and consulted at every stage.

Dick (2002, p1) provides the following definition:

Action research is a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time. The understanding allows more informed change and at the same time is informed by that change. People affected by the change are usually involved in the action research. This allows the understanding to be widely shared and the change to be pursued with commitment.

Stringer (1999) best describes the action research role of the university/Centacare partnership. In the first instance there is a need to 'look' thus building a picture and gathering information. When evaluating we define the objectives and the context and 'describe what all the participants are doing (educators, group members, managers etc.) have been doing' (p 43). The next step is 'think' which means reflecting on areas of success and any deficiencies, issues or problems, interpreting and explaining. The final step is we 'act'. 'In evaluation we judge the worth, effectiveness, appropriateness, and outcomes of those activities. We act to formulate solutions to any problems' (Stringer 1999: 18; 43-44;160).

### **Developing the partnership**

Due to the pre existing relationship a level of teamwork and trust existed. To continue to enhance this relationship it is important the research does not become the dominant factor at the expense of the relationship especially given that the university is effectively monitoring as well as evaluating the service delivery. It could be very easy to slip into a position of power where the university becomes the one 'yielding the stick' ensuring they are obeyed! This would not only be disrespectful but it would also damage the relationship and the research. It would also minimise the input of those offering the service, innovation would be lost as would the practice wisdom of the practitioners.

Titchen and Binnie (1993 p 858) 'devised the complementary roles of 'actor', in the form of a change agent/facilitator role, and 'researcher', both within a collaborative partnership'. This way of working was modified and fine tuned overtime to ensure the relationship continued to develop. Similarly, whilst the university and Centacare had a pre-existing relationship nonetheless it has been important to explore what the new partnership will 'look' like and how both organisations can work together to fulfil the Commonwealth's service agreement. Whilst there is a formal contract in place between the two organisations, operationalising the contract has been an important part of the process. Crucial to this has been the development of collaborative principles and evaluating these principles as to their effectiveness and reframing them as required thus utilising the 'spiral' process of action research. This has meant developing clear objectives, agreeing on roles and responsibilities, encouraging a sense of teamwork and trust, and being prepared to continually evaluate and adjust the partnership. It was recognised from the beginning the need for all stakeholders to be part of the evaluation of the programs including Centacare staff, the funding

body, community members and clients in order to maximise learning opportunities as well as service improvement.

Given the number of stakeholders it was accepted that some of the processes needed to be formalised particularly in terms of key responsibilities. It was therefore agreed the key activities of the project would be monitored by the University of South Australia to ensure they are implemented as intended. Feedback will be reported to the project manager, advisory committee and funding body through the required reporting mechanisms and appropriate actions taken to enhance the performance of this project. The university has a role not just in providing feedback but also suggestions as to how the service can be improved.

In their project Titchen and Binnie (1993) developed a number of strategies. These included encouraging innovation and facilitating change by helping the practitioners to research their own practice. They also facilitated professional education and reflective practice and together the team generated and tested theory. These strategies are similar to those developed by the university and Centacare. Both of the services are very new, the first ones opened their doors nationally in mid 2006 hence there is little research as to the efficacy of the services. Together Centacare management and practitioners in partnership with the university hope to develop a body of knowledge which is based upon the action research principles so that like the partnership, the service delivery will develop according to best practice principles.

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# **Benchmarking leadership in university-community engagement: First steps and future directions for a new regional university campus**

**Peter Hudson, Robert Craig and Sue Hudson**

Queensland University of Technology

## **Abstract**

There are more than 160 university campuses in Australia and about one third of these are located in regional areas (Garlick & Waterman, 2005). Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Caboolture has received federal funding to develop its new campus. This federal support confirms national agenda priorities (e.g., see Cox & Seifer, 2005). University-community engagement is also a high national priority; however gauging the progress of university-community collaboration requires some form of measurement. Many educators have advocated benchmarking as a means for measuring successful practices. Although Garlick (2003) argues that benchmarking must "...begin with an extensive consultation program" (p. 5) and, indeed, university and community consultation needs to be part of the benchmarking process, and commencing without effective leadership such goals may not be realised. Effective university leaders can establish the foundations for consultation, yet, they too must be guided by university policies and guidelines. Apart from articulating visionary directions and understanding these change processes, leadership for initiating university-community engagement also involves motivating potential key stakeholders, promoting collaboration and team effort, distributing leadership, and communicating clear commitments to educational development (Hudson, Hudson, & Craig, 2006).

Benchmarking leadership in university-community engagement would require matching policies and agendas to resources and activities. The effectiveness of leadership must be considered as a key element towards initiating community engagement and may be benchmarked in terms of activity frequency and intensity. Evaluation of the extent of policy implementation, leadership activities that have initiated university-community engagement, the degree to which community and university needs have been addressed, and the extent of community participation in programs (i.e., duration and numbers of participants) may also aid the benchmarking process, and assist in determining future directions. Any evaluation for establishing and advancing university-community engagement must be conducted with key stakeholders. Other benchmarks may include involvement of disadvantaged groups, the extent of human and technological resources, community engagement with educational programs, university-community innovations, and determining levels of commitment from community members, university staff and its students. Benchmarking needs to be ongoing for continuous improvement of university-community organisational structures and practices. Furthermore, benchmarking can be used to determine the growth of partnerships and associated activities over time.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Books R 4 Babies 2: The 'Lapsit' Project**

**Alexandra Diamond, Jeff Meiners, Wendy Schiller, Julie Kalms**

University of South Australia

### **Abstract**

This paper reports on the 2006 'Lapsit' project, an innovative community partnership program with library teams from the Cities of Salisbury and Playford working with staff and students of the University of South Australia (UniSA) early childhood program. Lessons learned during the 'Lapsit' project are addressed from the perspectives of student teachers, site staff, parents, children, library partners and university practitioners. 'Lapsit' was recognised by a 2006 National Investment in the Early Years award for "outstanding achievement in supporting parents and caregivers to maximise the development and wellbeing of young children", and a 2007 UniSA Chancellor's Award for Community Engagement.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Career development in nursing: An integrated and longitudinal community engagement program**

**Cobie J. Rudd, Christopher Churchouse and Amanda Swift**

Edith Cowan University

### **Abstract:**

University-community engagement is critical in preparing the health workforce. Through integrated and strategic community engagement programs, the career development of nurses can be better designed and supported. This paper reports on three initiatives that integrate teaching and learning and community engagement at specific critical milestones in the continuum of career development for nurses.

First, in partnership with the State Government, an Early Career Development Program that cultivates and measures Year 10 secondary school students' interest in nursing as a career option was created. An Aboriginal Student Early Career Development Program is also being established. Second, a series of formalised longitudinal clinical partnership programs across sectors was established and nurtured to offer undergraduate nursing students the opportunity to undertake all their practical placements in one setting. Third, a linked partnership with the State Government allows students at the mid-point in their three year undergraduate course, to undertake an additional module and obtain eligibility to register as an Enrolled Nurse. All initiatives are aimed to help bridge the transition from student to work-ready graduates and nurse leaders.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# ***Classmates* as community engagement: A way forward for teacher preparation?**

**Tania Ferfolja**

University of Western Sydney

## ***Abstract***

*Classmates* is a collaborative initiative between the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET), South Western Sydney Region. Beginning in 2006, the initiative seeks to prepare pre-service teachers to work in challenging high schools in disadvantaged communities. Schools in these communities frequently experience: chronic staff turn-over particularly amongst beginning and early career teachers; teacher shortages; and a disproportionately large number of beginning teachers. These factors impact on institutional knowledge, teaching quality, morale, staff stability, and a lack of suitable mentors.

Teacher education has an obligation to develop program strategies to meet the diverse needs of these communities. Engaging with community enables university faculties to specifically prepare graduates to work in difficult contexts by building their cultural and social capital. *Classmates* does this, aiming to produce graduates who: are equipped and willing to teach in difficult contexts; have resilience and confidence to work in such schools; and possess solid pedagogical skills. It seeks to reduce beginning teacher culture shock and to enhance participants' professional networks across the educational community, with the aim of promoting early-career teacher retention. This paper explores some of the advantages of the *Classmates* initiative, particularly in relation to its dedicated protracted professional experience component in schools in disadvantaged communities.

## **Introduction**

*Classmates* is a collaborative initiative between the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET), South Western Sydney Region. *Classmates* which began in 2006, aims to prepare pre-service teachers to work in disadvantaged and challenging schools, which are often characterized by chronic staff turn-over particularly amongst beginning and early career teachers. Through its community engagement focus, and building of social and cultural capital, *Classmates* seeks to produce graduates who: are equipped and willing to teach in difficult schools; have resilience and confidence; are culturally oriented; and possess solid pedagogical skills. Additionally, *Classmates* builds participants' professional networks in the endeavour to build community and retain early career teachers.

Australia is experiencing an ever increasing neo-liberal environment where tertiary education has been reduced to the industrial model which demands economic rationalist "efficiencies" and "stream-lining" of courses. Such rationalization often dictates a one-size-fits-all model to teacher education and arguably produces beginning teachers who are prepared for 'standard' or 'regular' schools. However, these new teachers may not be adequately prepared for schools in disadvantaged communities, where various social issues often result in educational disengagement (Thomson, 2003). The social, cultural and economic capital of students may not reflect teachers' resulting in a clash of values and expectations, exacerbating

discipline issues (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Additionally, the retraction of important social and public services means that, in some disadvantaged localities, care in the community has been largely left up to schools. Such complex issues contribute to an educational framework in which teachers have less time to teach, experiencing guilt and frustration at their inability to effectively cover required material (Thomson, 2003). They may also find themselves addressing a host of welfare issues that seem to be particular to disadvantaged as opposed to 'regular' contexts (Thomson, 2003).

### **Issues of beginning teachers**

The demands of challenging schools mean they frequently demonstrate high staff turn-over and high concentrations of beginning teachers, who are most frequently placed in disadvantaged regions (Berry, 2004; Vinson, 2002). Teacher turn-over and disproportionate numbers of inexperienced teachers can negatively impact a range of issues such as: the building of professional and institutional knowledge; the quality of teaching in the school; the mentoring capabilities of available staff; staff morale; and school stability (Vinson, 2002). Additionally, the correlation between well qualified, experienced and committed teachers and student achievement has also been well-documented (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rockoff, 2003).

It is in the interests of public education to develop teacher education programs that not only skill graduates for 'regular' schools, but adequately prepare them for the challenges encountered in demanding contexts. With the increasing differences in social dis/advantage and the residualisation of schools, it is timely to construct teacher-education programs that focus on the development of effective pre-service teachers for disadvantaged schools. Despite the enthusiasm exhibited by many beginning teachers, there is research to suggest that they will only remain in challenging environments if their initial preparation reflects the complexities of the contexts they enter, if they have sufficient knowledge and skills to help all students learn, and if expert teachers serve as leaders and mentors (Cooper & Carpenter, 2003; Martinez, 2003). Similarities between student, community and teacher habitus and capital may potentially contribute to smoother interpersonal and professional relationships and understandings (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Moreover, beginning teacher retention may be further enhanced through the early development of teacher professional identity (McCormack, Gore & Thomas 2006).

Although a recent initiative, *Classmates* seeks to prepare pre-service teachers with skills and experiences to negotiate the various demands that arise in disadvantaged and challenging schools through greater community engagement. This paper reports on the evaluation conducted at the end of its inception year. This involved interviews with the fourteen graduating *Classmates* pre-service teachers, supervising teachers, principals and academics involved in the initiative. Drawing on the interviews with the pre-service teachers, it illustrates that the program develops new teachers who are personally and professionally confident in their abilities to operate effectively in demanding contexts. This paper briefly reviews some of these strengths, but focuses mainly on the benefits of the protracted professional experience.

### **Classmates in brief**

In 2006, a small group of pre-service teacher education students in the Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary) who were preparing to teach single-method English, maths and science, participated in a pilot of the *Classmates* initiative. These pre-service

teachers were hosted in one of five South Western Sydney DET schools for two of their professional experience components. *Classmates* undertook professional experience three days per week, from early March and until the end of June. In school term three they undertook their third professional experience within one of the *Classmates* schools which heavily focused on working with the *Classmates* schools' communities.

As the initiative is also part of the regular teacher education degree, *Classmates* pre-service teachers underwent normal university instruction in a variety of modes including intensives, day and evening lectures/tutorials, and weekend workshops. A reciprocal teaching/learning strategy was employed where DET-teaching staff were invited to attend UWS-led *Classmates* workshops. *Classmates* pre-service teachers attended particular DET seminars for beginning and early-career teachers organized within the region. They also participated in a series of co-counseling workshops aimed at developing peer support strategies. These pre-service teachers were closely supported by the author who is also the UWS *Classmates* coordinator, and by a DET senior education officer, Mrs Lynda Pinnington-Wilson.

### **Benefits of an extended practicum in one school**

A key benefit of the *Classmates* initiative is the structure of professional experience which lasts approximately four months. Traditional practicum most frequently give pre-service teachers 'tasters' of at least two schools; *Classmates* however, focuses on a deeper and more protracted experience in the one key context. This enables pre-service teachers the time to be exposed to, and to undertake, the full range of professional duties, ranging from curriculum programming, planning and delivery; examination construction and assessment and report writing; through to parent/community interactions and events and extra-curricular activities, such as art shows and school camps. This protracted practicum enables the pre-service teachers to become, in effect, 'part of the furniture' which has numerous advantages.

One advantage is that the *Classmates* pre-service teachers have adequate time within a supportive environment to trial new pedagogical and classroom management strategies. Importantly, there is opportunity to learn about their students' backgrounds and needs, as well as the space to form meaningful professional teacher-student relationships. *Classmates* students have time to conceive of teaching as more than the transmission of knowledge, but more importantly, to recognize that it is about understanding individual children and their communities. Pre-service teacher education is about more than filling a box with teaching tricks through the imitation of one's supervisor. It involves a complex interactivity and reflexivity, and ideally the building of one's cultural capital with the students. As one *Classmates* pre-service teacher commented in the interview:

[It] gave us a really good insight into the styles of learning... just learning about the backgrounds of these students, how they learn, you know implementing different reading, writing and listening strategies and engaging the students' visuals was like my golden ticket. ... And just motivating the students through visuals, through engaging texts, through interacting with them outside as well as inside the classroom, like playing footy with the boys. I would play cards with the boys often and that really won them over, that gave me a lot of credit with them, so yeah, outside as well as inside.

*Classmates* pre-service teachers assumed a teacher identity while they were still on practicum – that is, while they were still *students*. This provided them with a marked confidence about their abilities and feelings that they could teach anywhere. The

intensity of their professional experience and the need to develop, build and refine a range of teaching skills and relationships relatively quickly meant *Classmates* pre-service teachers felt well-prepared for the challenges ahead. Interviewed for a media release part way into their professional experience, one female *Classmates* student stated:

I feel like a first-year teacher who is already comfortable in the teaching environment. It has really boosted my professional and personal confidence levels and the students treat me differently as a result. ... Once you walk into the classroom – and you have the posture and confidence of a teacher – then you're on your way (cited in Vlaming, 2006, p. 37)

Moreover, the *Classmates* students' protracted engagement within the school meant students positioned them as authentic teachers, according them vital capital. This shift in perception changed the teaching/learning dynamic, enhancing the institutional power of the *Classmates* pre-service teachers, enabling them to conduct themselves as *teachers*.

Like every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday I was there, and the kids got used to my face and they started to interact with me like I wasn't a pre service teacher, you know, I became a part of the regular staff there.

This is an important achievement in teacher education. In teaching unlike other professions, an expectation exists that from the first day, one is well-equipped to cope with the load, diversities and dynamics of teaching (Manuel, 2003). There is no apprenticeship. There is no time to *become* a teacher; one just *is*. *Classmates*, however, develops this identity prior to full-time employment. One host school Principal claimed at the initiative's launch in May, 2006, two months after being placed in their schools, that the *Classmates* pre-service teachers were 'ready to work now' (his emphasis).

Crucially, the *Classmates* pre-service teachers not only expressed their enjoyment at attending their host school but moreover stated their willingness to be appointed to a challenging school in the future. One *Classmates* pre-service teacher, initially intent on working in the private sector, became committed to public education, accepting a position in a school in the region. Additionally, numerous *Classmates* pre-service teachers have been appointed block teaching loads in their professional experience schools, having overcome their initial articulated fears about these sites. Engaging pre-service teachers in disadvantaged school communities is highly advantageous. Graduates possess social and cultural capital, in that: they are knowledgeable about the school culture; they have contacts and support in the school and region; they have a working knowledge of the school routines; and they are familiar to the students and community.

The structure of *Classmates* enabled a close alignment of theory and practice. Being involved in professional experience while undertaking the course, meant that theoretical understandings were immediately applicable and easily trialed in practice. The importance of theory to practice cannot be understated. Wilkinson (2005) in her research examining school improvement in literacy outcomes found that theory was essential as both a frame and lens. The frame structured teachers' knowledge about pedagogy; the lens enabled teachers to analyze their professional implementations. In *Classmates*, there is a strong context for connections between theory and its application in comparison to modes of teacher education that use a more compartmentalized approach to academic work and practicum. It also allowed pre-service teachers the opportunity to reflect on their theory and practice, while immersed in the school community, rather than as a disconnected after-thought. As one *Classmates* pre-service teacher stated:

Doing the subjects alongside prac, you know, doing the theory with the practical ... builds up your pedagogy because you are learning as you go. And as you learn it you get to apply it in the classroom.

### Conclusion

There is still much to be researched about the *Classmates* initiative and formal evaluations and further research is currently underway. The long-term implications, particularly on early career teacher retention are still unknowable, although they will undoubtedly be researched. However, this model does say something about pre-service teacher preparation and the importance of engaging with community to build capital, particularly for challenging schools. It appears that this approach to teacher education certainly has merits and produces graduates who are prepared to confidently meet the demands they may face as beginning teachers in such contexts.

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## **Community engagement: A partnership approach to measurement, evaluation and benchmarking processes**

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### **Abstract:**

Partnerships and collaborations will inevitably evolve and change. Hence there must be a shared commitment from participants to ongoing, comprehensive evaluation and improvement and knowledge sharing. This paper does not differentiate partnerships as separate to the community engagement agenda because in both instances, partners need to jointly engage in initiatives, ensure alignment with the key messages of partners and their communities, and ultimately, stay together. At the same time, higher education institutions are progressively developing their community engagement strategies in the short to medium term cognisant of the policy context and funding allocation formulae.

Accordingly, this paper explores a number of challenges for the next couple of years, not the least being success in articulating clear directions, actions and net benefits that have partner ownership and are measurable from the outset and on a continuing basis. Measuring sustained community engagement will mean measuring salient points and practices throughout lengthy processes. As a result, there is a need for higher education institutions and their partners to develop planning, monitoring and evaluation frameworks and approaches, including benchmarks and benchmarking processes, in order to define what can be considered 'good practice' across a number of realms. As part of this, the focus of community engagement strategies around student participation will be critical. A highlight of forthcoming challenges will be establishing measurement processes that offer just as much to the learning process surrounding community engagement, as they gain from the assessment information.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Community engagement as a Cornerstone Enabling Learning and Teaching and research in the Post Modern World**

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University of Wollongong

**Sue Curtis** Ortan Consulting

### **Abstract**

This paper demonstrates how community engagement can provide a cornerstone enabling research and learning and teaching to meet the challenges of relativity and uncertainty in a post modern world. In the field of education, the question of relevance is a constant criticism. If relevance is to be achieved, research and learning and teaching need to be interwoven with community and community concerns, in ways that enhance the outcomes for all stakeholders. The paper examines an academic's university community engagement practice from a reflexive and cross disciplinary perspective. It seeks to identify the characteristics and qualities that define successful university community engagement practice while identifying

that there needs to be recognition and reward for universities to have more academics involved in such successful and sustainable university community engagement practice.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Community engagement enhancing creative arts education in a Primary School setting**

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University of Western Sydney

### **Abstract:**

Community engagement has been used for many years to enhance and strengthen teacher education courses, preparing student teachers with real life learning experiences as they work with community groups in mutually beneficial projects. Community engagement in this context was used to give future teacher-education students **experiences** to socialise them into the culture of the primary school and also give them the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of working in a primary school. The projects also aimed at helping them gain **knowledge** about teaching strategies, pedagogy, behaviour management and subject content within the creative arts. Throughout the unit, students were asked to **reflect** on various facets of being a teacher, through observation, research, practical experiences and talking with the teachers and children. This paper seeks to answer the question, 'What changes can occur through university students being involved in community engagement within the primary school situation?' To answer this question, it examines a community engagement project that involved 13 undergraduate creative arts students who were placed in a primary school to work on a variety of arts-based projects with a range of teachers and classes. The outcomes suggest that adding the fourth component of **change** to McCarthy's (2003) three basic, interdependent components of service learning of experience, reflection and knowledge could be considered.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# Community engagement: Innovation through Higher Education Equity Support Projects

**Baden Offord and Rob Garbutt**

Southern Cross University

## **Abstract:**

Paulo Freire once remarked: "studying is above all thinking about experience, and thinking about experience is the best way to think accurately." This approach to pedagogy has been the basis of innovative community engagements by Southern Cross University. Through Higher Education Equity funding, a series of five projects have been designed and delivered that have brought the pedagogy of Cultural Studies into an active relationship with the community. These projects have cohered around the idea of engaged citizenship and participation as key learning objectives. This paper reports and reflects on the capacity of such projects to transform the experience of learning for students, educators and the wider community. In the paper we specifically consider two of these projects: *Out of the Spotlight: Disability in Regional Australia*, and *Interrogating Whiteness*, which brought the community and university into a mutually valuable, risky and provocative experience of learning.

## **Introduction**

This paper examines the scholarship of community engagement through the innovative and successful development of Higher Education Equity Support Projects (HEESP) at Southern Cross University (SCU), a small regional university in northern New South Wales. Through the Cultural Studies program, which is offered in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, these projects have been part of a specific and sustained effort to make community engagement a key teaching and research dimension.

In the following discussion, we explore how two HEESP projects provide examples of community engagement characterised by a concern for ethical understanding and engaged citizenship. First, we introduce the pedagogical framework from which these projects were initiated. This framework is encapsulated in Paulo Freire's remark that 'studying is above all thinking about experience, and thinking about experience is the best way to think accurately' (1985: 3). Second, we outline the purpose of Higher Education Equity Support Projects. These seeding projects have become increasingly important in ensuring the capacity of regional universities to actively address equity and access issues. Finally we report on two of these projects: *Out of the Spotlight* and *Interrogating Whiteness*. We argue that these two projects are examples of the scholarship of community engagement *in action*.

## **The scholarship of community engagement and Cultural Studies**

Cultural Studies arose out of the traditional humanities as a critical, interdisciplinary enquiry into the human condition. Underpinning Cultural Studies' pedagogy is a focus on creating an intellectual space in which a critical enquiry into the human condition may be undertaken with specific reference to power relations, identity and the forces that bear upon belonging in or being excluded from society. This enquiry is an ethical

intervention which according to Nick Couldry (2000: 1) is ‘an expanding space for sustained, rigorous and self-reflexive empirical research into the massive power-laden complexity of contemporary culture’. In this space, the cultural forms through which we are addressed—the most pertinent here being an address in terms of “race” or “ability”—are refused or at least questioned (Couldry, 2000: 4).

Such issues of cultural diversity, human rights and social justice have become vital themes in the Cultural Studies scholarship that has developed at Southern Cross University. This focus demands a critical and transformative pedagogy that ethically intervenes in the construction of monolithic understandings of identity in Australia. Our teaching is, therefore, contingent on how well we are able to examine and interrogate the ‘unfinished... project’ of Australia (Hage 2003: 350). Community engagement, then, is a key element of this pedagogy, for it is outside the university in the communities that constitute the nation that the Australian “project” is in-process.

### **Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education and Community Engagement**

As we have conceived it above, the pedagogy of Cultural Studies is one which encourages engaged citizenship and participation in civil society. These precepts do not only guide student learning, but necessarily involve all in the roles of student, teacher and researcher in a creative triangular relationship (Usher and Bryant, 1989). At the core of this relationship are issues of participation and engagement, and it is in these two words that ideas of equity and community engagement overlap.

Community engagement has its basis in the role universities play in the development of civil society (Langworthy: 1). Key outcomes of this engagement can include such benefits as the development of social capital and community well-being, and collaboratively-initiated social change (Wallis, 2006:3). Meanwhile, the issue of equality of opportunity has also developed within and outside universities as a result of communities’ desires for a fair and just civil society. With regard to universities, it is equity of access to and participation in education that are key aims which direct the Federal Government’s equity strategy and funding (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006: 1).

There is, then, a particular confluence of concerns and objectives between the Cultural Studies pedagogy of engaged citizenship, the idea of community engagement, and the promotion of equality of opportunity in higher education. At Southern Cross University this confluence of concerns has stimulated a series of collaborative learning projects regarding issues of access and participation, each of which involve students, researchers and their various communities. By their very nature, these projects have fallen within the funding guidelines of the Commonwealth Government’s Higher Education Equity Support Program. This has enabled the creation of a series of trans-disciplinary, extra- and co-curricular learning environments (AUCEA, 2006: paragraphs 7 & 9) for university-community engagement that also enhance equality of opportunity in higher education.

The Higher Education Equity Support Program is funded by the Commonwealth Government with the ‘aim to assist with overcoming barriers to access and participation in higher education’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006: 1). The HEESP targets students from low socio-economic or low income backgrounds, students from rural and isolated areas, students with disability, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and ‘educational disadvantage associated with gender’ (2).

Each year HEESP grants are made to providers of higher education. Individuals or groups within the educational institution may then apply to have projects funded. Successful project funding applications will meet both the Commonwealth's HEESP guidelines and satisfy the institution's equity strategy and plan. The Commonwealth's Guidelines focus on disadvantaged students and 'encourage sustainable improvements in *access, participation, retention* and *success* of higher education for those students' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006: 3).

HEESP projects vary widely and some universities provide examples of projects which have received funding (for example see: Curtin University, n.d.). This paper focuses on two projects at Southern Cross University aimed at encouraging students to participate in civil society as engaged citizens and to actively challenge inequalities and practices of social exclusion. By pursuing this pedagogical aim, the aims of HEESP were also satisfied. For example, a commitment to access to higher education by disadvantaged community members can be publicly demonstrated through projects which involve the wider community with regard to issues of disadvantage. Through the empowerment of students who experience disadvantage and social exclusion, and by engaging the university community in projects which highlight issues of equity and exclusion, the aims of encouraging sustainable improvements in participation, retention and success can be achieved. Simultaneously by engaging with local communities projects can be grounded in "real-world" concerns, providing opportunities for a two-way model of engagement between the university and its communities (Wallis, 2006: 2).

### **Out of the Spotlight: Citizenship and participation of people with disability in regional and rural areas**

The first HEESP project that we report on is *Out of the Spotlight*, a project that focused on disability in regional Australia. The idea for the project arose from conversations in the Cultural Studies undergraduate unit *Unruly Subjects: Citizenship*, which focuses specifically on the theory that contemporary forms of citizenship are based on exclusion (see Lister, 1997). Inspired by a concern for how people with disability are often and systematically excluded from full participation in society, a group of Cultural Studies academics lead by Baden Offord conceived of a project to address this important issue. Consequently, a strong relationship between the Disability Studies and Research Institute (DSaRI) and SCU was developed through the organisation and delivery in 2005 of the conference *Out of the Spotlight: Citizenship and participation of people with disability in regional and rural areas*. The project was crucially informed and guided by DSaRI Senior Researcher Sally Robinson and academics Gerrard Goggin and Christopher Newell who provided scholarly oversight of the conference aims giving specific care to the community engagement imperative. Rob Garbutt played a key role in organising the entire project and bringing the University and community together. An organising committee, which provided overall guidance included three SCU students, one of whom was a student with disability and another who worked in a disability service. These students provided key input into the conference organisation and the social event.

A primary goal of this project was to draw together people with disability, students, and academics, around issues of active engagement and participation of people with disability in rural and regional areas. A social evening preceding the conference drew sixty people including students, academics and people with disability from SCU, other universities and the community. This event included performances from students and community members, local short films, as well as refreshments and a

light supper. The conference, which was held the following day, was attended by 137 people, including students, academics, people with disability from the community, and disability service workers. Over forty local, regional, state and national organisations were represented. A significant number of participants with disability attended. Forty-two students attended, plus about nineteen academics, with the remainder—the majority—being from the community. The conference proceedings were produced in the form of two DVDs.

Access and participation were key principles for the conference design which included a combination of structured presentations and opportunities to workshop concepts and understandings of citizenship and full participation in society. The inclusion of a “soapbox” session consisting of nine five-minute speaking spots with five minutes each for discussion made the conference more accessible to community members with a particular point of view they wished to put. A story-telling session provided an extra point of access. Travel and accommodation scholarships were offered to external students and students with specific needs. Nineteen academics/activists and seven students presented papers on issues of active engagement and participation of people with disability in rural and regional areas. The conference was, as one respondent remarked, a ‘[g]reat opportunity to hear from range of people on rural/remote issues—the mix of people was wonderful, and the great conversations and papers on experiences and new work’.

### ***Interrogating Whiteness***

The *Interrogating Whiteness* project in 2006 was again guided by a view that students are active members of a democratic civil society, and that a key role of the university is to provide learning experiences which interrogate the forms of citizenship and society to which individuals and groups aspire. Critical race and whiteness studies (see Schech and Wadham, 2004 for recent Australian approaches) provides a framework for pursuing these principles with regard to the ongoing effects of “race” thinking. With such principles in mind, and for *Interrogating Whiteness* to be a productive learning experience, a trans-disciplinary approach that was grounded by community participation and involvement was pursued.

The project began in 2005 as a concept by Shelagh Morgan from Southern Cross University’s (SCU) Next Art Gallery to explore whiteness in a cross-disciplinary research project. The concept was developed into a HEESP project proposal which aimed to focus on whiteness in regional Australia and on developing an engaged learning and equity culture for students. This proposal outlined a series of free ‘roundtable discussions’ between academics, students and artists with a view to producing written works and visual art exhibitions.

In 2006 a coordinator and project team from areas across the university including Gnibi (SCU’s Indigenous College), Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Cultural Studies and Social Science began working the project concept into reality. The team re-conceptualised the pedagogical framework of roundtables into a series of interlinked workshops and exhibitions. The guiding principle was an intention to utilize the expertise existing within the university to create an opening workshop where the ongoing agenda was set by the participants. This reworking of the initial concept emerges from Freire’s (2000) ideas of adult learning where all participants (including ‘experts’) are both learners *and* community members with concerns that form the basis for transforming oppressive social practices. Places were also set aside to ensure community involvement was built into the workshop and exhibition process.

The project opened with a public exhibition. The exhibition aimed at stimulating discussion for the first workshop where that discussion was furthered and formed into a set of concerns and hopes to guide subsequent events. Around forty students, staff and non-university community members participated in this first workshop which included displays of artwork, performances, large group discussion and small group work. The key concern identified at this workshop was a desire for deeper learning about how whiteness operates in individuals' lives and in Australian society.

Issues raised in the first workshop were translated into three interconnected learning experiences: a free public lecture on whiteness by Indigenous academic Lillian Holt; a second workshop which included a plenary with Lillian and small group workshops; and the SCU Student Art prize exhibition that focused on the theme 'What does it mean to be white?' The public lecture brought two hundred people onto the campus from high school students to Bundjalung Elders, and a DVD was produced for distribution to libraries. The follow-up workshop was attended by fifty students, staff and community members. This was an intense learning experience for all. The key concern arising was how to take this consciousness of the everyday operations of "race" thinking and channel it into actions that transform ourselves and our communities.

This complex task of transformation was the organising idea of the third and final workshop which drew on the expertise that the workshop organisers were developing, and on the knowledge and experiences participants brought with them. The workshop closed with the opening of the final public exhibition, *A Stammer in the Language*, together with the launch of the project publication of the same name (Next Art Gallery, 2006). This publication has since been distributed to all regional high school libraries. Next Art Gallery also supports an *Interrogating Whiteness* website that lives on beyond the life of the project.

In general terms, the impact of the project may be gauged by the number of participants involved, conservatively over 350, whether through the workshops (100 participants), exhibitions, the inclusion of "whiteness" in the university curriculum through Writing, Cultural Studies and Visual Arts units, or the public lecture. The workshops were always well subscribed with 25 people completing the series of three. Similarly, such was the level of engagement that there was no shortage of work submitted for the four project exhibitions.

Feedback demonstrates that those participating formed a community of learners who were united around their concerns regarding racism in Australia and in their local towns. The practical orientation towards active citizenship ensured the theory examined in each project event did not become bogged in, as one participant described it, 'academic blah blah'. Rather the direction of workshops was towards profound learning and next steps, which included new ideas for thinking through issues, practical responses to everyday encounters with racism, and artistic expression in its toolkit.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have proposed a pedagogical and practical framework for university-community engagement, specifically regarding the intersecting issues of social exclusion from and active participation in a democratic society. The pedagogical framework derives from a Cultural Studies approach that situates the learner as an active member of society; a cultural practitioner who ethically intervenes by bringing

cultural theory and practice together. It is in this sense that Cultural Studies practice is *already* community engagement.

The practical framework for the two projects we have reported on here has been provided by Commonwealth HEESP funds. HEESP funding has enabled the creation of innovative learning environments that bring together students, staff and community members to inquire into the nature of, and conditions for, barriers to access and full participation in civil society. A key concern of these projects has been access and participation in higher education, though never losing sight of the fact that broader issues of access and participation significantly impact on this area of focus.

Community engagement, as we conceive it from a Cultural Studies perspective, is vital for engendering cultural self-awareness and an ethical understanding of society. It is an engagement which in itself is an ethical intervention, and to be effective is necessarily two-way—a fundamental nexus between the University and community.

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# Community Engagement through a model of Virtual Work-integrated Learning

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## Abstract:

Vibrant, relevant and enduring community engagement is a common goal for Australian universities and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has held a long-term commitment to the wider community, building a reputation as a university for the 'real world'. However, there is awareness within the university sector that in order to be relevant community engagement needs to be continuously renewed. Also, there is a growing willingness within the business community to build social responsibility. Increasing pro-bono work within the legal profession is an example of this movement.

To satisfy changing community and student learning needs, the QUT Faculty of Law is developing a virtual model of work-integrated learning to renew and strengthen partnerships with the wider community. The virtual work-integrated learning model will enable students to assist the legal and business community with these endeavours while enhancing their learning experience. The model will thereby balance the needs of community partners and also engage student learners. The virtual platform proposed will enable students to engage meaningfully with local, national and international community partners. This model should successfully embed QUT's core business of teaching and learning within a community engagement framework. The model is to be introduced into the curriculum in Semester 2, 2008 and will be evaluated and reviewed from both the university and the community perspectives from Semester 1, 2009.

The theory and literature of the fields of 'work-integrated learning' and 'community engagement' and the interaction between the fields of 'work-integrated learning' and 'community engagement' are analysed. The university context will be examined along with the need to balance student learning objectives and community needs. The paper proposes a 'virtual' model of WIL that is being designed to meet the rapidly changing nature of the modern workplace and twenty-first century student learning preferences.

## Introduction

In the Australian university context, the emphasis upon community activities has recently evolved from one-way 'community service' to two-way 'community engagement'. The current focus is now directed towards outcomes that are mutually beneficial for both the university and the wider community, a trend given national impetus through the work of the conference organisers, the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance.

It has recently been suggested that one measure of community engagement should include an assessment of the percentage of students undertaking a domestic or international workplace learning experience (Harding, 2006). Considerable university time and attention over the past twenty years has been devoted to the incremental development of graduate attributes to complement the

acquisition of professional knowledge in every field. There is growing recognition that authentic student learning involves students learning via their own 'active behaviour' and not just through 'what the teacher does' (Biggs, 2003). This emphasis centres on building students' skills and self awareness for future employment and has highlighted the desirability of work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences.

### **WIL as a form of Community Engagement**

The current emphasis on community engagement in the university sector focuses on developing enduring partnerships and collaborations with external organisations. It is taking a variety of forms, for example, knowledge transfer, the development of communities of interest and high impact community based programs. It has been asserted that these 'interactions enrich and expand the learning and discovery functions of the academic institution while also enhancing community capacity' (Holland, 2001). From the university perspective the engagement may be characterised as part of university core business of either teaching and learning or research. WIL programs clearly fall within such community engagement.

WIL provides a context for skills development and an opportunity for students to prepare for the transition from university to professional practice. Such experiences range from highly structured university controlled placements for academic credit, to informal situations where students volunteer to be part of a workplace outside of the formal university semester. The United States National Commission for Cooperative Learning defines cooperative education as:

...a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals...It is a partnership among students, educational institutions and employers, with specified responsibilities for each party (Groenewald, 2005, pp. 17-26).

Research into WIL programs has been summarised through literature reviews, attempted definitions and conceptual models in educational literature for many years (Dewey, 1938, Kolb, 1984, Boud, 2001, Dressler et al, 2005, Groenewald, 2005). However in this field, where educational practice is so affected by the pragmatic factors of the workplace, even theoretical models appear to be designed to be context specific. Overarching theory gives educators comfort in designing learning experiences as it ensures our practices are informed by research. However in this field, where theories of learning are only one of the many factors that impact on the success of the learning experience, they are arguably not as helpful (Van Gyn et al, 2005). This is particularly so where the proposed task requires the creation of a new type of work-integrated experience that is intended to operate in the digital environment and not in the physical workplace.

### **Student Learning Preferences and Current Workplace Technology**

The preference of the majority of today's students for communicating and learning via digital technology has been widely reported (Jonas-Dwyer et al, 2004 and Raines, 2002). Such an approach to communication also is closely aligned with many current workplace environments. The internet, and mobile technologies have transformed traditional methods of communication. At the same time these media have contributed to a surge of global initiatives in online learning and eLearning. Whilst many universities are now using digital

technologies for the flexible delivery of content, there are fewer examples of the effective use of technology to enable student centred and flexible learning (Radcliffe, 2002).

Given the transforming nature of workplaces and the radical changes in work practices in organisations, it is submitted that authentic WIL experiences can now be recreated in the virtual paradigm.

Similarly, given the wealth of current research documenting the changing nature of the way today's students learn and the competing demands on their time, it is submitted that work placement opportunities that enable flexible delivery and flexible learning also are a desirable addition to the traditional physical placement programs.

The virtual work placement model will provide flexibility in the learning experience, more effectively engaging today's students who are used to the constant connectivity provided by digital media (Oblinger, 2003). In taking into account what today's students value it is hoped that we can more effectively engage them with a view to positively influencing their learning experience, understanding and learning outcomes.

However, as more technology is not necessarily better, the model developed will endeavour to focus on the activity enabled by the technology (Oblinger et al, 2003) – rather than simply focusing on content delivery of knowledge through online packaged lectures and readings (McCombs et al, 2005).

### **The University Context**

The higher education sector in Australia has undergone a period of rapid change during the last decade through an altered funding model, new levels of competition between providers, an increasing emphasis on research quantity and quality and a larger, more diverse and demanding student population. In these changing times the strategies aimed at improving the quality of the educational experience for the new student body currently employed by Australian universities are both proactive and reactive in nature. A 2005 *Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)* survey noted general agreement that universities faced a dilemma involving

‘how best to balance mission (achieving the key purposes of the university) with market (giving students what they want in order to gain and retain them—even if this is specific, skills-focused job training)’ (Scott, 2005).

QUT is conversant with the need to balance mission and market and has utilised its strategic planning process to emphasise the importance of improving the student experience while strengthening ‘real world’ engagement. One of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategies is to ‘Strengthen the real-world focus of learning experiences through developing and strengthening active partnerships and collaborations within and beyond the University’ (QUT Learning and Teaching Plan 2005-2009). The beneficial learning experiences created through WIL have proven to be a positive factor in improving the student experience with research showing that ‘engagement in activities contribut[es] to enhanced academic outcomes’ (Furco, 2005).

The field of 'legal education' in Australia has also been affected by the wider university sector changes. A number of significant developments have occurred in the areas of 'legal' and 'generic' skills. For example, the Australian Law Reform Commission, in its major review of the Federal Civil Justice System (ALRC, 1999) recommended that legal education should be more concerned with "what lawyers need to be able to do" as distinct from the traditional approach, which has been centred around "what lawyers need to know".

### **The Proposed Virtual Model of Work-integrated Learning**

The aim of the Model is to provide an authentic and sustainable virtual workplace experience for undergraduate law students at QUT as an elective subject. It will be sufficiently flexible to be offered through either the standard semester or the summer program in students' final year of study.

The virtual workplace will operate from the Blackboard Learning Management System supplemented by the QUT ePortfolio program.

The following 8 step Model is being developed in collaboration with our community partners:

1. Students will apply for their work placement position by answering an advertisement in the virtual workplace newspaper.
2. Specific criteria will apply and students will need to prepare an eResumé outlining their experiences and demonstrated strengths and interests.
3. In response to their applications students will receive virtual letters of acceptance, which will allocate them to work teams and community partners on the basis of their expressed preferences. It is anticipated that the range of partners will extend across the spectrum of law firms, government, industry and community organisations. It is envisaged that at this point students also will be invited to participate in the community partner's virtual workplace, being granted a level of access to the organisation's intranet, online research tools, group emails, continuing education and professional development services. Throughout this period students also will be encouraged to develop team familiarity through an assessed interactive online exercise conducted on the QUT learning management system (LMS) platform.
4. After teams have been allocated to community partners, tasks will be set by workplace mentors in each organisation. Students will be asked to collaborate to prepare a plan of action to scope their approach to completing the task including a scoping, action plan, allocation of workloads and a timeline for completion.
5. Following submission of the group's plan of action, workplace mentors will provide feedback to the group highlighting practical considerations that may have been overlooked.
6. The major assessment item will then involve completion of the assigned task in groups. It is envisaged that given the range of employers, the nature of these tasks may include diverse activities for example research into legal problems, preparation of client briefings, memoranda of advice.
7. The workplace mentors will assess the project and give detailed feedback to the group on the strengths, weaknesses and practical utility of the work produced.

8. The final stage of the project will involve students being asked to revisit their original eResumés through the ePortfolio service to record and reflect upon their workplace experience.

## Conclusion

It has been asserted that the 'engaged university is seriously committed to interacting with its communities in a meaningful and mutually beneficial way' (Temple et al, 2005). QUT connections with the community historically have been strong: the current QUT Mission is 'to bring to the community the benefits of teaching, research, technology and service' (QUT Mission, 2005). This proposed model of virtual WIL is a practical example of this mission.

It already is clear that the only way model of virtual work integrated learning will prosper is through sustained and productive relationships between the university and the community partners (Reeve et al, 2007). New information and communication technologies are transforming the practices of both universities and workplaces and QUT law students, already comfortable with operating in 'virtual contexts', should easily adapt to rapidly changing digital work environments (Poole et al, 2005). The proposed model of online interactive communication is being designed to meet the needs of students and community partners. It will engage student learners in an authentic and rewarding learning experience with the "real world" of professional practice and contribute positively both to students and the community.

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# Community service: A case study at University of Western Sydney, Australia

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## Abstract

The University of Western Sydney has initiated a service learning elective for any undergraduate student in the College of Arts. The purpose of the unit is for the students to carry out projects that will be of substantial benefit to community agencies including cultural groups, primary schools and after school centres.

This paper highlights the development of the *Learning through Community Service* unit which is an innovative, flexible initiative that is organized into separate cohorts coordinated under the one unit title. There were three distinct stages in the development of the community service which has included:

- o organising the cohorts for the unit,
- o a unified, web-linked data base for connecting College of Arts staff and students with multiple community agencies; and,
- o planning for an evaluation study and other research based on the *Learning through Community Service* unit.

At present over 11 cohorts are developed that incorporate:

1. international student support, (for the UWS community);
2. creative arts/drama in community settings;
3. Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) with community groups;
4. community language school development;
5. mentoring to improve academic literacy, (for the UWS community);
6. mature-age buddies (improving retention at UWS);
7. video production – recording the international support program;
8. mentoring students in a beginning to school program;
9. retention and extension of community languages with bilingual children;
10. development of communication strategies and tactics for community groups in Western and South-western Sydney; and,
11. prior-to-school ICT support and development.

Each will be discussed and examples of the work undertaken will be given. The academic staff facilitate student learning through a defined pattern of on-line support. The goal of the academic staff is to help students learn by combining **reflection** with cohort academic content and community action.

The planning and implementation of the unit will be discussed examining the framework created to underpin the development of the service learning initially and its sustainability.

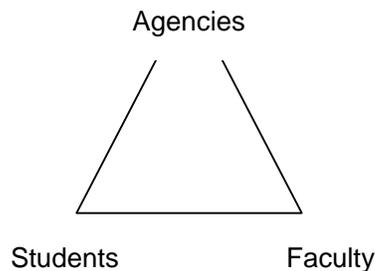
In addition the background of the three cohorts of students will be analysed focussing on the students' reasons for participation, the skills they developed over the semester and an in-depth evaluation of the structure and coordination of the unit.

## Introduction

The need for both community awareness and support is always required. With university students undertaking full time study and part time work there seems to be little time to undertake work with in the community in any form. By assisting the students to develop their theoretical knowledge gained in studies within a community setting has seen the development of a specific unit of study. Within this unit, students work in small teams with community groups in a wide range of areas. From this practical position students are encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge whilst helping other people.

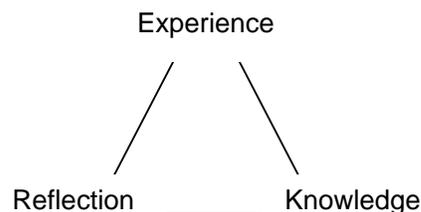
### Literature Discussion

The development of programs of study which includes the linking of the community with the growth of academic knowledge and skills for the university student is one which has benefits for both the university student and the community group. The service learning is accepted as being the 'linking of academic instruction with community service, guided by reflection' (McCarthy, 2006, p. 1).



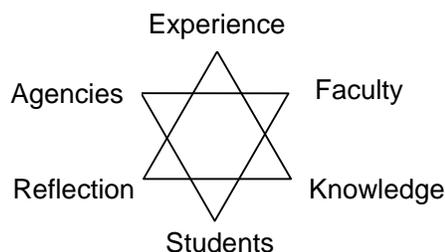
The link between the community and the university can be represented as a triangle:

Understanding this connection for all stakeholders in the community engagement is imperative to ensure the process is beneficial to all concerned. The workings of the engagement will be a success when another triangle is overlaid. This triangle is the link between experience, knowledge and reflection (McCarthy, 2006, p.



The experience relates to what is offered to the students within the community group or agency, the knowledge is what is gained from the university contacts/faculty and then the students undertake the reflection to high light their growth in both professional and personal domains.

When the triangles are super imposed on each other the links between the stakeholders of the service learning and the actual service are connected directly to



each other.

McCarthy (2002) points out that each model of service learning will be different as they are in response to the strengths of the particular institutions and the projects that are already working that may be slightly modified to meet the needs of community service learning. Utilising this framework the University of Western Sydney embarked upon introducing a range of options to students to work in their community – that is the university community, the local community or an international community.

### **The Contextual Framework**

The University of Western Sydney encompasses six campuses including Bankstown, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Parramatta, and Penrith. Greater Western Sydney is one of the world's largest urban areas. It covers almost 9,000 square kilometres, an area greater than the combined areas of Tokyo, London and Chicago. It is home to 1.5 million people, about 40% of Sydney's population. These campuses have the benefit of a multicultural population bringing to the learning experience of their students the opportunity to engage with a variety of global perspectives on issues that impact on our societies. The community 'engagement is the collaboration between the university and a community (regional, national or global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity'. The uniqueness of the approach of UWS is a 'commitment to two-way engagement' that is an 'outreach' which 'rests upon a rationale that recognises an intellectual, social and moral imperative' to ensure 'that we are in fact addressing the most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems faced by the communities we serve' (McKenna, 2006, p.65). In response to the overview of the university engagement and service in 2006 there was in the introduction of unit of study, *Learning through Community Service*, which focuses on students working either within the university community, the local or international community.

### **The Academic Framework**

The unit of study *Learning through Community Services* was offered as an elective valued at 20 credit points (this is double the usual allocation of credit points) for students within the College of Arts. This unit is one 'in which students apply discipline based knowledge as they carry out projects of substantial benefit to community agencies' (UWS, School of Education unit outline 101117, p. 2). The unit is an open elective available to all undergraduate students within the College of Arts and so is available to students enrolled in Humanities, Education and Languages.

The learning outcomes in the unit expect that the students will:

- Apply academic knowledge to issues that concern community agencies;
- Apply observation, reflection, and interpretation skills in identifying issues affecting community agencies;
- Understand and be sensitive to issues of cultural and social diversity and their impact on the acquisition of social capital of individuals and groups;
- Analyse problems and synthesize information useful to the ongoing concerns of the agency;
- Communicate effectively in person and in writing to a wide variety of stakeholders; and,
- Develop products of potential benefit to the communities and agencies in which they do their placements.

(School of Education, 2006, p. 2).

By undertaking a range of activities that included:

Developing an understanding of the nature and roles of public sector agencies and of non-profit community organizations;

Exploring issues that typically confront public sector and non-profit community agencies;

Examining strategies that agencies employ to address problems, including the role of voluntary service and advocacy;

Contributing to research and service provision in collaboration with public sector and non-profit community agencies; and,

Developing effective communication, advocacy and analytical and intervention and interpersonal skills.

(School of Education, 2006, p. 2).

The students are required to undertake a range of activities including participating in a range of lectures and tutorials in an intensive 3 day symposium which is then followed up by a range of meetings by each cohort. The meetings may be in person or over the web using a discussion board.

To demonstrate their participation in the community based service the students complete the actual project and submit four reflections which focus on the particular cohort:

Reflection 1: Selection of appropriate community group and project

Reflection 2: Setting up and commencing project

Reflection 3: Workings of the project

Reflection 4: Evaluation and achievements of the project

The final submission is a portfolio representing a consolidation of the four previous reflections and a synthesis of the work undertaken in the community project.

The determination that the assessment would be based upon reflection was supported in the research which found that 'critical reflection as a concept means certain pedagogical actions [are] in practice' (Willans, Harreveld and Danaher, 2003, p. 4) Therefore by 'using critical reflection, learners are engaged in critical analysis and active construction of experiences in context' (ibid).

Adding to the individual reflections of the engagement with the community there were celebrations of learning for the community and students. This varied for each cohort and obviously reflected the needs of the community group and the age of the participants. Following student and faculty evaluation a whole group conference has been developed where students share their projects and learning to others from different cohorts.

### **The Academic Learning Structure**

The unit of study comprised a three day intensive workshop which included a number lectures which focussed on working in a community as 'an important aspect of social entrepreneurship is understanding both the social positioning of people and the ways in which they can be assisted to move beyond those positions' (McConachie & Simpson, 2003, p 3). Therefore the lectures comprised information on:

Lecture one: General overview of service learning at University of Western Sydney;

Lecture two: Background to service learning and the theories related to service learning;

Lecture three: Social Justice and working in the community;

Lecture four: Helping other people, knowing what they need;  
Each lecture was presented by a specialist in the area and so the students were gaining knowledge and insights into the area of community engagement from researchers who are working in the area at present. Following the first year of study within this unit and relating to the evaluations of the students two additional lectures were presented on writing reflective journals on experiences in the service learning and professionalism in service learning.

The formal lectures were punctuated by cohort meetings with the academic leading the cohort. These times included the developed of an understanding of the way in which the university students will work with their community group and undertake the development of social entrepreneurship. The final session, of the three day workshop, was a compulsory session for students who would be working in schools or where there would be children attending the activities. This session was on child protection and the mandatory reporting of offences against children. This session is taken by experts in the area. A comprehensive overview of the cohorts is available on the UWS website.

### **The Teaching Framework**

At the beginning of the first session in the workshops students were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their previous work in the community. Six open ended questions inquired about the students' work undertaken in the community, the skills and knowledge they bring to community service learning and which ones they would like to develop when involved in community service learning. One other question focussed on whether the students had gained any qualification while working within a community and one on the students' interests outside university study. One closed question asked the students the number of hours they work in paid employment.

Following the lectures and cohort sessions students undertook the work for the semester. At the closure of some of the projects a celebration of learning was planned and organised by each cohort for the first semester. In some instances the celebration was planned by the students – such as in the Community Language School Development - Maltese Language School; others participate in a celebration organised by an outside provider – Students in Free Enterprise attend the annual national competition. In the subsequent semesters a joint celebration of learning has been shared. What ever the activity is, it brings closure to the students and the community with whom they have been working with together. All community groups are contacted and a letter of appreciation is sent.

### **Analysis of the student cohort within Learning through Community Service**

At the commencement of the semester the students completed a short questionnaire relating to their pattern of study, amount of part time work and the level of community service undertaken previously and at present. The students were also asked to comment on the skills and knowledge they bring to the community service as well as the skills and knowledge they would like to develop while engaged in community service.

The cohort of students in Learning through Community Service came from a range of degrees including: Arts, Business, Health Sciences, Music and Education. The unit was recommended for third year students to undertake and about 30.5% of the

enrolled students were in the third year of their study, 36% from second year, 22% from fourth year and 5.5% from both first and fifth year students.

Of the cohort 25% stated they were not working part time however a number of these students are parents and therefore looking after 2-6 children, other students cared for elderly parents. Of the 75% who work part time the average time was 18 hours work.

Of the students enrolled 47% were not undertaking any community service at present. It can easily be seen that with students working part time while they study fulltime they have limited time available to undertake community service. However of the students working in the community at present the range of activities were varied both in the type of service and the community groups they are involved in. They included working with scouts, with religious groups, coaching sport, and with service organisation such as The Salvation Army.

The interesting information given by the students was the skills and knowledge they would like to develop while engaged in community service. Students were particularly pleased to be working with children and others so that they would 'develop further my people skills, interacting with others' and develop 'leadership skills and time management skills while working independently'.

The reflections that were submitted by the students give a clear insight into their obvious development. For some students initially the opening up about their learning was difficult but as they were assured the reflections were for submission and not discussion they were freer with their comments and insights. Some students showed a meaningful development in their skills commenting that – 'having passion is fantastic and essential for us, but passion needs to have guidelines so that it is productive and our goals are met' and 'I have learnt that you can apply life's principles to business, such as you can try to achieve certain outcomes, but sometimes there is a different reason for you to be doing a project, etc. It is like a higher being or message, destiny or fate and it becomes more about the journey, than the goal.'

A deeper understanding of self is evident in many reflections with students commenting in the following fashion: 'I need to continue to push myself, it fulfils me, yet it sometimes also scares me, which to me means to take a deep breath and keep on pushing. Personally, I still have a long way to go, but I feel that I have made a lot of progress from the experiences and achievements of the project.' Overtime the students also could see the impact they would have on the community they were working with: 'I am excited to be part of a project that will have a profound affect on numerous children's lives, that will give them an opportunity to create better lives for themselves and the consequential flow on effect of this.' The ultimate comment was given 'This semester has given me more fulfilment than any material object our society idolises could give me'.

### **Evaluation of Learning through Community Service**

Cohort leaders have the opportunity to see the development of the students' understanding and knowledge through their work in the four reflection papers that they submitted through out the semester. As each project developed within a community the students would reflect on a different component and therefore the cohort leader would seen the development and be able to guide and mentor the students.

Still it needs to be examined as to whether universities do have a place to be providers and developers of community service engagement. As with most discussions the 'advocates maintain that improved collaboration can bring benefits to all parties and particularly, improve circumstances at a local level. Whereas opponents believe that it condones the abrogation of government responsibility in the provision of welfare services and job creation' (University of Newcastle, 2001, p. 1). Whatever the standpoint the students involved in the process of developing community based projects, whether they are working in the creative arts, undertaking a SIFE project or assisting university buddies have seen a marked increase in their development and understanding of the skills they have learnt at the university whilst they work with the community. The success of the initial semesters of Learning through Community Service has established as a recognised program for students at the University of Western Sydney within the College of Arts and also sees other colleges wanting to develop their own community service units of study.

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## **Connecting scholarship to places: human capital, learning, enterprising and an ethical approach to communities**

**Steve Garlick and Victoria Palmer**

University of the Sunshine Coast

### **Abstract:**

Universities have a responsibility to foster human capital, learning, and enterprising outcomes that impact positively on society and the environment within the regional communities in which they are located. In the past these were seen as essential aspects of how universities both contributed to and shaped the public good. This contribution and the ability of universities to be vehicles for critiquing and shaping the public good is currently constrained, however, by a neo-liberal paradigm that preferences rationalism, self-interest and competitiveness, and excludes processes of mutual dialogue and enterprising action by human capital that generates outcomes of meaningful worth for the community. To examine these issues, we discuss the importance of a relational ethic to underpin university engagement; an ethic that is based on Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) forms of togetherness. We propose that an ideal form of togetherness ought to underpin engagement processes and practices to move beyond the dilemmas of conditional funding. At the conclusion a proposed empirical exploration of these ethically-based engagement processes and objectives is outlined.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## Considering Student Voice in the Context of Community. Demand for a Regional University Campus

**Leonard John Pullin**

University of South Australia

### **Abstract**

A commonly raised issue in regional communities is the exodus of young people from the region where they were born and raised and the unlikelihood of them returning to the region on a permanent basis (Webb 2005; Magennis 2005; Pullin, Petkov, Munn and Crozier 2007). Regional communities argue there is a link between undertaking University study in a region and retaining young people the region or other regions when they complete their studies (Hillman and Rothman 2007). The young people the communities refer to are school leavers, those who have successfully completed Year 12, usually at a very high level of achievement.

This paper reports on findings of a feasibility study on establishing a University campus in a regional area (Pullin, Petkov, Munn and Crozier 2007). The findings indicate that four regional stakeholder groups, business and industry, community members, parents of high school students and existing University students, strongly support the establishment of a University campus in the region. In exploring senior high school student voice on the same issues, the paper questions whether the four stakeholder groups' judgment of student preparedness to study in the region reflects the intentions of high school students.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# Creating Spaces for University/Community Regional Engagement: Is it about Buildings or Partnerships?

**Yaso Nadarajah and Leonie Wheeler**

RMIT University

## **Abstract:**

This paper is based on 10 years of experience working with communities in regional Victoria. The analysis of this case study, the development of a learning centre) is located within frameworks of globalisation, regional development and learning communities suggesting that this process of situating can also help to shed new light on how we might approach questions of the nature of university-community partnership in the contemporary world. During the establishment of the learning site, many of the original concepts and the vision became buried in the haste to ensure the buildings and IT infrastructure were completed and that students were coming through the door. The underpinning community engagement where 'spaces' had been created within the community for meaningful dialogues and creative responses to the establishment of higher education in rural settings suffered as a consequence of this attention to infrastructure and resource planning. This paper is a reflective journey, a work-in progress; contextualised within the challenges of implementing a regional learning site, suggesting that a deeper understanding of 'why' communities engage may provide insights towards more sustainable and innovative university community partnerships in a globalising world.

## **The Building of a University-Community Partnership**

Situated just under 300 kilometers from Melbourne, Hamilton is one of the key regional centres of western Victoria. Like other parts of Australia, Hamilton's development as a regional centre over the first hundred years of European settlement was founded on the rapid expansion of an agricultural sector based predominantly on wheat and sheep and cattle grazing. A sharp decline in wool prices in the 1980s and the subsequent long term failure to recapture the wool market led to a local recession. Subsequently the region has turned to other resource industries including canola, beef, plantation timber and mineral sand mining. These new industries, such as the blue gum plantations and mineral sands mining have been embraced by some sections of the community as a desirable and much needed form of rural renewal and economic diversification. The mineral sands in particular are seen as the region's opportunity to remain competitive on the world market while the blue gum industry, which supplies woodchips to the Japanese paper industry, is hailed as 'one of the boom rural industries'. For many in the region, these changes herald also an uncertainty about the future, and the capacity of particularly smaller towns to sustain their livelihood. The debates which surround the blue gum plantations and mineral sands mining today also reflect the ways in which the community is beginning to rethink the traditional dominance of its pastoral industries and asking new questions about the Hamilton region's place within the rest of the world.

These questions about how a region remains connected with the rest of the nation or even the world is not a new phenomenon. These very questions also occupied groups of community members in the early 1990s as they tried to look for ways in which small groups of community members could draw attention to the wool of the region, with a view of attracting new market. One of the ideas coming out of this was that of inviting international visitors (and in this case international students) to the region as guests of local farming families for a weekend. There was an assumption that these students would take back interesting stories of the region to the

places they came from – a slow but valuable word of mouth community-to-community marketing strategy. Thus a partnership began with the RMIT University International (then) Student Centre in 1994. Such exchange trips slowly led to a broader engagement with a wide range of local families, local schools, non-government organisations, land-owners, small businesses and the local government authority. The growing diversity of engagement activities initiated a process through which community members, students, university researchers and lecturers began to get a better understanding of the kind of cultural identities formed through travel, migration, international education and intercultural exchanges. Called the RMIT International Community Exchange Program (RICE), the interaction provided a framework for ‘the way we respect and listen to each other, regardless of background, cultural and epistemological differences or the places we might come from’ (Nadarajah 2005, p. 11). It was a process of cross-cultural reflection about the different ways in which local communities perceive and respond to globalization, seeking to better understand how they are connected to other communities across the world, while ‘holding on to an audacious hope for a world in which people can live and feel nurtured, sustained, involved and stimulated’ (Nadarajah 2005: 11).

Three years after the partnership began the relationship between the community of this region and the university was formalised. What had started as a visit by 22 students and an international student advisor (Nadarajah 2005, 2006) in early 1994 became, by October 2001, one of the largest regional partnerships the University had ever been involved in. At the end of the first four years, about a thousand international students from over 30 different countries had visited the region under the exchange program. This partnership had in its first four years raised funds amounting to more than 5 million towards its development and involving more than 35 local schools, 300 community members, 20 community organisations, the local Shire Council and its affiliated committees and 35 staff members and several senior management from the University. It had support from the 6,000 strong International Student Association at the University, as well as several external student and community groups in Melbourne, including government groups and industry members through the Committee for Melbourne, the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAID), the Victorian Indonesian community association, and several others. Most importantly, the RICE Program also connected into the university, complementing the then developing student outreach programs, and the new community capacity building model, driven by the University TAFE Learning Networks area (Wheeler, 2004) and the University’s Regional Development Strategy. The successful funding submission to the Victorian State Government further consolidated the partnership between the Southern Grampians Shire Council and the University, and saw the development of a new ‘flexible learning’ and regional research centre to be located in Hamilton.

### **Working with communities – rural and university**

The starting vision was to bring together a local-global network of researchers, scholars and engaged community activists, working together to better understand and affect the nature of community life in a changing world. This partnership model was based on a shared belief in a collective capacity to hold the tension between what is local and global; challenging us to move forward strategically and practically without letting go of shared, collective purposes. This then would involve the development of an international research interdependent node, underpinned by a learning network framework that enabled the development of new courses and programs that built on the history, ecology, natural history, agricultural and cultural strengths of the region and the research expertise of the university and its international associations. As engagement with the region’s communities developed, there was concurrently link back to the university – progressing through the changes as well within university development, international, learning and regional strategies. Creative spaces for engagement in two different places began to also come together, some facilitated through the

managers of the RMIT Hamilton link, some informally, through visits and discussions through a range of networks and connections.

The challenge was to build on the RICE Program 'space' of mutual respect in which meaningful exchanges could now be extended through research, teaching and training. More than that, it was important that insiders and outsiders could co-create a 'space for mutual engagement' . For most of the people involved in the RICE Program, the challenges of globalization, global education, rural recession, changing social values, local-global tensions were not unknown. What the RICE Program offered was an opportunity to discuss these issues – and to be able to negotiate one's perspective from conversations with those who came from different places, experiences, disciplines, locales and histories.

Such collaborative engagement involves paying attention to creating spaces (both metaphorical and material) where cultures meet and interact, in other words, the relationships between cultures. It builds very slowly an awareness of the everyday lived realities and the practice that takes place between different communities (in this case a university community and regional primarily farming community). It highlights the differences in the use of language, the existence of various ideologies and the shifting nature of discussions themselves as they move across or between cultures, including when local communities themselves work within or from university-based frameworks with their own communities. Latham contends that the space of engagement is a creative framework through which to grip the self and open it up to the outside. It is through this process that the self is enabled with the ability 'to come into contact with others, and, through this interaction, to generate a sense of empathy, understanding and engagement' (Latham 1999, p. 164). For Latham, the way in which the self engages with the outside is conditioned by the spaces we inhabit and move through as part of everyday life. These 'live' spaces, as Latham refers to them, have the capacity to 'bring the self into a joint or shared reality' (1999, p. 164). Such a space of engagement is also in fact a reflective process, enabling a capacity to generate insight that otherwise might be impossible to achieve.

### **Reflections on the establishment of a Learning Centre**

Wheeler joined the RICE Program as part of the University's growing regional development strategies in 1999, which included developing a key regional learning centre in the Hamilton region. Wheeler came with an expertise in information and communication technology and online and flexible learning within the TAFE sector, whilst Nadarajah had a background in cultural studies, intercultural projects and local-global research programs, such as the setting up of the RICE partnership to date. Neither areas envisaged the extent of the challenges faced in the establishment of a learning site at Hamilton or that eight years on, both areas would have had an opportunity to work together once again to explore some of the original concepts.

From 1999 through to 2001, Nadarajah and Wheeler worked with senior University officials on the original proposal for the establishment of the Southern Grampians Shire and RMIT University partnership. In that time, their roles in the partnership shifted from innovation to implementation; as conduits between urban university and rural community, rather than as agents of renewal and creativity. RMIT's contribution to this region's learning community was to be facilitated through an International Flexible Learning Centre. This Centre was to be the major node of the RMIT Learning Networks, "a quality education and training system which prepares learners to live in a global economy by providing them with the knowledge, skills and expertise in their local environment (Southern Grampians Shire and RMIT University, 1999). This node would link the farm, the land, the home, local communities, workplaces to learning with a university community and its urban, regional and global networks through the use of telecommunications technology and local global intercultural engagement principles and

practice. The further development of the learning network concept was the introduction of a learning community framework and was drawn from some of the work of Canadian Consultant on Learning Communities Ron Faris (Faris, 23 October 2000; Faris and Peterson, 2000), which draws from the fields of human development, ecological models, political economy and communitarian values. Both of these processes of a learning network and an intercultural process of engagement were interdependent, and required a shared investment into a gradual building up of a collective of researchers, scholars (university and community), learners, community practitioners and learning sites (including field sites) (Nadarajah and Wheeler, 2000). Key to the success of this venture was its ability to offer applied research that would propagate courses and training programs (existing and new) that would combine the strengths of the region with the strengths of a global community. Efforts were also made to involve community environmentalists and innovators in the region with urban architects and RMIT students to extend an existing building that would seek to embody new ways of developing a capacity to move across such cultural and epistemological boundaries, keeping in mind the inequalities in the social status of different forms of knowledge.

As work began on the development of the site, many of the original concepts and the vision became buried in the haste to ensure the buildings and IT infrastructure were completed and that students were coming through the door. Philosophical and intercultural underpinnings that had driven this partnership thus far began to be taken for granted, underestimating its foundational impact on the sustainability of such an innovative partnership. The underpinning community engagement where 'spaces' had been created within the both communities (university and rural) for meaningful dialogues and creative responses to the establishment of higher education in rural settings suffered as a consequence of this attention to infrastructure, resource planning and management, drawing on an old-world view of learning. As the partnership developed in scale, profile and scope, direct management shifted out of the hands of the original innovators at the university level to senior management level. Learning models and leadership styles that relied on a human element of interaction, engagement and complex networks of trust were submerged under a flurry of high level instructions and directions. A university building emerged, driven at its core, not by a shared ownership of space and purpose but by a commoditized set of objectives, designed to bring in new students and research. Further to this, prevailing traditional perspectives, particularly from the region, of what the region needs and how a university should proceed as well as personal political agendas limited the exciting capacity for new regional educational setting alternatives and innovative learning models. A handful of influential gatekeepers in the region, working directly or indirectly with the University kept such monocultural discussions in the forefront, as did a couple of university administrators, driven by simplistic models of "this is what the community is saying", or "we have to listen to the community"; or drawing from an emerging yet inadequate theoretical work in the area of community engagement.

While it is common to talk about how we can involve communities in the kind of work universities do, many of us who work with communities "in the field" have reflected on the nature of these engagements and have seen the importance of understanding not *how* communities engage, but *why* communities engage (Mulligan & Nadarajah, 2007). Community' has long been described as invoking an "emotive charge" (Amit, 2002). Eric Hobsbawm (1994) suggested that 'Never was the word "community" used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life'. "However, those who want us to drop the word "community" have not come up with alternative language to describe the various forms of association that constitute the complexities of social life and nor can they explain the fact that the word is probably being used more widely today than ever before and that the desire to belong to community seems undiminished" (Mulligan and Nadarajah, 2007). Human activities, while anchored in specific regions and locales, are linked to other places and levels via complex political, economic, social and cultural networks of communication and action. Many writers – including Hall (1996), (hooks, 1990; hooks, 1994; hooks, 1999; Sandercock, 1999), Trinh T.

Minh-ha (1999) and West (1999) – have said that it has become even more important in the contemporary world to constantly discuss encounters with difference in order to win ‘power’ over one’s work and values. As hooks (1990, p. 148) put it:

Those ... who live, who ‘make it’, passionately holding on to aspects of that ‘down home life’ we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces, we will not survive.

## **The Present**

Deepening into any ‘space of engagement’ takes effort as well as attentiveness and empathy. It also requires the building of skills that subsequently enable the practitioners to deepen into more than one ‘space of engagement’. It enables the engaged to contemplate the unpredictable, the irregular, and the almost unimaginable, and create images and a rich language that can be interpreted in different ways by different people (Mulligan and Nadarajah, 2007). It also reminds us of the importance of carefully examining both the actions and the assumptions that make up our everyday life. When there are ‘spaces’ or ‘structures’ that enable all voices to be heard and considered, then the outcome is always far better than anticipated. Such ‘spaces’ will always start with, and privilege, the perspectives (and participation) of those with the least power and those who are most disadvantaged. As Hooks (1990, p. 148) said those who are ‘simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness’. This can create endless possibilities for building sustainable, trusting and transforming relationships between communities and institutions within this contemporary global world.

The reasons *why* communities engage with Universities are varied. Initially, the Southern Grampians Shire saw this as a way of dealing with the decline in wool prices in the 1980s and 1990s. It was also a way of connecting local people to the world of international students through the RICE program and other research. The focus then became on the *how* – the “box of contracts” that ensured the buildings and infrastructure were completed and the students were coming through the door. The power play and gate keeping also meant that the original vision got lost in simplistic models of what a rural campus should be. The challenge now is once again to focus on *why communities engage*. *This conception of engagement* emphasizes the nurturing and strengthening of relationships that constructively and innovatively influence the design and implementation of an educational establishment and application of research and learning outcomes that is socially relevant at all levels from the local to the global. At the same time, such an engagement also requires its careful, early and quick separation from elements of partnerships and relationships that are destructive and divisive.

The learning site at Hamilton is now seen as part of a more globally networked structure in keeping with the RMIT 2010 Strategic Plan. The operations of the site are underpinned by a learning network framework which is based on developing sustainable business partnerships. The site is managed by a senior management team which is based in Melbourne, but advice on key issues facing the region is sought from a Community Advisory Group. This group has representatives from organisations from local and state government, health, education, enterprise and community. It provides a focused point for liaison between RMIT and the local region and community. The local-global and regional development research is linked into the new Global Cities Institute, enabling a much stronger connection into research at the university, building through community practice on the local global sites. The Learning Community Partnership team (Wheeler 2005, 2006) is responsible for coordinating local and Melbourne academic, research, IT, and Property Services personnel to ensure a quality

learning and research support service, enabling vertical and lateral discussions, building a collective purpose.

As Ferguson (1999, pp. 13-14) has argued, it may not be too much to hope for a future in which we can recognise differences without seizing them as levers in a struggle for power. Exploration of this enhanced capacity can lead to a much better understanding of the empowerment of individuals, groups and relationships and this, in turn, can lead to the transformation of existing and over-arching systems, policies and procedures in which the individuals, groups and interconnected networks are embedded. At the same time, in recognising the potential of the engaged space of the community-university partnership, it is equally important to remember that these “spaces” are not fixed in time and space. Working across different communities for well over ten years affirms the fact that it is such ‘spaces of engagement’ that provide the impetus for communities to come forward to engage actively in the transformation of existing and over-arching systems, policies and procedures in which these individuals and groups and interconnected networks are themselves embedded.

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# Curriculum Alignment Improves Student Engagement in Tertiary Education

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## **Abstract:**

Keywords curriculum alignment, tertiary participation, collaboration

This article outlines a national curriculum alignment project which the New Zealand Government introduced and funded after a successful informal trial was conducted at Manukau Institute of Technology in South Auckland, in 2003. The purpose of the project is to identify anomalies and misalignments within the curriculum between secondary school and tertiary, which could act as barriers to higher learning. It is also about establishing meaningful, collaborative academic relationships with subject teachers and lecturers, as opposed to the more traditional public relations or marketing relationship with careers advisors in secondary schools. Industry dialogue and consultation is an important dimension in the examination of relevant curriculum within a region. A number of successful models will be outlined in the article which were utilised to engage secondary students and demystify the tertiary sector. Finally, some concluding statements will be provided to encourage the introduction of curriculum alignment into all tertiary institutes.

## **Introduction**

There is an Australasian surge towards tertiary community engagement in education. Changing government policy and funding reflect the interest in this crucial investment which has economic, social and health implications for all communities. In Australia, a benchmarking project has been funded to develop a community engagement assessment framework and to examine the best way to achieve community engagement within current funding allocations, whilst aligning the “intellectual strengths, capacities, and goals of the institution”. (Garlick & Langworthy 2006, p. 4)

Similarly, in New Zealand, a number of initiatives have been launched by the Ministry of Education to address community engagement and effective ways of engaging particularly with secondary school students. Trevor Mallard, Minister of Education, stated in his speech to the New Zealand Council for Educational Research Conference in 2003, “The overall thrust of the Youth Transitions Work Programme is to improve retention and ensure successful transitions from school to tertiary education or employment. There is also a big focus on quality pathways at school that connect with post-school options”.

This article will focus on one initiative currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission to help create seamless transitions from secondary schools to tertiary education, across eleven Polytechnics in New Zealand. The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) was established in 2003 to lead the government’s relationship with the tertiary education sector.

Polytechnics in New Zealand are defined as either dual sector, institutes of technology or trades based tertiary institutions, offering some or all of the following - foundation courses, certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate study. This

article will provide a general overview of current projects across all eleven polytechnics but with an emphasis on work occurring at Unitec New Zealand, which has campuses in west and central Auckland.

### **Curriculum Alignment Project Objectives**

In 2003, Manukau Institute of Technology started an informal project to work more collaboratively with local secondary schools in their region, to identify barriers and anomalies within parts of the curriculum that could create barriers to higher learning. The project was very successful and adopted by TEC and funded for a two year trial with nine Polytechnics involved throughout New Zealand, in 2005. Unitec NZ and the Southern Institute of Technology were the last to join the project in late 2006.

The purpose of curriculum alignment is to create seamless transitions from secondary schools and Private Training Establishments (PTEs) onto higher learning within the tertiary sector and to demystify the tertiary sector. PTE's provide alternative education for youth who leave school prematurely with no or low school qualifications. Curriculum alignment has been achieved using a number of models such as Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) funding to develop non traditional subject options for secondary students in automotive, boat building, hospitality and other vocational subject areas. This funding was made available when the school leaving age was raised from 15 to 16 years in 1996 and enabled schools to purchase vocational programmes from polytechnics.

Gateway programmes are also utilised as a form of work experience, which has been funded by the Tertiary Education Commission to encourage students to make links with tertiary providers and industry. The programme generates credits which feed into the new National Qualification Framework and the work must be meaningful and related to industry. Students often move into trades based education and then apprenticeships from this scheme. Student for a Day is also useful, where students visit the campus and spend a day in class in their subject area of interest, and other partnership programmes where students come onto the campus and lecturers teach within the classroom setting at secondary schools.

The curriculum alignment project must be underpinned by building collaborative relationships with all stakeholders, getting to know secondary school teachers and understanding the curriculum and qualification framework at the secondary level.

It is also about identifying the critical skill sets required by industry, employer groups and the tertiary sector in order for students to succeed at the tertiary level and secure relevant employment at the end of their studies.

Within Unitec's local region, the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission, Waitakere City Council representing local government, Enterprise Waitakere representing local business development, Waitakere Education Sector Trust who work with all educational sectors in the region and are creating a 20 year educational plan, and the Principals Association for West Auckland schools are all involved in the push for regionalisation of tertiary education to make it more accessible for students. Waitakere City is noted to have the largest youth population in New Zealand, with the lowest literacy rates and participation in tertiary education, so this is a serious social, economic and health issue for the region. (MOE survey 2005), (Census 2006)

Research conducted by Anderson (2005) shows that after parents/caregivers, subject teachers are the most important influencers of students and Careers Advisors rank well below this (which makes sense as they are generalists and facilitators of

information, whereas the subject teacher has a captive, subject specific audience every day). It is therefore important for Polytechnics to develop closer working relationships with subject teachers and Heads of Departments and to put some of the marketing spend into this strategic area by funding polytechnic based faculty heads or lecturers to liaise with local schools to deliver parts of the curriculum within the secondary school environment and have students visiting the tertiary campus for workshops and lectures.

This is about relationship building with both staff and students, understanding the secondary curriculum and identifying opportunities to get involved with secondary school events such as art exhibitions, design competitions, sports events, mentoring, language and cultural days, first aid courses, talent contests and leadership programmes. Anderson, (2005, p. 2) asserts

“This mechanism provides a framework that focuses on what is taught and its meanings in the vocational and the educational context. This also provides opportunities for schools and Polytechnics to shift their ways of relating from a marketing and public relations focus to a professional and educational context”.

Research conducted by Anderson (2005, p. 7), in collaboration with other curriculum alignment managers and secondary schools, clearly demonstrates the range of unit standards being offered by different schools delivering in the same subject area and the consequent difficulty of creating pathways into the local polytechnic unless some alignment is negotiated with schools. With the widening of the school curriculum to include non traditional subjects under the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement framework, Polytechnics have also widened their offerings in response to this new demand but these changes have occurred rapidly and without cross-sector co-ordination (Butterworth and Butterworth, 1998).

Curriculum alignment is therefore necessary to allow for a more co-ordinated and seamless approach which benefits all parties but most importantly, the students, many of whom will not have the school grades to go directly to an undergraduate degree. In fact, recent data suggests that the greater number of potential students who could enter into a Polytechnic environment are unqualified or partially qualified school leavers, or mature students who do not have a clear pathway for entry, unlike the degree entry which is prescribed and very clear. (Anderson, 2005, p. 13)

Demographic projections identify increasing proportions of the population pyramid in West Auckland will be Maori and Pasifika in origin. Both groups are under represented in tertiary education and this will have both an economic and social implication for educators - stronger links must be forged with these groups to address this disparity.

School rolls are expected to reach a peak in 2008, which indicates the greatest numbers of school leavers will hit tertiary institutions in years 2009-2010, as sited in the New Zealand Education Review, October 18, 2005. Anderson (2005) goes on to endorse the Ministry of Education statistics that only 20% of school leavers enrolled in polytechnic programmes during 2002 and 2003, so there are huge opportunities for polytechnics to increase student participation through curriculum alignment initiatives.

## **Process**

A Curriculum Alignment Project Manager was appointed in each tertiary institution (polytechnic). Most were internal appointments but recent dialogue at a curriculum alignment forum suggests those who made the quickest headway were external appointees who had previously worked in the secondary sector as they understood the qualification framework, the curriculum, the structural and hierarchical systems and they had credibility within the secondary environment.

At Unitec, the first step was to host a dinner launch for senior Unitec Staff, secondary school Principals and Managers of private training organisations. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Enterprise Waitakere, a local business development centre, was the key note speaker, so the link with growth industries in the region was established from the outset. The CEO and President of Unitec also spoke to demonstrate the commitment of senior staff to the project, something that was deemed essential for buy-in.

A database was then set up to identify the teaching staff in each subject area for the twenty four secondary schools we wished to target. The Academic Deans then met to discuss which Unitec schools would be involved in the pilot and informed the appropriate Heads of School.

This resulted in an internal forum to discuss in more detail what curriculum alignment was about and how it could benefit each Unitec school. It also provided an opportunity to establish what, if any curriculum alignment activities were already taking place informally.

Dates were then set to host academic forum, where all stakeholders were invited. A leading keynote speaker was secured from the relevant industry, plus Unitec school staff, secondary teachers, PTE staff, and Industry Training Organisation representatives who work within the modern apprenticeship scheme, within the subject discipline area.

The meetings were facilitated by the Curriculum Alignment Manager and the forum was structured to build trust, collaboration and dialogue between all parties. The secondary and PTE teaching staff were asked to bring their current scheme of work, with a break down of senior level units. A matrix of achievement and unit standards was then created to identify anomalies and misalignments within the secondary and tertiary curriculum which could lead to barriers to entry for students. Other opportunities were also identified to align with industry and for Unitec to develop specific programmes and resources to fill gaps in a collaborative way.

## **Outcomes**

Once the curriculum gaps and other collaborative opportunities were identified, a number of initiatives were put in place to address these: a Gateway programme in electronics was designed to deliver a unit standard which the polytechnic deemed essential and the secondary school was struggling to deliver due to the expensive equipment required in electronics, with the students attending the polytechnic for a block week in the school holidays and then moving into an industry project.

Another initiative was to utilise STAR funding for programmes written to accommodate the school and polytechnic requirements; for example hospitality, where the school purchased the programme from the polytechnic and lecturers visited the school to deliver some of the content and the students visited the

polytechnic for a block week to complete units which required the use of a commercial kitchen.

Also, Student For A Day which is a special taster course for students keen on a particular course of study but needing clarification, to experience a day in the classroom at a Polytechnic, either individually or in a group setting.

Other tailor made programmes were developed from the forums for specific regions, example, marine science and kiwifruit resources were developed by the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, industry and school teachers to fill a gap in the secondary school biology curriculum and to meet future employment demands in the region.

Some polytechnics have dropped low level certificate programmes into the secondary school and private training establishment sectors to ensure curriculum gaps are filled and creating stair-casing opportunities into diploma and degree courses, to offset this loss.

Through dialogue and increasing trust, some private training establishments are developing more collaborative working relationships with the polytechnics, rather than viewing them as competition and they are working towards aligning their curriculum as well and creating pathways which are being reflected in the polytechnic prospectus's.

An Art and Design forum resulted in teachers requesting a number of initiatives which Unitec responded to. The School of Design now hosts the travelling art show, Top Art, which showcases the best senior student boards and they coupled this with a mini graduate exhibition and lecture series for secondary students. They also facilitated two professional development sessions for teaching staff which were well received. Both events provided opportunities for Unitec to host students and art teachers on campus and to help familiarise them with the School of Design.

After hearing the challenges involved in delivering parts of the electronics curriculum within the secondary school environment, the Industry Training Organisation have agreed to provide more resources, an industry stakeholder has offered to create a simple wall chart showing career opportunities for the secondary school sector and Unitec has provided information on where to source and purchase equipment.

Scholarships/study awards are being introduced in some polytechnics to reflect student involvement in curriculum alignment activities and in some cases this involves an inter-secondary school competition within the curriculum alignment programme. For example, a cook off within a hospitality course, a fashion design competition, and a world geography competition with teams of five students from each school and PTE in the region offering geography or travel and tourism, with the winners receiving a study award.

Many polytechnics have adopted curriculum alignment into the academic board policy/process and evidence of curriculum alignment and industry consultation must be provided for all new programmes and renewal of existing programmes.

The prospectus's have been altered to show curriculum alignment by specifying particular achievement and unit standards required from schools/PTEs to pathway into the certificate, diploma and degree levels, including the apprenticeship model. This aids the students' subject selection process and guides teaching staff who are designing the programmes at secondary school and PTE level.

## **Conclusion**

Many positive outcomes have arisen from engaging in curriculum alignment including the tremendous collaboration between academic staff within the two educational sectors which have resulted in sharing of information and resources, professional development, a greater awareness of the challenges faced by secondary teachers, a more informed knowledge of the secondary curriculum and a closer working relationship with students, PTEs, local employers, Industry Training Organisations and other stakeholder groups.

There is clear evidence now available to demonstrate that the polytechnics who have engaged in curriculum alignment with their local schools and PTEs are experiencing strong growth in enrolments within these areas and that this is a justified and necessary role within any forward thinking tertiary institute. Anderson (2005) states “the effects of curriculum alignment are entirely positive in and terms of student benefit and the reconstructing of relationships between secondary and tertiary teaching staff”. She also states that “there are documented instances for those polytechnics who have had a head start of increasing numbers of school leavers traversing to tertiary study purposefully designed collaborative pathways”. (Anderson, 2005, p. 15 -17)

Building strong relationships with both academic students and those who traditionally may not have continued on to tertiary, by involving them in tertiary programmes at school, getting to know them in a secondary school class environment through a visiting lecture programme, having them and their parents/caregivers visit the tertiary campus and thus demystifying the tertiary environment are all attributed to the increasing numbers of students attending polytechnics throughout New Zealand.

Sustainability of the project is ensured through embedding curriculum alignment processes into the core business of the institution. This can be achieved by having a requirement within academic board process to demonstrate how new programmes reflect and are linked to the secondary school curriculum and via job descriptions and appraisal which require curriculum alignment activities and outputs.

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# **Degrees of Work: trends and implications for the management of university students in paid employment**

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## **Abstract**

The trend for Australian university students to work longer hours in paid employment is now quite clear. Previous studies have recognised the link between the general costs of university study but have done so almost exclusively from a metropolitan perspective. This paper will present a preliminary report on the results of a survey of the students of a regional university. However, even less apparent in other studies is how the growth in the paid employment of university students is a reflection of the changing character and nature of the contemporary labour market in Australia. This paper will identify the nature of the student employment in terms of industry and employment status, earnings and hours as well as other employment relations issues such as union membership and whether students are able to find employment in the area of their study. In this way this paper will explore the contemporary character of an important aspect of regional labour markets and highlight the human resource and industrial relations implications of this new and growing cohort of young workers.

## **Introduction**

Over the past decade there has been a steady increase in the number of university students who are employed in the workforce. Paid employment is necessary because students must pay living expenses from their own resources; there has been a decline in the number receiving government support while students' families seem unable to contribute more (AVCC 2007; Robbins 2006). In a simple way this growth in paid employment is a reflection of a user-pays approach to the funding of higher education in Australia. It should also be noted that students work to pay for the basic necessities of life and not to fund lavish or fashion driven consumption needs as some people have suggested (Bishop 2007). In addition, student paid employment has grown to such an extent it can now often be in conflict with the demands of full-time study. University students who work today juggle increasing hours of employment with class attendance and with out-of-class study regimes. It is argued here that paid employment for an increasing number of university students is having a negative impact on their higher education experience.

## **Literature**

In 1994 a survey of full-time first year students at a small number of universities established the incidence of paid employment and its impact on study (McInnis 2002; Lucas & Lammont 1998). In broad terms the 1994 study found that 43% of university students were engaged in paid employment whilst studying. Time spent on campus by these students was estimated to be over 4 days and the class contact times for them was 17.6 hours per week. In 1999 another study was conducted which found that 51% of full-time students were engaged in some form of paid employment, representing an increase of 9% over 5 years. (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). Days

spent on campus by students fell by 11% while contact hours had reduced slightly to 17.1 per week. More recently the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC 2007) conducted yet another survey into student work and into student finances. This national survey of university students found that 70% of the student body is engaged in an average of 14.8 hours of paid employment per week. The implication of the contrast between the 1994, 1999 and 2006 studies is that there is a growing incidence in student reliance on paid employment.

Although some attempt was made by these surveys to capture the experience of all students none actually identified or contrasted the experience of students studying in a regional university and within a regional labour market. As a consequence the study examined in detail here (Robbins 2006) was not designed to challenge the national studies but to supplement them with a regional focus and to offer more comprehensive perspectives on the nature of student employment and the broad industrial relations implications of the growth in student paid employment. The regional study involved a 50 question questionnaire which was distributed to students via their lectures. It was a confidential survey which does not identify any individual. The findings are based on 239 student respondents from the regional cities (7 campuses) of Bathurst, Albury, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo and Orange.

### **The Findings: A Profile of Student workers**

The students surveyed were all undergraduates of whom 92% were studying full time and 8% part time. Of the respondents 88% were Higher Education Contribution (HECs) students and 12% Fee Paying students. The range of ages covered by the questionnaire were from 18 to 25. The average age was 20 while the spread of age was uniform and as expected. The work experience of different age groups does not appear to be significantly different. Students aged 18 appear to be as likely to work as students aged 21. Older students, those around 25, are perhaps more likely to be working longer hours and in better paying jobs because they more often have a broader range of financial and familial responsibilities to balance. The gender mix of respondents was 43% male and 57% female which is in line with the gender mix of all student enrolments for this regional university (CSU 2005). Students in the survey came mostly (77%) from non-metropolitan locations. The most common places students live are at home (30%), in Shared accommodation (26%) and in University accommodation (22%).

The survey examined the issue of student support and assistance in two different ways, the level of government support and the level of family support. The level of government support was, in broad terms, as might be expected with 43% of students receiving some financial support from the federal government and 55% receiving none (2% did not answer). There was no direct indication of how much government assistance was given to the students from the federal government but from hours of work, earnings and expenditure levels it is clear that few students received a full living allowance. In contrast, 23% of students received no support from their family, 23% received occasional assistance, 16% received small but regular assistance, 17% enjoyed substantial support on a regular basis while 18% of respondents received complete support from their family. This latter was composed mainly of students who lived at home.

The survey found that student income levels earned by paid employment varied from \$800 to \$50 per week. The higher income figures invariably related to part time students who were working full time. Nevertheless the average weekly earnings of students who worked was \$244.76. The average hours that students worked to earn

this was 14.5 per week. In terms of expenditure it was found that 62% of student expenditure was on accommodation, food and utilities, phones and study costs represented respectively 6% of expenditure, entertainment represented 16% and transport 10% of expenditure. From these figures it is clear that basic living expenses represent the great bulk of student expenditure. The entertainment expense of \$52 or (16% of expenditure) does not suggest a lavish lifestyle.

### **The Findings: A Profile of Student Work**

Work is a highly significant factor in the lives of university students. It was found that 66% of respondents were employed in paid work of some kind. This contrasts with the 2006 national study which found 70% of students worked (AVCC 2007: (McInnes 2002; McInnes, James & Hartley 2000; Lucas & Lammont 1998). It was also found that of those regional students who worked, over 73% performed work that bore no relation to their area of study. Although 71% of regional students who worked only held one job, it was alarming to find that nearly 30% performed more than one job.

Student employment was concentrated in two main industries, retailing (28%) and hospitality (24%). Business & Finance and Other Services each employed 11% and 12% respectively. The rest of the student workers (25%) were evenly spread throughout the ABS classification of industries. Students were employed in a variety of different sized businesses; 38% of students worked for a small business, 26% for a medium sized business and 29% for a large business (7% did not answer). Given that the small business sector is such a dominant form of business in the Australian and regional economies (ABS 2006; Robbins, Murphy & Petzke 2004) the dominance of small businesses is not surprising. That so many students, relatively speaking, are employed by big business probably reflects the dominance of retailing by large national corporations and the significance in the regional hospitality industry of large service clubs. It is also apparent that most students who are working are employed by the private sector of Australian business rather than the public or not-for-profit sectors. Only 6% of students were employed in the public sector. This would surely reflect the fact that the private sector has the majority of the part-time and casual jobs in the Australian economy (ABS 2006).

### **The Findings: Industrial relations Issues**

The survey also examined a range of industrial relations issues although this paper will only comment on the most obvious ones. The terms and conditions under which student workers are employed varied considerably. It was found that 17% were employed under a contract, 6% under an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA), 6% under an Enterprise Agreement, 23% under an Award and 25% under some sort of Verbal Agreement. Of considerable alarm is the finding that 11% of respondents Don't Know under what arrangement they are employed while 22% did not answer this question.

An important implication of these arrangements is the varying opportunities that they offer student workers to participate in the determination of the terms and conditions of their employment. While arrangements such as Awards and Enterprise Agreements are collective and do not lend themselves to individual negotiation with the employer the interests of employees are nevertheless addressed collectively through formal processes of negotiation and bargaining and most commonly through formal trade union representation, even for non-members (Peetz 1998). On the other hand arrangements such as AWAs and contracts both written and verbal, are by their nature individual and should, according to supporters of the *Work Choices Act*,

explicitly reflect the outcome of employee and employer *negotiations*. However the survey found that no student with an AWA had negotiated this with their employer.

Although many students still work under some form of collectively negotiated employment mechanism they are not, as a group, much connected to the union movement. The survey found that only 12% of student workers were members of a union. These figures are considerably below the national membership level of around 20% (ABS Cat. 6310.0 2006). However, the level of student membership of unions is actually not so far from the private sector union density level of 17% (ABS Cat. 6310.0 2006). At one level the low union membership of student workers must be of concern to the trade union movement. On another level the nature of employment under which the vast majority of student workers are employed makes these types of workers amongst the hardest to recruit (Bamber, Lansbury & Wailes 2004; Peetz 1998).

### **Impact of Paid Employment on Study**

The average hours of work of regional university students was 14.5 while for all students nationally it was 14.8 hours (Robbins 2006; AVCC 2007). However the regional survey established that the spread of these hours of work were by no means uniform. It was found that 6% of students work hours before 9.00am, 36% worked 9.00 to 5.00, 20% worked after 5.00pm, 10% of students worked at the weekends only while 27% had no regular hours of work. The impact of paid employment needs to be seen in terms of impact on class attendance and impact on out-of-class study. As might be expected students claimed paid work negatively impacted on attendance in face to face classes in only 17% of cases. For those who did experience a negative impact almost 90% perceived it as minor.

The impact of paid work on after or out-of-class study was more problematic with 53% of respondents indicating their paid employment reduced their non-class study. Only 37% felt it did not impact on their out of class study and 10% did not give an answer. Of those who indicated a negative impact 50% felt work to be minor issue while 50% thought it had a significant or substantial impact on their personal study time.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this survey indicate that the level of student paid employment is now reaching alarming levels. Paid employment is beginning to impact negatively on class attendance while it has already reduced the level of out of class study. This will affect student performance, the quality of the educational experience and standards of excellence. Academic innovations may have to be adopted to concentrate more assessment within class times but this may contradict the stated aim of all universities to generate life long learning skills.

To curtail the growth in the hours of student employment university administrations will have to redesign the costs of basic but critical services like accommodation and meals. Accommodation represents the most significant cost to students and for this reason universities must examine the pricing policies of their accommodation. Of course this may be easier said than done. In the face of real falls in funding most universities have been compelled to maximise the economic returns on many of their facilities and services. However, the fundamental problem is the level of government living allowances to students. It is clearly apparent from this study that students are

required to work more because they either cannot get government support or because what support they do get is inadequate.

Finally, given that living and studying costs are increasingly paid for by the paid employment efforts of many students themselves, the nature of their employment conditions becomes more critical. While students will generally work in short term, casual and unskilled jobs these are now the very ones being transformed by the deregulation introduced by the Work Choices Act (*The Age*, :1 & 6). It is argued here that there is a need for greater not less minimum employment protections.

Finally, even if we accept that the current level of paid employment is manageable because most are still able to attend classes; this is a short term position. The trend for the past decade is for student paid employment to increase and if this continues higher education for some will simply not be sustainable. If students are required to work more hours then the impact on their education and educational experience will be fatal. It will force some students to cut classes, some students to study part time and some students to abandon higher education altogether. This seems a wasteful consequence at a time when the nation has skills shortages. Supporting students in a frugal but sustainable lifestyle seems a modest investment cost for both the student and the nation.

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## **Developing a community engagement database at the University of Western Sydney**

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### **Abstract**

It is important that universities are able to track and provide a consolidated picture of various engagement activities in which they are involved in order to implement frameworks for quality management of the area.

In this case study the development of a comprehensive on-line tracking system and database for community engagement at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) is outlined and discussed. The study identifies the methods, procedures, data sources and strategies being employed for effective data collection and use. The methods used to develop the system include analysis of data generated in an extensive Review of University Engagement in 2005 and review of the relevant literature.

The system is currently being implemented at UWS. This session will include a demonstration of the system, and give practical input on the range of ways in which the system can be used.

### **Introduction**

A review of recent literature suggests rapidly growing interest amongst Australian universities in becoming more “engaged” with a wide range of non-university communities, organisations and groups (Alvarez, Badenhorst, & Burnheim, 2005; Birch, 2005; Galligan & Roberts, 2005; Gervasoni, 2005; McDonald, 2005; Nugent, Delaforce, & Harding, 2006; Penman & Ellis, 2003; Ralston, 2006; Wiseman & White, 2005, etc.). A clear understanding of the facets of university-community engagement is an essential starting point for further discussion.

Various definitions of engagement provided in the literature share two key points. “Engagement” entails: (a) purposeful collaboration of universities with the non-university world and particularly with their surrounding communities; and (b) mutual benefits from such collaboration. As defined by Scott (2004), a “community” is a group of people sharing a common location, set of activities, purposes, interests or heritage. Communities can, therefore, be geographical, cultural, linguistic, religious, generational, national, social, economic or professional.

The aims of universities focused on community engagement and the benefits from such collaboration include the opportunities engagement provides to involve staff and students in real-world learning experiences (Ostrander, 2004; Ralston, 2006); to better manage competition through developing links with industry and attracting students with the relevance of programs (Nugent, Delaforce, & Harding, 2006; Ralston, 2006); and to foster democracy and prepare active and engaged citizens (Alvarez, Badenhorst, & Burnheim, 2005; Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004; Ostrander, 2004). For communities the purposes and benefits of collaboration include the application of intellectual property, resources and academic expertise provided by universities to local problems and needs (Charles & Benneworth, 2002);

the enhancement of regional economic competitiveness through raising the stock of knowledge and skills (Charles & Benneworth, 2002; Garlick, 1999; Garlick, 2000; Ralston, 2006); and the enrichment of their social and cultural life (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpfer, 2004; Glassick, Huber, Maeroff, 1997; Magrath, 1999; McDonald, 2005; Penman & Ellis, 2003).

In this context, it is important for universities to develop frameworks for quality management of community engagement, including mechanisms for systematic monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and promotion of university partnership activities, implementation of “good practice” models and addressing areas requiring improvement. As stated by Scott (2004), only a relatively small number of universities currently have such mechanisms already in place. Even though comprehensive and interactive community engagement databases can be found in some universities (e.g., Arizona State University, 2004; Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, 2002), there are few available studies which provide a detailed methodology and specific procedures for the creation and productive use of such systems.

Three broad methods for tracking and evaluating university-community engagement activities are distinguished in the literature (e.g., Garlick and Langworthy 2005, 2006; Scott, 2004, Weerts, 2005, 2006). These are: (a) analysis of qualitative data provided in guided self-evaluation assessments, interviews and focus groups (run with staff and target communities); (b) quantitative assessment of a defined set of variables; and (c) a combination of (a) and (b). Determining the relative advantages and limitations of the first and second methods, Garlick and Langworthy (2006) argue for a “hybrid approach”, based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative information. Scott (2004) suggests that, first, a set of key tracking measures have to be identified and refined through the analyses of all quantifiable (qualitative and quantitative) data for the area. Second, once such variables have been decided and given priority, they should be used to systemise the data into a comprehensive, university-community engagement database. Third, it is necessary to determine how best to gather further data on these measures, to report on outcomes, and to further facilitate partnership activities with the help of the database. This approach, being focused on metrics, uses the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data and underlies the development of the community engagement database at the University of Western Sydney (UWS).

“UWS is committed to working in partnership with its regional, national and international communities, beginning with the people and organisations of Greater Western Sydney (GWS)” (UWS AUQA Performance Portfolio, 2006, p. 47). This goal is been achieved through a diverse range of partnership programs with government and non-government organisations, community groups and individuals, industry and business.

The 2005 UWS Community Engagement Review provided an opportunity to advance the tracking and improvement system for university engagement using self-assessment data collected from 40 UWS schools and units, and survey data from 158 partner organisations. The data was consolidated into a database consisting of 766 partnership activities undertaken by UWS colleges, divisions, schools and units over the period 2000 to 2005. In 2006 the university moved to develop an on-line data collection instrument that populates the database and from which regular reports can be produced and disseminated across the university.

Concisely, the objective of this paper is to share the experience of designing and implementing the community engagement database at UWS. The paper gives a

detailed and evidence-based description of the methods, procedures and data sources involved in this project, and thus might be valuable to those doing similar work at other institutions.

## **Method**

### **Participants and procedure**

The UWS Partners Survey was conducted in August 2005 via both telephone and mail. The survey generated 158 responses from UWS community partners. The sample was representative of the region in terms of the types of organisations and groups, and their geographic locations. Concurrently, a Self-Assessment Guide on university engagement was disseminated to all UWS colleges and units. Consolidated responses were received from 17 UWS schools, 7 research centres and 16 units.

### **Instruments**

The purpose of the UWS Partners Survey was to gauge the perceived effectiveness of UWS engagement with the GWS community from the external partners' perspective. Participants rated a set of 33 items, outlining the university's engagement strategies, first on importance to their organisation, and then on their perception of current UWS performance in delivering them. They used a five-point Likert-style scale (1 – low to 5 – high). Respondents were asked to provide comments on both the "best aspects" of the university's current partnership work with their organisations, and on those most "needing improvement".

The purpose of the UWS Self-Assessment for Community Engagement was to collect as much information on community-university collaboration as possible in order to systemise and analyse it, and to better understand what engagement meant for UWS staff in operational terms. University Community Engagement Review coordinators were nominated and asked to identify all partnership activities in their schools, research centres or units undertaken over the period 2000 to 2005. The Self-Assessment reports described and classified each engagement activity according to a range of criteria and gave feedback on management and co-ordination of the area at UWS.

### **Analysis of the data**

To determine which engagement strategies UWS partners perceived as being more important than others, the Partners Survey item mean scores on all importance measures were compared using a paired-samples *t* test. To simplify the analysis the mean ratings were ranked in order of highest to lowest and then tested for significant difference between the highest and lowest, then the second highest against the second lowest and so on until all means were tested.

The partners' responses to open-ended questions and the self-assessment reports from UWS staff were subjected to a detailed content analysis. Both types of analysis served the purpose of identifying meaningful and quantifiable categories and subcategories to accommodate engagement data and subsequently to organise the data into a database.

## Results

### The UWS Partners Survey 2005

Varying levels of importance were placed by community partners on UWS engagement strategies. It was found that differences between mean item ratings of .30 or more were likely to be statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . Thus, the seven survey items with the highest mean scores appeared significantly different from the seven items with the lowest scores, while there was less differentiation between the other 19 items.

**Table 1: Paired Samples Test of Partners Survey Items Ranked Highest to Lowest\***

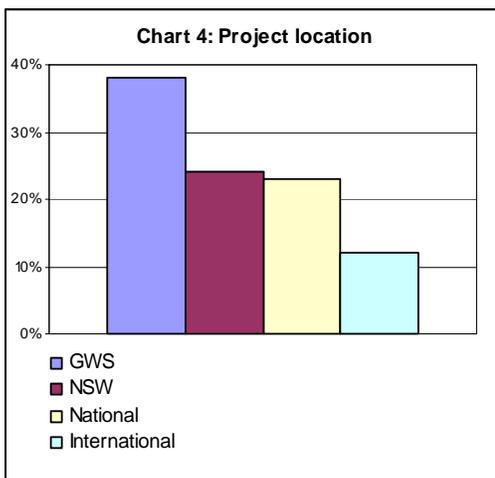
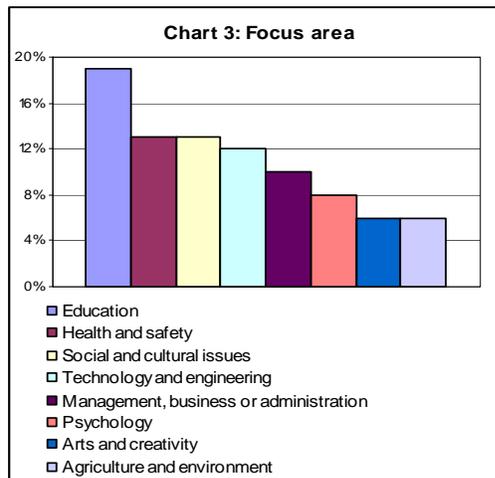
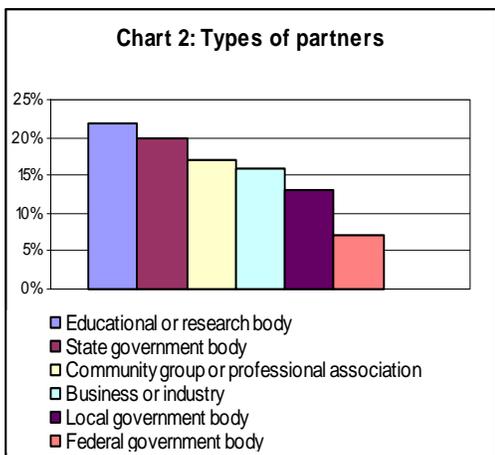
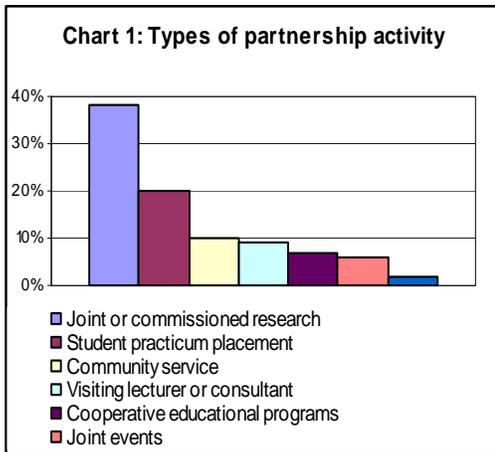
Ranks and items	Paired Differences						
	M Diff. SE	SD	t	df	p		
Ranks 1 vs. 32	Ranks 1: Access to knowledge which is relevant and up to date	1.23	1.41	.18	7.03	64	.000
Ranks 2 vs. 31	Rank 2: Research outcomes that benefits your organisation	1.02	1.25	.16	6.38	60	.000
Ranks 3 vs. 30	Rank 3: Help with any specific research needs your organisation has	.71	1.41	.16	4.48	78	.000
Ranks 4 vs. 29	Rank 4: Contribution to public debate on key Greater Western Sydney issues	.50	1.02	.12	4.35	77	.000
Ranks 5 vs. 28	Rank 5: Continuing education courses specific to your organisation's needs	.31	.72	.08	3.71	73	.000
Ranks 6 vs. 27	Rank 6: Collaborative research around key priorities for Greater Western Sydney	.34	.98	.12	2.88	66	.005
Ranks 7 vs. 26	Rank 7: Provision of students doing research and field work	.30	1.19	.12	2.30	90	.024

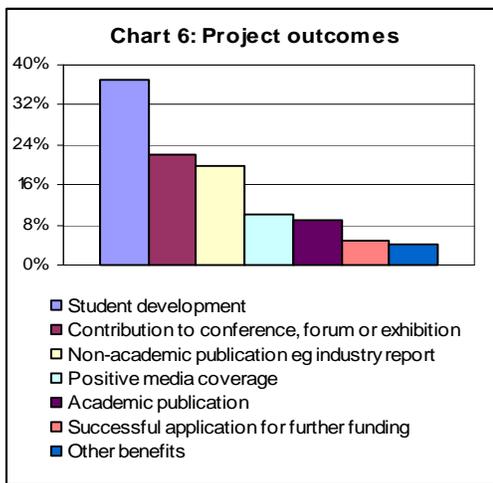
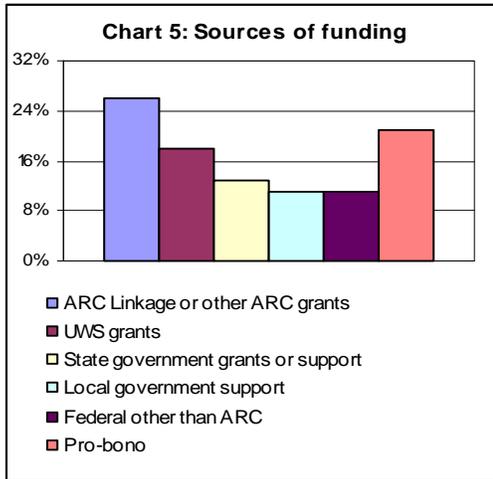
\* Only significant results at  $p < .05$  are included in the table.

The seven most important items aligned well with the main themes in participants' open-ended comments. As Table 1 shows, UWS partners put particular emphasis on access to relevant knowledge, productive research collaboration, joint contribution to GWS issues, joint educational programs and work with UWS students.

### The Self-Assessment for Community Engagement Activity 2005

Through the content analysis of the Self-Assessment data, it became clear that UWS engagement projects vary in the type of activity undertaken, partner, focus area, geographical location, source(s) of funding and outcomes. Charts 1-6 present these findings as approximate percentages of totals per category.





The outcomes presented in Chart 6 are mainly focused on the perceived benefits for the university with less focus on benefits for the community. Based on the results of the UWS Partners Survey, two additional outcomes more directly related to community benefit were included in the database. These were “Contribution to GWS issues” and “Evidence of partner's satisfaction with the project”.

### Implications

The above results (a) helped UWS identify valid parameters against which to gauge UWS community engagement; (b) helped systemise the available data into a prototype database with categories that explicitly accommodate all the engagement activity identified; (c) suggested a need to upgrade the data gathering and outcome reporting systems for engagement at UWS; and (d) advanced understanding of purposes the database could serve.

### Key parameters

The variables, generated directly from what UWS staff and partners reported in the 2005 Engagement Review, formed the following fields for the prototype UWS engagement database:

- UWS project leader details including name, position, location and contact details;
- Activity details including name, brief description, location, type of activity, main focus area(s), numbers of staff and students involved, names of UWS staff involved, scope of funding, dates of commencement and (planned) completion, and outcomes;
- Partner(s) details including number of partners, name of each partner organisation, type, and contact details.

### **Gathering further data**

To make the submission of the data quicker and easier for university engagement staff and to achieve greater consistency in the data generated an on-line instrument was developed.

Special consideration has been given to the motivators that would encourage staff to enter such data. In this regard, action is being taken to link the database to funding, promotion and recognition systems for engagement.

For example, the database is to be used as a basis for reward funding to divisions and colleges each year for excellence in the area. Only data entered on the database will be eligible for use in justifying promotion claims in the area. Other incentives being investigated include using the database to inform the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for the area. Content for the university's annual engagement report highlighting good practice examples will be drawn from the database. It has been also suggested that the performance plans for each Associate Dean (Engagement) will include ensuring all partnership activities in their college are on the database and updated.

### **Use of the database**

It was recognised that it was necessary to be very clear from the outset what exactly the database will be used for. It is anticipated that the UWS community engagement database will:

- Ensure appropriate performance and improvement funding;
- Provide the data to test the university's implementation of the Quality Development and Management Framework for community engagement;
- Provide feedback to the Board of Trustees, the UWS community and to external constituencies;
- Improve quality through recognition of areas of effective engagement activity implementation and link these to those who are just starting out in the area;
- Calculate community service performance indicators for UWS colleges and divisions;
- Identify partners with whom another part of the university is already working (in order to avoid duplication or embarrassment, or to identify opportunities for leverage);
- Identify groups in other parts of the university working on similar area in order to foster cross-fertilisation and more crossdisciplinary work;

- Produce systematic compliance data and data for the UWS annual report to the State government;
- Manage service learning courses by tracking their students, finding community partners, and promoting courses to prospective students.

### Final comments

It is critical that key players are involved in shaping a system that helps rather than hinders their activity. For this reason the prototype database has been piloted and presented for critique to potential UWS users, and also to staff who have practical involvement in quality management and engagement activities at other Australian universities. Further amendments to the system are planned to allow both university and community members to explore and search our engagement activities on-line. UWS staff and external parties will do such searches in order to explore potential partnerships. Students will search the database for service opportunities and match their interests with community needs. It also appears important to provide an opportunity for staff to modify previously entered data.

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## **Developing University-Community Partnerships to Support African Refugees in Greater Western Sydney**

**Margaret Vickers**

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### **Abstract:**

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) Regional Council has placed support for African humanitarian refugees and recent immigrants high on the University's engagement agenda. This paper discusses how UWS is responding to this imperative, how our interactions with refugee groups are being structured, and how these interactions and negotiations are shaping academic service learning programs and other activities. The paper also outlines an emerging program of research that aims to identify strategies that will be effective in a range of areas, including education and literacy development, counseling and social support, and youth transitions. Substantial numbers of African refugees have entered Australia over the past three years, many of them from the Sudan. After 21 years of civil war which has destroyed their infrastructure, most Sudanese families entering Australia have lived for extended periods in refugee camps. Their educational and social needs are extreme but they hold high hopes for a better future. A range of well-tested strategies are available to support young people and in terms of literacy development, engagement with school, counseling and stress management, and transition to work or further study. However, many of these strategies make assumptions about levels of cultural familiarity and contextual knowledge that cannot be assumed to apply to recent African immigrants. UWS is at the beginning of a three-year program of research and development aimed at identifying what is needed, developing service learning programs that will deliver effective and sustainable support, and offering strategic assistance to other agencies and groups who are active in this field.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# Education for the Public Good: Is Service Learning Possible in the Australian Context?

**Anne Langworthy**

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## **Abstract**

Many Australian universities are looking for models of community engagement that are not “third stream” or somehow independent of core business but, like Work Related Learning and collaborative research, essential for the development of graduate attributes and the achievement of graduate outcomes. Ostensibly the concept of service learning provides one of these models.

In the United States, service learning has grown rapidly for a variety of purposes: as a means of engaging students with communities, promoting civic and social responsibility and enhancing student learning of academic content. Service learning is usually defined as a credit-bearing activity and is integrated into existing subject units. Students apply what they have learnt in the classroom to address priorities in the community in partnership with that community. Service learning, therefore, requires a partnership relationship between the educational institution and community partners, with the intent of mutual benefit. An emerging body of research into service learning methodology and outcomes has documented positive outcomes related to retention, learning, and development of pro-social behaviors, and identifies best practices. Professional associations, publications, and email groups support the service learning educator.

Interest in community engagement and service learning has fostered national conversations about higher education for the public good (Benson & Harkavy, 2002) and about the human drive “to create, maintain and develop the Good Society that would enable human beings to lead long, healthy, active, virtuous, happy lives” (Chambers, 2005, p. 3). However, this concept of service to others and the wider community and the importance of values education is not a given. Public higher education in the US is more likely to shy away from service learning goals related to values or citizenship and to emphasize service learning as an active learning pedagogy (the idea of learning by doing articulated by John Dewey) with benefits to academic learning and professional development.

Much of the interest in engagement (see Kellogg report of 1999: *Returning to our Roots* as an example) arose from a national policy environment that positioned higher education as merely a private benefit to the students. During the 1980s, federal and state policy changes greatly increased the proportion of educational costs borne by students and reduce public funding to universities. These policies created a more vocational view of the purposes of higher education. Some higher education leaders, beginning in the 1990s, posited that engagement in community issues would be an effective strategy for renewing higher education’s larger role in creating public good by addressing critical public issues through partnerships.

But can the American service learning be transplanted to the Australian context where a culture of education for democracy and citizenship is at odds with a culture of education for private benefit and vocational outcome that has increasingly seized the policy agenda? Are Australian universities ready to come down from their sandstone towers and work with, rather than just for communities?

This paper looks at the relevance of service learning in the Australian context, factors that may hinder its wider adoption and asks the question whether Australian universities are ready to become truly engaged in service learning.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Engaging Indigenous Secondary School Students in the Northern Territory: Facilitating Pathways to Tertiary Education**

**Cheri Williams**

Charles Darwin University

**Abstract:**

Indigenous people constitute 28% of the Territory's population and are responsible for the decision making and economic development of 50% of the Territory's land mass and 90% of its coastline. Its largest and rapidly increasing cohort is aged between 0-15 years, and its poorly-educated adult population has life expectancies that are 20 years lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# Evaluating Community Engagement: Lessons for an Australian Regional University

**Catherine Arden, Trevor Cooper, Kathryn McLachlan**

Catherine Arden, University of Southern Queensland  
Trevor Cooper Councillor, Stanthorpe Shire Council and President of the Granite Belt Learners Group,  
Kathryn McLachlan Community Development Officer with Community Development Services Inc, Stanthorpe and Treasurer of the Granite Belt Learners Group.

## **Abstract**

Community engagement, along with personal fulfilment and economic resilience, is an integral element of lifelong learning (Global Learning Services, 2001). This paper reports the processes and outcomes of a collaborative community engagement research project undertaken by university researchers, and local and state government and community partners that provides a testing ground for the principles and practices of regional and community engagement, lifelong learning and e-democracy in a rural community context.

The purpose of the research project was to evaluate the Granite Belt Community Engagement Network (GBCEN) Project being conducted as part of Stanthorpe's Learning Community initiative by the Stanthorpe Shire Council and the Granite Belt LEARNERS Group during July-December 2006. The evaluation utilised a participatory action research (PAR) approach to evaluation designed to foster as well as measure effective community engagement practices.

The paper reports the evaluation findings in terms of the perceived benefits, limitations and challenges of using e-democracy for improving local government community engagement, and the potential for utilising school and community leaders, networks and interactional infrastructure to enhance lifelong learning and community engagement in rural and regional communities. Drawing on applications of social capital theory in rural and regional communities in Australia, lifelong and transformative learning theory and community engagement research, the paper also discusses implications of the evaluation processes and outcomes for the enhancement of university regional and community engagement through collaborative research and evaluation projects that build 'bridging and linking ties' between formal educational institutions and situated, informal and non-formal learning that occurs in communities and organisations. The paper goes on to make recommendations for enhancing the relevance of research and scholarship in a regional university to the needs of the communities it serves.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## Events Research As A Means Of Fostering University-Community Engagement

**Earl Jobling and Marthin Nanere**

La Trobe University

### **Abstract:**

In an Australian context, the pursuit of economic rationalism by successive governments at both the federal and state level has had a profound effect on the workings of local municipalities. A direct outcome of the rationalist agenda has been that local authorities have reformed their internal structures and developed a commercial orientation that mirrors that of the private sector. In particular, local authorities have introduced strategic practices that are responsive to their outside environment. As a case in point, local authorities recognise the importance of strategically allocating resources to 'local events' in order to promote economic development and tourism within their respective regions. At the same time, local authorities appreciate that while 'local events' affect the social fabric of the local community, the social impact of some events is obviously going to be far greater than others. From the perspective of local authorities, this poses a number of questions; most notably, to what extent should local events be supported, and correspondingly, what form should the support take. The effective allocation of scarce local resources requires that local events are assessed in a systematic and objective manner. Universities are well placed to respond to community needs in this regard. To this end, the current study, commissioned by the City of Greater Bendigo with the support and assistance of the Elmore Field Days Organising Committee, sets out to investigate the economic and social impact of the Elmore Field Days on the Bendigo regional economy, and identify how visitors to the field days perceived Bendigo as a tourist destination. At the same time, a key objective of the research was to provide the Elmore Field Days Organising Committee with a comprehensive evaluation of how patrons and exhibitors perceived their 'Elmore experience'. The research is part of the City of Greater Bendigo's strategic plan to work collaboratively with event organisers and imbed major events into the social and economic fabric of the Bendigo region. A key facet of the research was the involvement of students in the collection of data. This enabled students to apply and reflect upon the skills learnt at University in a 'real world' environment. The 'real world' nature of the study invoked a high level of emotional involvement on the part of students. The current study provides an exemplar of how a community oriented project undertaken in a collaborative framework has the capacity to be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders, namely; the local authority, event organisers, the local university and its students, and most importantly, the local community.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# **“Getting out there”: the Scholarship of Community Engagement in the reality of practice**

**Dallas Wingrove and Amaya Alvarez**

RMIT University

## **Abstract**

Community engagement in the Australian University context exists in many different forms. In centres of community policy and research; as a strategy to recruit potential students and to further embed the university in its wider geographical or social community; and as community engagement learning - learning that enhances the core business of Learning and Teaching for educators and undergraduates, through the design and development of learning experiences that go ‘out there’. It is in this third kind of engagement that this paper is interested.

This paper explores community engagement learning through an account of the process of developing two community engagement electives in partnership with teaching staff from the disciplines of Applied Media and Communications and Engineering.

Drawing upon our practice, this paper seeks to contribute to understandings of the pedagogy of community engagement learning. By doing so, we seek to inform the emerging scholarship of engagement across the higher education sector and to make explicit key challenges to the emergence of this scholarship.

## **Introduction**

In this paper we reflect on some of the complexities of community engagement learning. Community engagement in the Australian University context exists in many different forms. In centres of community policy and research; as a strategy to recruit potential students and to further embed the university in its wider geographical or social community; and as community engagement learning. Broadly, community engagement learning enhances the core business of Teaching & Learning for staff and students through the design and development of learning experiences that go ‘out there’ and engage with community.

It is in this third kind of engagement that this paper is concerned. We are interested in a discourse around the pedagogy of community engagement drawing on our learning and teaching practice. By moving back from our practice of developing curriculum we want to reflect on the questions: what it is we do and how is it framed in our university; and what are the tensions between the two?

We would argue that CEL (Community Engagement Learning) creates authentic, diverse and rich learning experiences for undergraduates. Such learning actively fosters and enhances graduate capability, and encompasses the enabling of social and civic dimensions of learning and the enhancement of a graduates ability to “deal effectively with novel situations in the changing world of work and social world” (Draft Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2007-2010). Yet, in the current context of our university, CEL has been shifted to the margins and has been subsumed by the university’s recently prioritised agenda, WIL (Work Integrated Learning). This has significant implications for the sustainability of CEL and the scholarship of

engagement; how it is valued and framed (or not) and how the university defines the very purpose of higher education.

### **Community Engagement learning 'on the ground'**

In our recent practice, we have embedded CEL in core learning and teaching by framing this work as curriculum. In creating cross disciplinary undergraduate electives, we have sought to foster and enhance quality teaching and learning, and to enrich student's experiences of higher education. The core pedagogic principles which underpin these electives enact a holistic view of graduates learning and represent a capacious view of the very purpose of higher education, that is one that is inclusive of, but not exclusive to, preparation for professional practice.

By 'getting out there' students engage across disciplines and work with communities which often represent a social and/or cultural shift from their own. Key learning which frames this work includes enhancing student's critical understandings of the discursive practices which surround the profession they seek to enter; fostering and enhancing critical understandings and of the ethical implications of professional practice; and fostering a sense of place and responsibility as members of a profession and as citizens in the community. Actively fostering social and civic dimensions of learning is core to this work.

The two cross disciplinary electives discussed here, *Engineering in the Community* and *Community Media*, are grounded in (or built upon) critical and active engagement with communities. The development of the elective '*Engineering in the Community*'; stemmed from a community engagement partnership program, *Rockets in Schools*. Since 2001, second year Aerospace Engineering students had worked as volunteers across primary schools, both urban and rural, designing, building and launching rockets. In most cases, community partnerships were formed with primary schools identified as socio economically disadvantaged. Broadly the impetus for this engagement was to both address what were then university access and equity targets; and to create authentic, informal learning experiences for undergraduates, through which students generic capabilities, such as critical thinking and problem solving, could be fostered.

In the process of developing this elective our interest lay in creating learning experiences for students which fostered and enhanced students' critical understandings of the social practice of engineering and beyond that to the social and civic dimensions of learning. The elective *Engineering in the Community* did not just create opportunities for our students to be exposed to a set of experiences otherwise not widely available, but also presented the chance for negotiation of meaning and for the creation of learning experiences and paradigms that inform identity.

The students and teaching staff, and the community partners were all practitioners in the creation of a set of possibilities in engineering practice and teaching and learning more broadly. Students enrolled in the elective engaged in a cycle of acting, (integrating and applying their skills, knowledge and experiences in community settings); reflecting on their experiences and learning, (which included self and peer review), and acting, (applying new understandings, experiences and knowledge to new learning contexts in local communities).

By embedding CEL (*Rockets*) in curriculum, our pedagogic intent was to shift students' learning from something that was marginalised and dependent on the

unpaid commitment of a few champions to something that would be sustainable and accessible to a broader student group - to embed CEL ore teaching and learning, both within the discipline of engineering and across the university more broadly.

*Community Media*, like *Engineering in the Community*, emerged out of informal on the ground learning that was already occurring and a commitment by educators that such learning should be framed in a way that recognises teaching as scholarship, and values and formalises this learning beyond the life of the activity. Discussions with educators in Applied Communication identified an interest in exploring community media as a site of learning more broadly, within the context of current debates on the value and role of community media in contemporary Australian culture (Rooney & Graham, 2006). It was felt students would benefit from an understanding and engagement with this context beyond the 'training ground' model of engagement that previously dominated their motivations.

After collaboration and discussion the elective was presented to academic Board and approved to run in second semester 2007. The course aims to develop and enhance students' knowledge and understandings of what it means to work in community media, including the role the sector plays in wider media and community contexts within a democratic society. As capability based, *Community Media* seeks to actively teach and foster students' critical understandings of the role of community media in contemporary society and culture; an ability to identify and critically reflect on key technological challenges and opportunities that impact on community media; the skills to collaborate and negotiate within a community media organisation on a shared project; an awareness of the ethical issues that arise within community media practice; and how these issues relate to students own understandings of ethical practice.

## **Pedagogy of community engagement**

In developing these electives from the ground up, key dimensions of community engagement learning have emerged. For us community engagement learning fosters cross disciplinary T&L, both in design and in delivery. It is student centred and encourages undergraduates to work in teams across year levels and disciplines. The learning outcomes from this model are grounded in actively supporting and enhancing student's capacity to lead, to collaborate, to work autonomously. As well as to critique the discursive practices surrounding their chosen profession through working with and reflecting on the practice of engaging with diverse communities. Finally, the communities with which we and the students work are underpinned by principles of access and equity and are not first and foremost driven by a corporate imperative.

Community engagement, as we understand it, is a multidimensional, often multi disciplinary and partnered exploration of what it means to engage with community in a pluralistic democratic culture. What this learning might entail is then open to negotiation, debate and the interests, cultures and identities of a range of communities (including the students), CEL can challenge destabilise expand, and extend students' understanding of themselves beyond (in this case) that of engineers, or journalists, TV producers in the making; allowing them to unpack and critique the profession as social practice, rather than as a set of narrower vocational skills and capabilities.

## Challenges to the pedagogy

As our stories reveal there are a number of challenges to the development of CEL. These include the pedagogic challenges inherent in non-traditional learning and teaching, including assessment; how such curriculum sits in relation to the current priorities of RMIT University's Learning and Teaching Strategy; the embedding of CEL in core programs rather than as electives on the margins; and the tension between CEL and the massification of higher education.

At RMIT University there is no clear community engagement discourse. Instead there has been a shift from an explicit commitment to the scholarship of engagement to a prioritising of work readiness and industry relevance (Draft Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2007-2010). In discussions with educators we have felt a growing unease about how such work is now viewed and valued within the University. WIL rather than community engagement as such is now given prominence in RMIT University's emergent Draft Learning and Teaching Strategy, (2007-2010). Broadly, within RMIT University WIL is defined as learning that enhances students work readiness through simulated or real work experiences, creating opportunities for professional practice in real life settings.

Under this banner CEL reduces community to an alternative site for the WIL experience - and yet we would argue the intent, the approach, the pedagogy, of WIL and CEL are quite distinct. As Langworthy (2005, p.1) observes a new responsive model of community engagement does more than prepare students for employment but also 'prepares them to be fully functioning members of the community.'

Further, when a community outside the academy becomes a partner to a learning experience there is more to negotiate, organise, define and understand. It is (at least) a three way learning process: between students' staff and partners. Community engagement learning is therefore time and resource rich and requires on the ground collaborative support from staff. This essential work is often hidden in the curriculum and absorbed into work loads by existing staff.

Community engagement learning also represents a paradigm shift from a model of knowledge transmission to experiential, problem based learning. Learning through the experience of engaging with community challenges the notion of teacher as expert as students engage in the 'messiness' of integrating and applying their knowledge, skills and qualities in real life, diverse community settings. Yet, teaching practice in higher education is often characterised by "a didactic, linear approach, where information ...is unproblematically transferred from teacher to student" (Usher, 1996, p.12). For many educators ways of knowing enacted through community engagement learning therefore represent a significant shift from the dominant ways of knowing within their discipline and is tantamount to their conception and experience of teaching practice (Barrie, 2004).

Community engagement learning sits within the mass educational environment characteristic of higher education (Biggs, 2003). In such an environment there is a disjuncture between the theoretical notion of graduate capability as holistic, and the demand by government that graduate attributes be carved up and measured as objects (Milton, 1999). We would argue that the discourse and practice of community engagement is holistic, encompassing social and civic dimensions. Hence in putting community engagement learning in practice there are tensions between holistic learning outcomes and agendas of quality assurance and accountabilities. The question of how to assess community engagement learning illustrates some of these

issues and tensions. The reality that assessment is linked to external demands and the needs of professional bodies and funding (Homes, 2000; Biggs 2003) creates tensions between external accountabilities and the development and application of formative assessment tools and strategies, and curriculum integrity.

## Conclusion

The discourse and practice of community engagement learning has emerged as one of a range of innovative teaching and learning approaches and yet evidence and understandings of such learning is largely anecdotal and under investigated. To a significant extent such learning takes place outside core curriculum, with programs often delivered through university elective programs. Despite clear synergies between community engagement learning and key educational agendas, such as the graduate attributes agenda, critical learning's from this work is not being captured, reviewed or shared. In our own work we get rich feedback from students but little sense of where the work sits in relation to the core business of the University or how it compares relates and can be enriched by other such work elsewhere.

The implications of how to sustain community engagement learning which may include students' formal and non-formal learning, and how to support teacher's engagement in community engagement work are therefore far reaching, particularly in light of the impacts of the massification of the sector.

If community engagement is to be framed as scholarship mechanisms for developing a scholarship of engagement are crucial. As argued by Shulman "For an activity to be considered scholarship it should manifest at least 3 key characteristics: It should be *public*, susceptible to *critical review and evaluation* and accessible for *exchange and use* by other members of one's scholarly community" (as cited in Bass, 1999, p.2). As Bass (1999) notes these components are fundamental to all scholarship and to new knowledge. From the perspective of our practice framing CEL as scholarship is the critical challenge if the pedagogies of engagement are to inform and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

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# **Human capital, innovation and the productive ageing: Growth and senior aged health in the regional community through engaged higher education**

**Steve Garlick and Jeffrey Soar**

University of the Sunshine Coast

**Abstract:**

This paper examines how low relative economic growth and high service and infrastructure costs in non-metropolitan regions that are increasingly attractive to lifestyle-seeking seniors, can be offset by focussing more positively on the human capital dimension of this cohort through closer engagement with higher education learning and innovation.

At present, many senior-aged persons attracted to 'lifestyle' locations are allowed to let their knowledge, networks and skills ossify through a lack of engagement with processes of learning and innovation and institutional impediments of a structural and attitudinal nature. It represents poor return on sunk investment in human capital, has cost impacts on enabling health and community services and infrastructure and does not contribute as positively as it could to regional growth outcomes through productivity gains.

The spatial impact of this will exacerbate as the demographic profile of the nation continues to age. Higher education in these places could be a key instrument in the learning and innovation required to realise the greater productivity gains from senior-aged human capital and the consequential growth and health outcomes at the local and regional scale.

The paper reports on the literature, research undertaken and analysis to understand these potentially important issues of policy and practice. The paper has a particular focus on the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay Burnett regions of Queensland which have some of the highest concentrations of senior aged people in Australia.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## Institutional Approaches to Strengthening Community-University Engagement

**Linda Silka**

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*In the face of many challenges, how do universities build their support and capacity for community engagement?* Many universities around the globe are struggling with this very question. As universities have begun to recognize the benefits of community engagement—benefits for their students, communities, and regions—they have encountered a daunting array of obstacles. This paper will describe a model emerging from one university's decade long strategy for overcoming some of the obstacles to comprehensive and sustained engagement. The University of Massachusetts Lowell is located in a highly urbanized and industrialized region of the U.S. that, as a consequence of changes in the global economy over the last decade, has undergone demographic and economic shifts. Lowell is now home to a large and growing immigrant population and these demographic shifts have taken place at the very time that the region has experienced significant job loss and economic restructuring as a consequence of manufacturing companies moving overseas. Like many universities, UML has sought to develop an institutional response to these challenges that will be consistent with the university's core intellectual mission and will tie engagement to that mission. This paper analyzes a series of interlinked initiatives that together have strengthened community engagement. These initiatives have included (1) the creation of a university wide task force on community engagement charged with producing a report identifying gaps, resources and needs; (2) the creation of a community outreach transformation team charged with designing an implementation strategy to close the gaps identified by the task force; (3) the enhancement of institutional support for engagement such as through the creation of the office of special assistant to the Provost for community outreach and partnerships; (4) the strengthening of the community's voice in these efforts through the creation of a community-university advisory board charged with advising the UML Administration on outreach strategies; and (5) the development of a program of seed grants designed to support outreach experimentation as well as encourage faculty to pursue external funding to test innovative approaches to outreach in education, environmental justice, health, and immigrant experiences. These efforts have been tied to a prominent focus on information dissemination through the hosting of international conferences, the creation of a community information clearinghouse, and the support of publications on outreach and community-university partnerships. Throughout this work a focus has been maintained on new faculty and how to support their pretenure involvement in outreach and engagement. Together these steps have been instrumental in shifting the culture at this research university toward one in which faculty increasingly see their academic responsibilities as including outreach and engagement.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# **Integrating teaching, learning, research and community engagement: case study**

**Nasir Butrous**

Australian Catholic University

## **Abstract:**

Participation of both students and staff in community engagement is an essential element of the Australian Catholic University's mission and reflects a concern for the welfare of society. This participation is an integral component of the concept of community engagement in which the mutuality of students, staff, and community needs are met.

This paper analyses approaches undertaken in designing and implementing a community based learning and assessment with direct involvement of the community partner. It also considers benefits emerging from the community engagement project to the student, faculty staff, and the community organisation and stresses the importance of ensuring mutuality of meeting all the stakeholders' needs. It is a win-win situation for all involved.

## **1. Community engagement and ACU mission**

Community Engagement (CE) as a core activity, together with teaching and research in Australia's higher education sector, received a special attention following the "Crossroads" review in 2000, the blueprint that followed "Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future 2003", and the prospect of additional government funding attached to engagement as a "Third Stream" activity in 2005. Despite the attention, CE is a miss-used and vague concept leading to the use of different terms and different definitions. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) refers to the "process of engaging, for mutual benefits, with business, government, or the community to generate, acquire, apply, and make accessible the knowledge needed to enhance material, human, social, and environmental wellbeing" as "Knowledge Transfer" (DEST 2006). According to Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC 2005) "engagement focuses on universities' application of research, teaching, and scholarship in partnership with the needs of business and communities. It can also focus on projects designed to generate social and economics benefits within its community of interest". For the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA), a peak professional body representing 28 universities, CE or "Regional Engagement" is "a two-way relationships in which the University forms partnerships with the community.....that focuses on scholarly practice and community driven engagement that has reciprocal and mutual benefits as an outcome predicted on the exchange of knowledge". (AUCEA 2005).

Barbara Holland, an international scholar on engagement, noted that "Engaged Scholarship" has "increased institutional diversity" in the US and describes such engaged scholarship as "engaged forms of teaching and research, faculty connect their academic expertise to public purposes as a way of fulfilling the core mission of the academic institution" (Holland 2005). Harding (2006) supports the notion of "CE reflecting individual institution's particular priorities making it an axis of differentiation between universities". Despite CE being a misunderstood concept, Wallis argues that

“it has been broadly used to describe relationships between a university and any of its communities. It is a two-way relationships leading to productive partnership that yield mutually beneficial outcomes” (Wallis 2006). B-HERT has taken similar position to CE as a “two-way orientation, with institutions outside higher education committed to interactions with universities in a similar way” (B-HERT 2006).

For Australian Catholic University and consonant with its mission, community engagement is an integral part of University core business that requires it “to make a specific contribution to its local, national, and international communities”. Within the context of its mission, ACU sees engagement as (ACU National 2006):

- enhancing the dignity and wellbeing of people and communities;
- being based upon trusting relationships and genuine partnerships with community institutions and corporations for mutual benefits;
- a key vehicle for the University’s research and teaching and learning; and
- a central means for the University to honour its “commitment to serving the common good”.

Thus, ACU prides itself being an engaged university that “has created special partnerships that serve its distinctive mission” and endorses the position that “varieties of excellence are achieved through varieties of partnerships”. (ACU National 2002).

## **2. Methodology**

Strategic Management (MGMT304) is a third year capstone unit of the Bachelor of Business course designed to enable students to integrate concepts from their studies in the core and professional strand units. Historically, since 1995 the unit has been offered on a face-to-face basis using a textbook case study approach that is very common in this type of unit. Students were divided into small groups (3-5 students) and allocated a case from the prescribed textbook (the textbook and cases were American). Each group was responsible for presenting a strategic management report for their cases by the end of the semester that is regarded as a major assessment item replacing the end of the semester final examination.

This method of offering the unit continued until 2004 when WebCT was introduced and staff were encouraged to utilise it to supplement face-to-face teaching (*blended mode*). Despite the availability of the WebCT, its usage was limited to lecture notes and announcements to students during the semester.

End of semester feedback indicated that students were unhappy with American textbook cases and the amount of workload was heavy as highlighted by the University student evaluation program. Given the above challenges, and following consultation with colleagues in the school, an attempt was made in 2006 to improve the quality of student learning in this unit using a social constructivism approach to teaching and learning with more usage of the WebCT technology.

Looking for a local organisation that is going through or interested in strategic planning exercise was the first priority to improve the quality of student learning. Building on existing relationships with the local business community, Nundah Rotary Club (NRC) was approached in 2005 to assist in recruiting local organisations (business and not-for profit community organisations). Following meetings with various organisations identified by NRC, three local organisations were identified to

take part in the project. The needs and expectations of these organisations together with the faculty expectations were clearly communicated. Organisations were expected to provide information to students and making themselves available to meet with the students during the semester (on three occasions) and would take part in assessing student work. In return, faculty staff would provide each organisation with a copy of student strategic management report at the end of the semester.

Four to six person multidisciplinary teams were formed early in the Semester and each team was responsible for developing a business strategy for an Australian organisation. Students signed “confidentiality agreements” when accessing commercial ‘in confidence’ information related to the organisation. Although three organisations were expected to participate in the project before the start of the semester, only one was able to continue with the project at the start of the semester. Instead of groups being allocated different real live case study as originally planned, all groups (8) were allocated the same case and learners were encouraged to distinguish their work from other groups.

### **3. Designing and implementing a community based teaching and learning**

As teachers, we face a wide variety of students with divers’ educational backgrounds that can lead to similar conceptions of learning which emphasise the acquisition and retention of knowledge. Marton and Saljo (1976) were the first researchers to make a distinction between “*deep approach*” to learning where students’ intention is to “*understand meaning*” and “*surface approach*” where the intention is to “*memorise*”. (For comprehensive database on theories of learning see Kearsley, 2007).

The following changes to the design and implementation of the unit, aligned with social constructivism approach, were introduced in 2006 as part of this project:

#### **3.1 Posing problems of emerging relevance to learners**

Information about the community organisation, previous financial reports and previous plans were made available to all groups by uploading them to the WebCT. By developing a situation for students to explain, making the case local, information on WebCT, and providing face-to-face contact with organisational management, learners appreciated the relevance of the new situation that encouraged and urged their active engagement.

#### **3.2 Seeking and valuing learners’ points of view**

Restructuring the module involved a change in the roles of teacher, learners, and content (Dalsgaard and Godsk, 2007). The teacher’s role as a “traditional lecturer” was reduced from two hours per week to one hour making the role as a guide to the students and promoting dialogue, and recognising student’s needs for assistance. Students were divided into small diverse groups in a way to avoid concentration of those with similar specialisation in one group. Because each group was comprised of various learners with diverse backgrounds, each member had something unique to offer in their group’s construction of the strategic plan. Learners’ views were sought and valued through weekly group presentations about the case whereas other groups were supported when commenting on their colleagues’ presentations. Thus encouraging learners to exhibit a record of their thinking, as a way of their reasoning, by sharing it with others.

### **3.3 Structuring learning around premise and essential concepts**

As mentioned earlier, the strategic management unit is a third year capstone of the Bachelor of Business course designed to enable students to integrate concepts from their studies in the core and professional strand units. Thus, the material was presented “*holistically*” focussing on “*big ideas*”. The emphases on primary ideas instead of sets of discrete facts lead to cross-curricular teaching and learning. Working with primary material and raw data of a “*real live case*” helped learners to form a more accurate understanding of the subject matter.

### **3.4 Adapting curriculum to address learners’ suppositions and development**

Being actively involved in the design of the Bachelor of Business during 1996 and 2002 quality review cycle, made the lecturer responsible of the unit aware of what the learners already covered “knew” from previous units. Accordingly, this unit was designed to help learners build a *bridge* between what they knew and what is expected of them to learn to fulfil the intended outcomes of the unit. Further meetings between learners’ groups and the participating organisation’s management was organised to elaborate on previous information and answer questions resulting from students’ added learning.

### **3.5 Assessing student learning in the context of teaching**

Learners were assessed during the semester (two individual tests) and during groups’ oral presentations allowing the lecturer to gain an insight into the learners’ understanding as well as the level of their cognitive development. By the time the strategic management report was constructed, each group member’s mark was focused on the outcome, so each member had a sense of ownership. The inter-subjectivity the students experienced through this group project allowed them to extend their understanding of strategic management. In addition, the completion of various parts by each of the group members meant that learners had to communicate, share and negotiate to create the final strategic plan for the case. Student’s peer evaluation was introduced allowing group members to reflect on their learning process and the contributions of their fair share, and others, to the group final report, which was submitted to the local organisation. University end of the semester student’s evaluations were also carried out providing further opportunities for critical reflection and thus contributing to the student learning. The active involvement of the community organisation in the assessment process added another dimension to the learning process.

## **4. Reflection as a teacher**

Reflecting critically, as a teacher, on this project made me realise how “*small*” changes to the learning environment had a positive impact on the students’ learning and understanding. As mentioned earlier, the design of the Strategic Management unit is based upon trusting relationships and genuine partnerships between ACU

National and a local community organisation for mutual benefits. It was a win-win situation for all involved: students, the community organisation, and the university.

Being part of a team responsible for developing and presenting a business strategy report (following meticulous analysis of the community organisation case) assisted learners in gaining an insight into the various processes and stages of strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The application of these skills and competencies to formulate strategies resulted in sustainable competitive advantage, thus supporting students in acquiring knowledge, skills and expertise in their chosen academic field and meeting relevant professional requirements. Students' understanding of strategic management knowledge was impacted by a relevant real live case.

Learners' communication and interpersonal skills in working with clients and colleagues have been enhanced by working in diverse teams and interacting with the management of community organisation.

Taking part in community engagement projects provided an excellent opportunity for students to become acquainted with the spirit of engaging with the community. Through deep involvement in community engagement projects dealing with a real life case increased students' awareness of the impact of their decisions on those affected by them. This is particularly the case when dealing with economical, social, political, ethical, behavioural and international operations' issues in strategic management.

The community organisation benefited from their involvement in this project by having third year business students analyse their organisation under the supervision of faculty staff and receiving (8) strategic management reports with no direct cost to them. At the end of the semester, the management board of the community organisation had access to faculty member (free of charge) assisting them understand students' multiple reports and then produce their own strategic plan for the coming three years.

The university also gained from this project by having students and staff engaging with the community through teaching and learning as a way of fulfilment of its mission. As a lecturer in charge of the unit, the project is a living example of my own teaching and learning principles and philosophy. The project enhanced my witnessing of my ethos via contributing to the wider community and provided an opportunity for nexus between teaching and learning, research and scholarship. It also enabled further engagement with the management board of the community organisation, on voluntary basis, assisting them to produce their own strategic plan. Above all, the project contributed positively to my professional development as a teacher and thereby student learning.

Despite the positive outcomes from the project, I believe there is more to be done in relation to the design of the unit and its delivery using WebCT making it a more "*blended*" unit.

Better use of the WebCT tools in the delivery of this "*blended unit*" need to be the focus of future improvements. "Discussions Boards" could be used to further encourage engagements amongst group members in their deliberations on strategic management for their case creating virtual teams. Discussion Boards could also be used to facilitate interactions at the class level and extended to a "seminar presentation" to the class encouraging active involvement and enabling the creation

of virtual communities. Other features of the WebCT technologies such as email and chat rooms and technological deliberations need to be more integrated.

Exploring the differences and similarities between students across a range of business disciplines in order to develop strategies for improving the academic engagement and participation of diverse student populations, needs to be seriously considered as a future project. This would enhance our understanding of the creation of inclusive learning environments and to inform the development of good practice (see Hockings and Cooks, 2006, for details about factors influencing student engagement among socially and academically diverse students within a widening participation context).

In addition, assessing the quality of the transformed module and the extent of its contribution to the student learning requires further research (Dalsgaard and Godsk, 2007).

## **5. Conclusion**

Collaborative relationships that yield mutually beneficial outcomes for the university, its students, and its communities could be enhanced through the scholarship of community engagement. Community engagement projects, if designed and implemented effectively, could enhance students' employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, and self-management. It also increases the University's capacity to meet its community engagement core objectives in addition to the needs of the community/industry partner. Thus, the nexus between teaching and learning and research and scholarship is a win-win situation for all involved.

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## **Interpreting the role of 'social partner': The experiences of an allied health program at a regional university**

**Ruth Beecham**

Charles Stuart University

### **Abstract:**

The speech pathology program at Charles Sturt University has a history of developing innovative fieldwork opportunities in collaboration with a range of organizations and agencies. Using the word 'collaboration' is, however, a little problematic, so the first part of this paper describes how our program has problematized, and then interpreted, its role as a collaborative entity. The importance of engaging in this description is because we have discovered several problems in unreflective engagement in collaborative social partnerships. Using a number of our community engagement projects as exemplars of these problems, we highlight the influence of organizational interests in determining how, and with whom, we engage in collaboration. We then discuss how we have come to a view of partnership that is linked to our program's educational philosophy, and explain how the use of this philosophy helps significantly in balancing the agenda of our employers with the agendas of community members and organizations. The paper concludes with a critical appraisal of our efforts in collaborative community partnerships, highlighting their piecemeal nature, and also their fragility, operating as they do within a context of health and educational service provision dominated by an ever-narrowing social, political and economic agenda.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Learning through community service: Assisting others, learning themselves**

**Katina Zammit and Rosalind Martins**

University of Western Sydney

**Abstract:**

The incorporation of service learning into the tertiary sector is not as easily implemented given the administrative and teaching culture of universities. This paper will present some initial findings in relation to the development of an academic literacy service learning strand within a larger service learning unit. University of Western Sydney 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students were involved as mentors working with 1<sup>st</sup> year, NESB (Non-English speaking background) student mentees, who had difficulty with academic literacy in their first semester of study.

University lecturers, mentors and mentees gained from their experience personally, emotionally, motivationally and academically. Reflections from mentors focused on the personal and academic impact of their experiences. Written reflections rated greater satisfaction as being the most significant impact, while academic support had the greater impact in the online discussion board.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

### ***Learning to be a 'real' teacher only takes place in a classroom. Doesn't it? A Community Engagement Program for Preservice Teachers at the University of Western Sydney.***

**Judith Thistleton-Martin**

University of Western Sydney

**Abstract:**

Traditionally Professional Experience for preservice teachers has been confined to classroom teaching only. It is also desirable, however, that preservice teachers have much broader in-school experiences to deepen their understanding of the educational issues confronting the wider community. By engaging future, or pre-service teachers in service opportunities with schools, other educational settings and with community based organizations, teacher education programs can prepare teachers to meet the challenge which requires them to develop the ability, knowledge, and skills to fulfil an increasing variety of roles and identities. Such placements can also provide unique teaching and learning opportunities which develop relationships distinct from those possible in just the classroom context.

The University of Western Sydney's Community Engagement Program for all preservice teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree implemented a cycle of action and reflection as student teachers worked with school and community members through a process of applying their academic and practical knowledge to school and community needs. At the same time, the preservice teachers were required to reflect on their experiences as they sought to achieve real outcomes for the school and community as well as developing deeper understandings and skills for themselves.

This paper will explore the implementation and impact of this program on the first year students involved.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Mapping Community Health Needs and Priorities: Reflections on Community Engagement from the Tasmanian University Department of Rural Health and the Meander Valley Community**

**Stuart Auckland, Jessica Whelan, Annette Barrett and Katrina Skellern**

University of Tasmania

### **Abstract:**

Pressures on current health care services in rural and regional Australia increase the demands on policy makers to be better informed about the specific health needs of communities. In addition, recent policy developments in regional health services have called for a stronger preventative approach to health care through increased community participation in rural health service delivery and planning. This presents increasing opportunities for universities to engage with communities. It also highlights how an understanding of university community engagement (UCE) processes can assist universities and communities to work collaboratively in capturing the health issues, priorities and actions of a community in an inclusive and empowering way. This paper outlines a recent health mapping project in which the Tasmanian University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) engaged with the Meander Valley municipality in Northern Tasmania. The paper examines key university engagement principles underpinning the collaboration and explores how these were developed and sustained in successfully mapping the health needs and priorities of the community.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## Northern Territory Domestic and Family Violence policy and practice: engagement through evaluation

John Guenther & Ian Falk

John Guenther Cat Conatus & Ian Falk Charles Darwin University

### **Abstract:**

Evaluations have traditionally been used by funding bodies and others to justify the acquittal of funds at the conclusion of a project or to assess the project in terms of meeting a program's objectives. An alternative view is of evaluations as participative processes. Through the participation, the direction of project activities can be influenced, good practices can be supported and promoted and the ongoing development of strategic policy can be informed. This is the approach being used by Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory to evaluate Domestic and Family Violence policies and strategies. The paper's authors have been directly involved in the design and implementation of the evaluations, which are in various stages of progress.

This paper explores the methodological basis for this approach, drawing on relevant evaluation literature. It briefly reviews the processes used for these projects, which include an evaluation of a 'whole of government' strategies and a suite of interventions designed to address family and domestic violence in several remote Indigenous contexts across the Northern Territory. One of the primary concerns of the whole of government evaluation was to consider how government communicates across agencies and how it engages with non-government organisations providing services to clients and vice versa. The focus of the suite of projects is to trial and develop practices that contribute to good outcomes for families and children at risk of family violence. The University's involvement is both as an objective observer and an engaged participant in the processes. Traditionally the capacity to be both objective and engaged is seen as being impossible, undesirable or somehow unethical, a position this paper discusses and takes issue with.

The paper will consider how one university has engaged with community stakeholders at a variety of levels: Commonwealth and Territory government agency representatives; non-government organisations providing services; representatives from communities and clients. The paper will conclude with an assessment of how effective the University has been: a) in engaging meaningfully with these stakeholder groups; b) in influencing the course of strategy and policy according the needs of the various stakeholder groups; and c) in managing the dual role of objective observer/researcher and engaged participant. The paper will provide insights for other research practitioners who may be considering participative approaches to evaluations. It will also be of particular use to organisations and communities that want to build evaluation into their program development.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Parents as teachers in a regional university's curriculum: Emotional learning, rational language and research representation**

**Ruth Beecham and Margaret Waller**

Charles Sturt University

**Abstract:**

The Parent Tutor Scheme partners local mothers of children with significant disabilities with small groups of Charles Sturt University speech pathology students over a six week period each year. The objective is for these mothers, paid at academic tutorial rates, to teach students what it is like to be *them*. Both students and tutors report intimately life-changing learning – but a brand of learning experienced as peculiarly resistant to explication through language. This paper provides the theoretical justification for exploring the learning from this community engagement project through the medium of photography and community participation. It does so in order to argue the case for equitable access to knowledge, when this knowledge is generated from community partnership initiatives.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Process and accountability in university engagement with Indigenous communities**

**Matthew Campbell**

Charles Darwin University

### **Abstract:**

This paper examines community engagement strategies that enable universities to meet the needs of Indigenous people within their regions. Its focus is the Northern Territory (NT). Indigenous community engagement requires specific attention as a subset of community engagement more generally. The paper draws on practical examples from the context of Indigenous community based Land Management to explore Indigenous community engagement.

Background is provided at the outset on community engagement as an area of practice for universities and the potential benefits of improved engagement in relation to the demography of the NT. The following are then explored: the benefits that genuine engagement and partnership can deliver; the factors underpinning community engagement in the Indigenous community context; and, the difficulties in reconciling institutional and community needs.

This paper highlights three key lessons. First, community engagement on the ground in Indigenous communities can lead to benefits being delivered to the university, the students, the Indigenous community and wider NT community through the implementation of successful collaborative practice. Second, community engagement practices need to occur throughout work with Indigenous people involved in community based activities. Finally, community engagement processes must be underpinned by a sound knowledge of Indigenous governance and knowledge production principles, respect, and a commitment to ongoing negotiation over the aims, purpose and practice of the work undertaken.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **Promoting community capacity through university-community engagement: The Deakin University / Department of Human Services (Barwon South West) Partnership**

**Iain Butterworth and Sandy Austin**

Deakin University

### **Abstract:**

The formal Partnership between Deakin University and the Victorian Department of Human Services (Barwon-South Western Region), based in Geelong, aims to bring together the knowledge, experience and resources of the Department and Deakin University for the benefit of the people living in that region, as well as for the mutual benefit of both organisations. A recent review process featured stakeholder interviews and focus groups. A special workshop on university-community engagement was also held for interested stakeholders in late 2006. This was facilitated by Prof. Judith Ramaley, President of Winona State University, during her visit to Deakin University as a Fulbright Visiting Senior Specialist. Visioning and strategic planning have continued throughout 2007.

This paper will describe the efforts and achievements of the Partnership through the complementary lenses of Healthy Cities, health-promoting universities and community capacity. This framework will be used to describe how the Partnership coordinators have used Prof Ramaley's insights to establish a draft Business Plan that espouses a more mature form of collaboration and embraces shared, transformative goals. The paper will describe how the notion of community capacity is being used to evaluate the Partnership's overall contribution to community engagement.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

# Recognising engagement: Examining a regional university's partnerships and practice

Jan Strom, Ros Derret and Justin St Vincent Welch

Southern Cross University

## Abstract

The Office of Regional Engagement at Southern Cross University has undertaken a low cost staff engagement strategy, in order to gather data and build a profile to assist in the development of an inclusive and achievable Regional Engagement Functional Plan. The process is both 'action' and 'learning' oriented and designed to engage staff in the rich possibilities that a culture of engagement can bring.

## Introduction

Southern Cross University (SCU) was established as an independent university in January 1994. The Office of Regional Engagement (ORE) was established in July 2005 to facilitate a core element of the University's Strategic Plan (2005-10), specifically Objective 4 which states: "SCU will take a prime role in the intellectual, economic, environmental, social and cultural development of our region" (Clark 2005, p. 2). ORE is responsible for the development of the University's Regional Engagement Functional Plan (REFP), and is utilising an action learning/action research (ALAR) approach to engage both internal and external participants (See *Appendix 1*). By mid 2007 the 'engagement' process is concluding its third action cycle.

### Engagement analysis

This paper explores three engagement activities that have been undertaken by the ORE at SCU since April 2006 in order to:

Facilitate the development of the SCU Regional Engagement Functional Plan (REFP);

Gain a better understanding of current engagement understanding and practices;

Engender a whole-of-university engagement culture.

SCU embraces the notion that engaged Universities are central to strong communities and the ORE recognises that "for effective engagement to take place a systematic approach to collaboration and leadership is required" (GRC 2007, p. 42). As a consequence the engagement activities undertaken by the ORE between April 2006 and March 2007 were: Deliberative Juries, an Engagement Audit; and an Internal Reference Group. This paper addresses the impacts, both positive and negative, of these activities as well the emergent outcomes and implications for the University's on-going engagement in the region, particularly the further development of partnerships that can contribute to regional prosperity.

The ORE has taken an Action Learning Action Research (ALAR) approach (See *Appendix 2*) whereby the learning both informs and is informed by the action. Action learning is emergent and can help to challenge in-grained organisational behaviours that typify many organisations. Passfield (2001) argues that the power of action learning is that it is flexible; about real life engagement and can be transformative. It takes people "beyond the familiar to the unknown [as it] takes people outside their

comfort zone, provides supportive challenge, builds relationships, raises personal and group awareness, and builds confidence along with competence" (Passfield 2001, p. 39). ORE anticipates that the utilisation of an action learning approach will assist staff to learn more about engagement; and facilitate a culture of engagement whereby staff will embrace the notion that engagement is part of their everyday work, and not in addition to it.

## Framework

SCU sought a low cost entry model for data gathering and analysis that may lead to more sophisticated methodologies in the future. Such strategies and the SCU experience generally, provides valuable information sharing with other institutions, while contributing to the development of a quality management framework for university engagement. An ALAR approach is being used to enhance learning and practice by monitoring current activity and modifying as appropriate. ALAR also assists in identifying and prioritising future engagement activities and opportunities for the university to contribute to regional prosperity.

## The Jury

Deliberative Juries were held at each campus (Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tweed/Gold Coast); and comprised a mix of randomly selected academic and general staff. Evidence was heard from two panels of 'expert witnesses', one being from the University and the other from the region. The University panel comprised the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Head of the ORE. The external panels were campus specific and comprised various sub-regional business, industry and community representatives who "spoke about their perspective on the significance and challenges facing SCU with respect to regional engagement" (Fisher 2006, p. 7). According to Fisher (2006) staff really appreciated the inclusion of external 'expert witnesses' and feedback from the participant survey indicated that it is vital for staff (and the University) to hear these points of view. Garnett (2004) states that participation is the key element of the Jury method because it adds depth and width to the decision making process. While Garlick (2001) argues strongly in support of such engagement with key players and organizations, to assist in awareness raising and to encourage collaboration between local stakeholder and industry groups, and the University.

Key learning from Jury action process revealed the need to allow enough time for Jurors to hear, explore and deliberate upon the divergent community views presented. It was also evident that the facilitation of Jury deliberation needed to ensure that participants embraced a University wide perspective rather than focusing upon the "issues that beset them in their [daily] roles" (Fisher 2006, p. 10). And that participant response to the process changed over the course of the Jury. At the commencement 52% of participants felt positive about the impending Jury, this opinion may have been based on background material distributed provided the week before. When surveyed following the Jury, 80% of participants felt the activity had great potential "to contribute to SCU improving its regional engagement activity" (Fisher 2006, p. 11).

Other positive outcomes from the process included the emergence of common themes from the three Juries endorsing a whole-of-university engagement approach. Following the 'evidence hearing' a draft report was circulated to all Jurors by email, and after some minor adjustments these recommendations were made for inclusion in the REFP:

- Make SCU readily accessible and visible in the region
- Reward staff for their contribution to regional engagement
- Raise the profile of regional engagement within SCU
- Provide regional leadership
- Make SCU the first preference for local students and training providers.

Carson & Gelber (2001) argue that a element of the Jury process is that their recommendations should be implemented. If they are not, then the decision makers must publicly provide sufficient grounds to explain why they will not be implemented. Some Jurors had expressed concern regarding leadership commitment to the process and the resultant recommendations. In this instance they were unfounded as the Jury process had the full and active support of both the Vice Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor and the ORE embraced the above recommendations which formed the basis of the University's REFP.

Two key issues that did emerge were the University's apparent inaccessibility to the community; and a general misunderstanding regarding what Universities do. Many Jurors said the engagement of people from the region was a key element in the process that may help to change perceptions; strengthen relationships; and improve accessibility between key community members and the University. In turn, this could contribute to the development of mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships for the region that could assist in "transform[ing] Australia's industry-based economy into a knowledge-based economy" (Shadbolt & Kay 2005, p. 168).

### **The Audit**

In late 2006 the ORE commenced the second ALAR cycle by undertaking an audit to build upon the learning gained through the Jury process. Garlick (2001) emphasises the importance of taking a baseline audit as a means of establishing the range and impact of engagement activity undertaken by academic and non-academic individuals. Twenty-five work units (faculties, schools, centres, colleges, etc) were identified and asked to participate in the Audit and all but one submitted a return. Completion of the Audit was linked to 1.5% of the individual work units funding for 2007. Such audits can assist in building a profile of organisational activities; increase stakeholder understanding of organisational breadth and diversity; provide a means of evaluation; and build collaborative relationships and support within an organisation. (Elliot, Sandeman & Winchester 2005; Garlick 2001; LaBerge & Svendsen 2000; Svendsen 1999).

Audit participants were asked to identify their activities, regional partners and the impacts of their engagement. An electronic Audit pro-forma was used to record the information and as a prompt, examples of regional engagement activities were included to assist participants. The analysis matched the resultant data against lists of prioritised activities that make up the four (4) key action areas as identified in the REFP. The learning from the Audit will assist in developing a regional engagement framework that the ORE and individual work units can build upon while providing a whole of university perspective on cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary linkages. Two additional positive outcomes were the identification of individuals and work units whose activity can be celebrated as exemplifying best practice in regional engagement; and the provision of baseline data to inform the development of a reward/incentive system.

Post audit reflection also revealed a number of challenges that can shape future action and inter-action between the ORE and other University work units. Despite the

guidance provided in the Audit pro-forma, some respondents were still uncertain as to what constituted a regional engagement activity. Most University work units will need 'training' to maximise their understanding of regional engagement issues as they relate to their work unit's core activities, for example, teaching and learning, workload models, staff incentives and public access to University resources. This last point reinforced a key issue identified in the Jury process, being the need for the University to develop a strong regional communication strategy in order to reduce the incidence of unrealisable community expectations.

### **The Internal Reference Group**

The purpose of the Internal Reference Group (IRG), the third action cycle, is to provide a communication and referral capacity for the SCU regional engagement framework. The IRG will meet on a quarterly basis and its members have been nominated by each work unit head. Some members represent faculties rather than single schools, and this can be problematic when their activities, including engagement, are conducted on more than one campus. These same people were also responsible for collecting and compiling the Audit responses.

The challenge for ORE will be in ensuring that the IRG remains a dynamic conduit, and that representative members use the IRG to enable open two-way communication between the ORE, other IRG members and their own work units. Kemmis & McTaggart (2003) argue that this allows participants to see things 'inter-subjectively', that is from one's own point of view and from the point of view of others. At the initial meeting IRG members also provided feedback on the recently completed Audit, current engagement activity, and assisted ORE in selecting examples of regional engagement activities that they believe are worthy of celebration, for display on the ORE website and in other forums.

To work effectively the IRG, like the Jury, will also need to be able to make recommendations, perhaps about key operational issues, that are taken seriously. ORE must be able to communicate with individual units via a single contact person who can filter and disseminate information and opportunities, particularly to and from academics. Due to the distributed nature of the SCU campuses, cohesive communications will be critical.

A uniform understanding of regional engagement is also essential and this may require work unit heads and staff to be 'trained' through an ORE presence at their work unit meetings. A part of this 'training' will be to encourage the development of a work unit focused on developing a regional engagement policy that will address the particular characteristics of each unit but also take into account the distinctiveness of each SCU campus. To maintain the dynamism of the IRG it may be useful to encourage key individuals to mentor others and also to conduct a follow-up Audit in two years time.

### **Moving forward**

Garlick states that "the field of organisation learning and action research embodies principles of collaborative sharing of information ... that transcend the structures of the individual institution"(2001, p.15), and the ALAR process undertaken by the ORE supports this notion. Additionally it is envisaged that these engagement processes will also assist the University to contribute to regional prosperity by developing partnerships, with business, industry and government.

While the ORE continues to encourage a culture of engagement across the University via activities such as these; each process has revealed evidence of existing engagement and transformation. Some individuals and work units are moving beyond the 'traditional' core elements of teaching and learning; and research; to embrace a culture of active and integrative engagement.

Many in the University, from the Vice Chancellor to participant Jurors recognise that in order to manifest cultural and organisational change, and to truly maximise the benefits of engagement, engagement must be

"a characteristic of a University's policy and practice ... reflected in the responsibilities given to senior staff, rewards and incentive mechanisms, career structure and promotion criteria, the learning experience of students and the number and sustainability of relationships with organisations external to it" (Goldsworthy 2006, p. 2).

These elements will be critical in the next stages of this on-going process.

## Conclusion

Elliot (2005) identifies an audit, a steering group and dedicated resources, such as the ORE, as being key elements for a University engagement strategy. Consultation has been the hallmark of gaining an understanding of the SCU's current engagement profile. It has used the processes outlined in this paper and continues to ensure there is effective communication through e-newsletters, website (<http://engagement.scu.edu.au>), discoverSCU electronic newsletter and hard copy that is distributed throughout the University's footprint.

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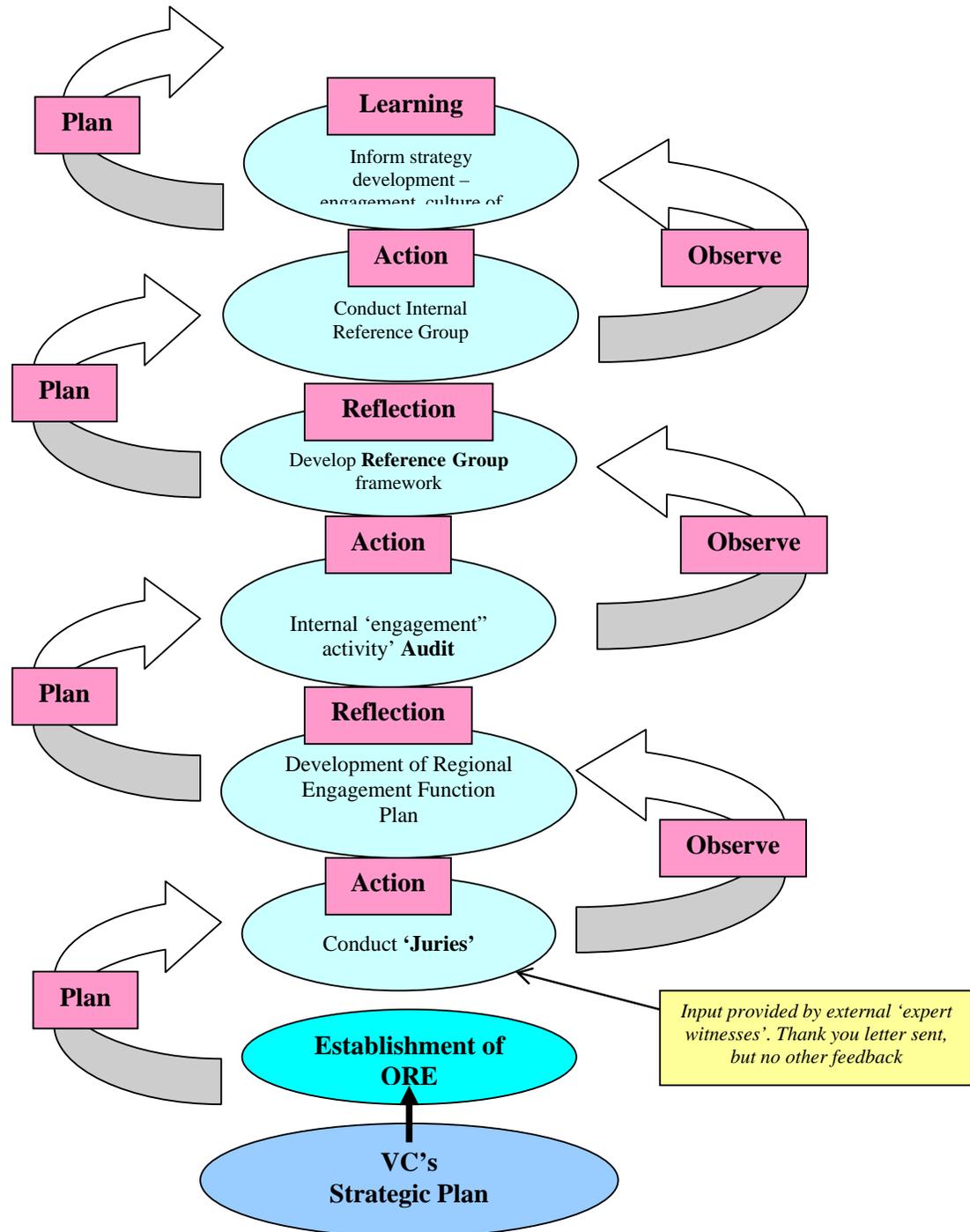
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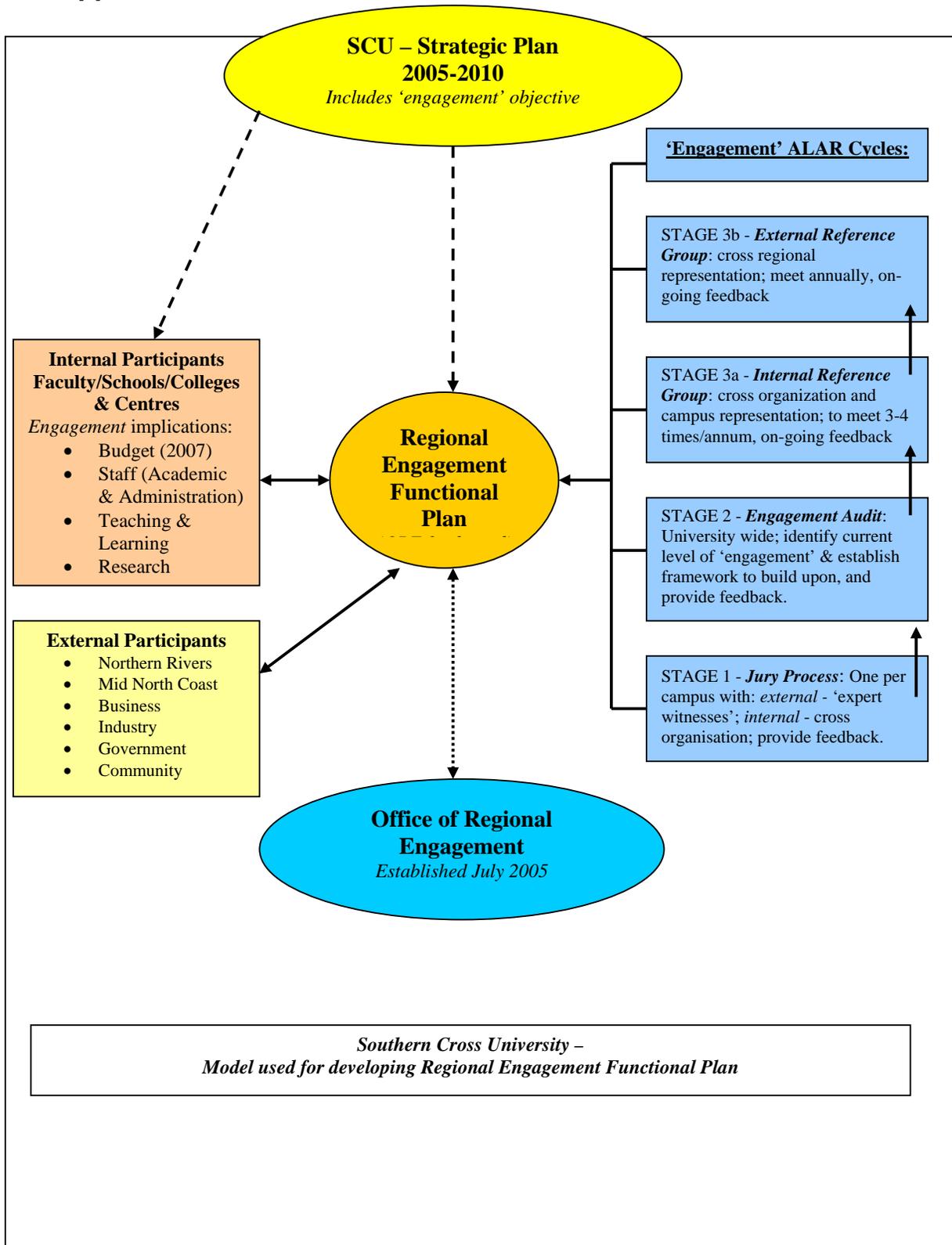
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**Appendix 1**

**Action Research/ Action Learning Framework**



## Appendix 2



# Reflections on community engagement for transforming praxis: Lessons from the Learning and Teaching Creatively Project

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University of Wollongong

## **Abstract:**

The Learning and Teaching Creatively project involved collaboration between the Bundanon Trust, the University of Wollongong's Faculty of Education and Shoalhaven Campus and the Australasian Occupational Science Centre. The aim of the project was provide opportunity for Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) students at the Shoalhaven Campus to experience the creative process, thereby enabling them to develop ways of facilitating creativity in primary school students. Additionally, the project was designed to initiate a long term partnership between the Shoalhaven Campus and Bundanon, a highly valued internationally renowned 'living arts centre' located in the Shoalhaven. The Knowledge Building Community and occupational science, both of which use community engagement to link theory and practice, provided frameworks for the project. The project was funded by a University of Wollongong Community Engagement Grant and in kind contributions from the partners.

The project demonstrated the efficacy of living as a learner, which is a key component of the Knowledge Building Community. It also reinforced principles that underpin occupational science, such as the critical relationship between what people do and the context in which they do it, and how doing can be transformative. The project outcomes, as revealed by students' diaries and reflections from the project team members include benefits at the personal and community level. Additionally, the project has fostered a climate for educational and creative aspirations which are considered vital for regional development in the shift towards innovation and knowledge-based economies.

## **Introduction**

Learning and Teaching Creatively was a community engagement project involving collaboration between the Bundanon Trust, the University of Wollongong's Faculty of Education and Shoalhaven Campus and the Australasian Occupational Science Centre. The aim of the project was to provide opportunity for Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) students at the Shoalhaven Campus to experience the creative process, thereby enabling them to develop ways of facilitating creativity in primary school students. Additionally, the project was designed to initiate a long term partnership between the University and Bundanon for future regional development.

The contexts for Learning and Teaching Creatively were the Shoalhaven Campus in Nowra, Arthur Boyd's Bundanon, a large rural property on the Shoalhaven River and primary schools within the Shoalhaven region on the south coast of NSW. The project participants were twenty two students who comprised the 2006 cohort of the Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) pre-service teacher education program at the Shoalhaven Campus. The project was funded by a University of Wollongong Community Engagement Grant and in kind contributions from the collaborating organisations. It was conducted from August to November 2006.

This paper describes how Learning and Teaching Creatively was integrated into the Shoalhaven Graduate Diploma of Education (GDE) curriculum and shares student comments about their project learning experiences. Included in the paper are reflections from the project team members on creatively teaching about creativity and on how the collaboration will contribute to regional development. The paper begins with a description of the organisations which collaborated in the project and a brief outline of the GDE program at Shoalhaven.

### **Collaborators in the project**

The Bundanon Trust was established in 1993 to develop a 'living arts' centre from the Boyd family's Bundanon property and their art collection, all of which were gifted to the Australian nation by Arthur Boyd. The mission of the Trust is to promote the practice and enjoyment of the arts and to promote education and research in the arts. To this end, the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre was established by the Bundanon Trust to facilitate discovery learning and experiential programs to foster creativity as well as an appreciation and enjoyment of the natural and cultural environments (Bundanon Trust, n.d.).

The Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) program at the University of Wollongong's Shoalhaven Campus was directly involved in the project. This program uses a Knowledge Building Community (KBC) which is a learning environment that supports the continuous social construction of knowledge. The KBC model at Shoalhaven is based on the Four Pillars of Professional Wisdom, which include: taking responsibility for one's own and other KBC members' learning; using the principles of Problem Based Learning to identify and solve professional problems; being a collaborative learner; and becoming a reflective practitioner. Community learning and school-based learning are incorporated into the KBC model at Shoalhaven (Cambourne et al., 2003).

The Shoalhaven Campus was established in Nowra in 2000 as part of a collaborative regional development initiative of the University of Wollongong, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Shoalhaven City Council. Not only does Shoalhaven Campus bring university education to the Shoalhaven region, it also plays a role in regional development by fostering innovation and commits itself to inspiring imagination in the Shoalhaven (Collins & Stevenson, 2004).

The Australasian Occupational Science Centre (AOSC) is a unique community education and research centre supported by the Shoalhaven community and the University of Wollongong. It was founded in December 2004 as a community initiative and is located on the Shoalhaven Campus. Occupational science, which provides the AOSC theoretical framework, generates knowledge and understanding about human occupation - the everyday things that people do to occupy their time - and the various influences that shape human occupation (Wicks, 2006). The AOSC program stream that focuses on people's participation in creative occupations was particularly relevant for this project (University of Wollongong, n.d.).

The project team consisted of the Bundanon Education & Public Programs Manager, the Co ordinator of the Shoalhaven Graduate Diploma of Education program, the Head of Shoalhaven Campus and the AOSC Director, who was the project leader. The team members were assisted by two Bundanon Education Officers, an artist-in-residence at Bundanon and two Shoalhaven artists, all of whom engaged with the UOW students. Teachers in the Shoalhaven primary schools supervised the students

transforming their project learning experiences into appropriate classroom practice during their final practicum.

### **The Shoalhaven GDE curriculum**

When compared with the traditional approaches to pre-service teacher education, a KBC mode of delivery entails reversing the flow or direction of student learning. For example, rather than attending lectures and tutorials during which theoretical concepts are introduced and explored, students experience situated or contextualised learning in authentic classroom contexts for 2-3 days per week (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the classrooms, the students assume the roles of sophisticated apprentice, supporting classroom teachers in the daily ebb and flow of school life, and novice anthropologist, using the techniques of scientific anthropology to develop grounded theories of how classrooms and schools work (Cambourne et al, 2003).

For the other 2-3 days per week, students and a lecturer, specifically skilled in this form of teaching, meet on Campus as members of a Knowledge Building Community. At these meetings, students are expected to construct their own grounded theories of what they witness and experience in schools and are continually making sense (and re-making sense) of their anthropological data. Students are also expected to use the prescribed information sources, textbooks and papers generated by acknowledged experts in the field, as well as theoretical frameworks for this process of making sense. (Cambourne et al, 2003). The three phases of the project were planned to integrate into this existing GDE program.

### **Integration of the project into the GDE curriculum**

The first two phases of the project were designed to provide the students with opportunities to make connections and find relationships between artists, their own work and their response to their physical and non physical environments. Students were also encouraged to make a link between creative thinking and problem solving, as revealed in creative processes. In phase one, two Shoalhaven artists engaged with students in the Home Room, describing their work and work practices. During these sessions the students also participated in activities of an open-ended nature so they had little preconceived idea about what the task end result should be. For example, students undertook an exercise of drawing on a large scale, blind folded, whilst exposed to different types of music. The students were encouraged to realise their emotive response to each piece, using a charcoal stick in one hand, and an eraser in the other. Using the blindfolds and the music helped the students to become engrossed in the act of expression, without concern for the resulting image or any judgements on the merits of the result. This activity encouraged them to discover and experiment, leading to enjoyment, confidence and learning advancement.

Phase two of the project involved two, two day retreats at the Boyd Education Centre where the students participated in a variety of creative tasks, individually and in groups, using diverse media. Two Bundanon Education Officers and one of the local artists provided the support and guidance during these experiences of personal creativity, and a Bundanon artist-in-residence shared her studio with the students. At the Centre, students worked collaboratively on a large scale artwork, which enabled them to work expressively and explore a large variety of marks, textures and materials, and methods of application.

The students' final school-based practicum was the third phase of the project. In this practicum, they were expected to incorporate their new understanding about creativity into the creative arts programs for primary school students, which they designed, implemented and evaluated.

In order to demonstrate the degree to which they had achieved competency in the 4<sup>th</sup> Pillar of Wisdom, students were required to keep and share reflective journals throughout their participation in the project. The students also used an electronic chat room to share their emerging thoughts and ideas about how their experience of the creative process would influence their future praxis.

### **The students' experience of learning creatively**

The effectiveness of the project in enabling students to experience the transformative potential of creativity is clearly demonstrated by comments such as "unshackling" and "enlightening", which were recorded after the first retreat. One student stated the retreat provided "an opportunity to let us use our imagination and creative skills we never knew we had". Another student recognised it was "a great experience for beginning teachers. She stated that "we learnt the importance of being free and having fun with art".

The following extract from an electronic chat room discussion provides evidence a student could make sense of the project experience and relate it to the prescribed texts: "But the most important thing was I was doing exactly what Langer (2005) discusses in her book... Not worrying about everyone else, not bringing any expectations, having complete mindfulness. Just enjoying the process and the journey."

A reflective diary extract reveals how one student incorporated her project experience into her school-based practicum.

I took a whole session Art lesson today...I had it all planned out, starting with talking about the differences between pencil and charcoal, then showing various pictures of mine and others' artworks, then having the kids experiment themselves. First of all, I had the students draw a picture with pencil. We were interrupted half-way through by a blimp in the sky. I allowed the students to go out and have a look, because they had never seen one before. When they came in, I suggested to some who hadn't started yet that they might want to draw the blimp they'd just seen. After drawing something with pencil, I had the class use charcoal on a fresh sheet of paper. They were to draw the exact same thing they'd just drawn, to experience first hand the differences between charcoal and pencil.

Such comments were enthusiastically received by the project team as they revealed how the students were translating the theory and their experiences into practice.

### **Reflections on teaching creatively**

Marcel de Roo, one of the local artists working with the students, believes the facilities, environment, history and seclusion of the Boyd Education Centre could not be underestimated with regards to supporting the delivery of the program and its

lasting effect on the students. He found the students were willing to explore ideas, concepts, materials and mediums. He also observed the students fully immersing themselves in the creative sessions without distraction and appreciating the physical environment in which they exist and how that can have an affect on their creative responses. De Roo maintains the intensive group experiences maximised their learning advancement, specifically their understanding of creative processes (personal communication, April 2007).

Brian Cambourne, the GDE program co-ordinator, evaluated how effectively the learning creatively experience “spilled” over into each student’s conceptual thinking, as revealed in the assessment tasks they negotiated and completed, and in the lessons they delivered in the classrooms during their final practicum. In comparison with the 2005 GDE cohort, which did not have the Bundanon experience, Cambourne reports the 2006 students showed a higher level of confidence in their approach to teaching the creative and performing arts syllabus (personal communication, April 2007). On reflection, it seems the synergy between philosophies underpinning the KBC and the Boyd Education Centre was an important influence on the project’s success.

A Bundanon staff member described the project as “unique” and “inspirational” and having a strong impression on student concepts and aesthetic development. She stated that “watching the students realise their own artistic potential was fantastic. The students really came out of their shells and pushed the boundaries with their art.” (Criddle, 2006). Simone de Haan, the Bundanon programs manager, observed the students bond through the experience, on human and professional levels and believes key factors were the influence of the special location as well as a learning environment in which nurturing of effective communication was seen to be primary (personal communication, October, 2006).

Alison Wicks, AOSC Director, believes that a key factor in the successful outcomes of the project was the transformative potential of participating in occupations that are purposeful and meaningful in an environment that is both relevant, supportive and culturally sensitive (Whiteford & Wright St Clair, 2005). From an occupational perspective, the project reinforced research identifying creativity as a process-oriented experience that can be self actualizing (Blanche, 2007) and that community is an important support for doing creative occupations, which can be a significant source of meaning (Dickie, 2004).

### **Reflections on community engagement for regional development**

Head of Shoalhaven Campus, Robbie Collins, views the project as a vehicle for promoting regional development. First, creativity has been identified as “the main internal driver in the knowledge economy” in the regional development process (Garlick & Pryor, 2002, p. 13). And second, the nascent relationship with Bundanon will create a ‘knowde’ in the knowledge economy which will support future community engagement and foster further regional development (Collins & Stevenson, 2004). Furthermore, Collins believes not only have the students benefited from the insights gained from their project experiences, but that they carry these forward into the region as they work in schools and then potentially link their students with both Bundanon and the Campus. In so doing, they will be inspiring educational and creative aspiration in Shoalhaven. As well, collaboration between Bundanon and the Campus has already fostered conversations about further shared initiatives, such as sharing Bundanon’s artists-in-residence program with the Campus community who attend guest speaker nights and film nights (Collins, personal communication, April 2007).

## Conclusion

The Learning and Teaching Creatively project produced positive outcomes at the individual, community and regional levels and was successful from learning, teaching and occupational perspectives. The 2006 students' knowledge and understanding of creativity was enhanced by doing creativity, and by doing it in a supportive context, outside of the traditional classroom setting. Now, as qualified teachers, they can implement improved creative arts programs within Shoalhaven schools. Key aspects of the project have been incorporated into the Shoalhaven GDE program for future cohorts. In fact, based on the project outcomes, the Faculty of Education has approved two retreats at Bundanon and sessional teaching by local artists for the 2007 cohort. The project has also increased public awareness and utilisation of the Bundanon Education Centre, which, although world renowned, has been relatively unknown in the local area. In addition, the Bundanon-Shoalhaven Campus relationship has strengthened as a result of the project and others ways of collaborating are being explored.

Through its community engagement, the Learning and Teaching Creatively project has contributed to cultivation of a rich climate of creativity within the Shoalhaven community. Such a climate is critical for regional development given that creativity is considered vital in the shift to innovation and knowledge-based economies (Australia Council, 2005; PMSEIC, 20005).

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## Researching the inspiration: An empirical research project on the Inspire Mentor Program, Flinders University

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**Abstract:** The Inspire Mentor Program was created to support the Adelaide Southern Region to increase school retention rates and to encourage a stronger culture of learning for young people who have or are disengaged from formal education. Flinders University students act as mentors to young people at risk of disengaging from their education to support and encourage them in their studies, and to see further education as an option. Inspire is one of the University's key community engagement strategies. This paper will explore the early stages of a two-year research project about the mentoring experience from the perspective of the university student mentors. The primary research objective is to understand what influences the capacity of university students to provide positive and continuous mentoring relationships:

Identify the opportunities and challenges for university students in developing and sustaining a mentoring relationship.

Examine ways of improving the Inspire community engagement strategy to support the needs of university student mentors.

One of the key indicators for the success of mentoring programs is continuity of the mentor-mentee relationship. This requires a focus on the experiences of mentors, which is the primary concern of this research project. Understanding what influences consistency in the Mentors' capacity to develop positive mentoring relationships has many dimensions. These dimensions include: policy framework, training, acknowledging colonisation and Indigenous Sovereignty, resources, mentoring support, environment (school, class etc), motivation, resilience, and problem-solving/initiative. Skills include working collaboratively (with multiple stakeholders), practical and logistical considerations, and satisfaction. The research is significant at a number of levels. At an academic level, there is a gap in Australian empirical research conducted on mentoring, particularly university to school mentoring. The experience of mentoring will provide insights into one of the pathways that university students take in entering the workforce. In addition, the skills developed in the transfer of knowledge and learning within the mentoring relationship will provide information about how young adults (the mentors) develop characteristics such as resilience, confidence and efficacy. As mentors within a community engagement program, their experiences will be critical in understanding how universities utilise resources (eg the student body) to support community capacity building, widening participation and community engagement activities. At the service provision level, this kind of formal mentoring is quite new to Australian Universities and, although program reporting is conducted, there has been little evidence-based research upon which to benchmark or develop services.

### Introduction

This paper is a work in progress to flag the commencement of a two-year empirically-based research project on the experiences of university student mentors. I will briefly trace the literature on mentoring, which reveals a gap in two significant areas. Firstly, evidence based research on the benefits gained from mentoring programs (eg

Gardinar 2005a), and secondly evidence based research on what mentors require for a long-term commitment to mentoring. The literature indicates that mentoring relationships must continue on a consistent basis for a minimum of 12 months before any significant impact can be measured. This leads to the research question: what do mentors require to make a long-term commitment to mentoring? A small qualitative study by Jones (2006) gives an early indication of what the research project may find. The research methodology will be briefly outlined.

## **Literature review**

I have argued elsewhere (Koerner & Harris in press) how a University-based mentoring program can be a key strategy for Higher Education community engagement. This paper will consider the benefits of mentoring programs, and the key factors involved for the sustainability of mentoring programs.

In a media release Maria Gardinar (2005a) stated that her research report into a mentoring program for 70 early career female academic staff is possibly the only one of its kind due to the lack of research that quantifies the benefits of mentoring. There is a burgeoning body of research in the United States, however. Most of this research is focused on mentoring programs for disadvantaged young people, which we will discuss further below. Gardinar's research consisted of a 7-year longitudinal study that provides evidence that the benefits of mentoring are both real and substantial for both the individuals involved and the institution (Gardinar 2005b). Gardinar's research found that the women who received mentoring had a higher rate of promotion, produced one and a half times the number of high quality publications and received over four times the grant income of their equivalent colleagues who did not participate in the program.

Interestingly, Gardinar noted that there was a considerable variation in the way that the mentoring sessions took place. The pairs negotiated how they would work together themselves, and it included a range of approaches from short informal conversations to scheduled longer intensive meetings. The real benefits did not show until the end of the first year, which is consistent with other findings in youth-focused mentor programs (Sipe, date unknown, Hartley 2004). The above research shows that it is the consistency and longevity of mentoring relationships that give results. Gardinar's research provides excellent evidence that the mentoring relationships do work. Ten years prior, an impact study in the United States on disadvantaged young people who were matched with a mentor, compared to a control group waiting to be matched provided clear evidence that young people could benefit from having a long-term mentor (Tierney, Grossman & Resch 1995). Their findings included that the participants were 46 per cent less likely than the controls to initiate drug use and 27 per cent less likely to initiate alcohol use. Further, they were nearly one-third less likely to hit someone and had 50 per cent fewer days of school absenteeism than the control group.

While these studies focus on the participants of mentor programs designed for very different target groups (early career female academics and disadvantaged young people), they both found that continuity and longevity of mentoring relationships are essential for any significant benefits that may be experienced by the mentee's in the program.

The literature cited in MacCallum and Beltman (1999) on school based mentoring in Australia indicates that outcomes for young people who were at risk of dis-engaging from formal education included: academic improvement, increased achievements for particular subjects, increased retention and increased participation in class room or

school activities. Other benefits included personal and social development, such as increased feelings of self worth and self-confidence. MacCallum & Beltman found that this resulted in the students being more willing to attempt school tasks. As noted elsewhere (Koerner & Harris 2007), the observations from the partners of the Inspire Mentor Program at Flinders University in 2004, 2005 and 2006 concurred with these findings. These findings are based on evaluation reports, however, and demonstrate the lack of empirically based research on mentoring programs. It is important to note that research by Herrera (2005, p.26) on school-based mentoring programs in the United States is more reserved citing that the benefits may be limited and further research is necessary to draw any conclusions.

The literature agrees that benefits can be gained from mentoring, and research is starting to substantiate this claim (eg Gardinar 2005, Tierney, Grossman and Resch 1995, Sipe, MacCallum and Beltman 1999). The literature also agrees that a minimum of 12 months is required for evidence of any benefits for the mentee to start to show. These two findings require mentoring relationships that are consistent and continue for a minimum of twelve months if not longer. Therefore, the key indicator of a successful mentor program is actually held by the mentor's ongoing engagement with their mentoring relationship. While there is a rapidly increasing amount of documentation regarding good practice for mentor programs, and the benefits gained for mentee's, the question still remains: what keeps mentors engaged in a mentoring program for more than 12 months?

This is the question behind this two-year research project that commenced in early 2007. The research will focus on mentors from the Inspire Mentor Program that operates out of Flinders University in partnership with 35 primary schools, secondary schools, alternative education programs and community-based partners such as community centres, The Smith Family and smaller community based mentoring programs in the Southern Suburbs of Adelaide. Helen Jones (2006) conducted a small qualitative research project on the Inspire mentor program in 2006 that we will discuss in some detail prior to focusing on the inquiry at hand.

Jones' research was based on qualitative data collected from a small sample of six long-term mentors in the Inspire Mentor Program. The project was designed to gain insight of the mentors' experiences as mentors, as well as of the program itself. Jones used the concept of social capital in her analysis and identified factors that affected the mentors' persistence with the program on a long-term basis. Jones uses Putnam's definition of social capital to form the basis of her analysis. Putnam defines social capital as: "...features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1995: 664-65, cited in Jones 2006). Due to the small scope of her paper, Jones focused on two aspects of the material gained through face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews. The first was the mentoring experience, including the mentor's motivations to participate in the program and secondly the reasons that each mentor persisted in their role on a long-term basis.

Jones found that most of the mentors were motivated by a combination of altruistic and personal/career development factors. Jones argues that :"[b]y becoming mentors these students were engaging in new social networks, and a key component of social networks is reciprocity" (Jones 2006, p.8). The reciprocity is general in nature, without a specific outcome that is expected within a particular time frame.

Of particular importance is the impact that the mentors can have in schools with poor retention rates. Jones argues that the literature on relational support provided by teachers to students can be applied to the mentors and is a crucial element to

success for schools with student populations from disadvantaged backgrounds (Jones 2006, p.12). She concludes that her research supports the need to have adequate support in place for mentors, particularly in their first few months in the program. Jones found that the reciprocal outcomes for the six mentors she interviewed demonstrated the important features of long-term commitment to the mentoring program: “Developing trusting relationships with students as well as supportive social networks within the schools are imperative for successful long term mentoring” (Jones 2006, p.25).

The usefulness of Jones’ paper in the context of community engagement for the tertiary sector is this: by increasing the experience of social capital of the mentors (as future professionals, as community members and as representatives of the University in addition to being a resource for the mentee’s and the organizations that the mentee’s participate in), institutional partnerships are established and fostered between the University and the partner organizations involved. This increases community capacity at an institutional/organisational level, as well as increasing the individual capacity of the mentors, mentee’s (as community members) and the professionals in the partner organizations (i.e. teaching staff, youth workers and community workers). An evaluation of the Mentor Marketplace Programs (that fund Inspire through Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, or FaCSIA), reported that mentor programs could build community capacity by contributing to the capacity of participating communities to develop mentoring projects and by developing community capacity more broadly (Wilczynski, Ross, Schwartzkoff, Rintoul & Reed-Gilbert, 2004).

## **Methodology**

Given that the funding body are implementing detailed quantitative data to track the impact of the mentoring program for the participating young people, this research project will focus on collecting qualitative data from the mentors to determine what keeps mentors involved in the program for a long-term commitment. The literature shows that the most important factor required for a successful mentoring program is the long-term commitment from the mentor. This factor leads to the research question: what keeps mentors involved in a mentor program long-term?

## **Research Method**

The research methods include journal entries and interviews with Inspire mentors to provide data relating to their ongoing experiences over a two-year period. This will provide qualitative information about the induction, development and exit of the mentors within the program.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is a work in progress to flag the commencement of a two-year empirically-based research project on the experiences of university student mentors. I have traced the literature on mentoring, and have identified a gap in two significant areas. Firstly, evidence based research on the benefits gained from mentoring programs (eg Gardinar 2005a), and secondly evidence based research on what mentors require for a long-term commitment to mentoring. The literature showed that mentoring relationships must continue on a consistent basis for a minimum of 12 months before any significant impact can be measured. This lead to the research question: what do

mentors require to make a long-term commitment to mentoring? The small research project conducted by Jones (2006) gave an early indication of the experiences and needs of mentors. She identified a combination of altruistic and personal/career development motivations that drew the mentors to participate in the program. In conclusion, the research project should contribute to our understanding of what mentors require to remain involved in a long-term commitment to mentor programs. In turn, this will be significant in its application for practitioners of mentor programs, and possibly for future implementation of well designed and researched mentor programs by Universities as a strategy for community engagement.

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## Shared Agendas – finding the inaugural project to tie the knot

### David Ensor and Catherina Wallace

La Trobe University

#### **Abstract:**

La Trobe University has a network of seven campuses – with five of these being in regional Victoria. The University is actively involved as a community partner in developing our communities – it has a stated commitment to align with community aspirations and challenges.

La Trobe has a history of piloting new models to support collaboration between universities and business. This has had a particular focus on SME / university partnership models which have been recognised in the recent DEST KPA/Philips Knowledge Transfer Report and at the national B-HERT Awards (Award for Best Regional Collaboration – 2005).

In line with a national trend of reduced student interest in the sciences, the University has suffered low levels of enrolment in engineering programs. This poses a challenge for communities grappling with severe skills shortages and for the University in terms of course viability planning.

Having identified a clear community need for specific skills alongside a related University program with declining enrolments, a program was launched to:

- develop industry-partner scholarship funding.
- encourage industry to initiate and implement student recruitment and schools partnership programs.
- use a scholarship program to initiate and develop broader partnerships between the University and external stakeholders.
- develop a framework for an inaugural partnership based on community and university needs and resources.
- increase industry-based learning opportunities and alumni mentoring of students.

The program has developed a passionate network of industry partners who actively pursue solutions to their skills challenges, while growing the network for industry and university collaboration. The enrolment in the engineering program has increased and national sector bodies are working to extend its reach. Research programs have been scoped in support of the partnerships.

A model of has been developed that aligns community engagement objectives with university marketing imperatives within accepted Project Management Cycle frameworks. Effective alignment of university and community collaboration is important to develop the inaugural basis of a sustainable relationship that will develop mutual responsibility and commitment. This program has piloted one such model.

*The presentation will highlight the challenges of developing the program as well as exploring the key drivers that have led to its current success.*

## Introduction

There are many and varied ways of connecting with industry and community and, as such, there can be no prescriptive model that provides the practitioner with a common framework to deal with community engagement. This paper will examine a particular model for the university sector in engaging with both external and internal communities that leads to meaningful and tangible outcomes – tying the knot.

In undertaking a literature review of community and engagement, there is a wealth of information with many sites on the internet dedicated to Community Development and engagement. Some organisations have approached the challenge of engaging with communities by developing procedures and toolkits to enable their practitioners to undertake effective engagement. One such procedure, "The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 Community Planning: Advice Note 5" identifies levels of engagement, and key steps that partners can take to effectively engage with their communities.<sup>1</sup> Another publication "Community Engagement – What is it and why is it Important?"<sup>2</sup> attempts to define community engagement and the many and varied approaches to community engagement dependant on the different wants and needs of the individual players. The Victorian Local Government Association has also developed the "Community Consultation Resource Guide – the 'red book'" to assist their members to engage in consultation with communities.<sup>3</sup>

In developing a model for engagement within the Office of Industry and Community Engagement at La Trobe University, engagement is defined as the process for working with communities to identify problems, needs and wants and develop solutions.

La Trobe University has a network of seven campuses – with five of these situated within regional communities. Engaging with all of the diverse communities within the university catchment involves both time and commitment by the University to advance its communities through learning, teaching and research.

In order to have a better understanding and appreciation of the collaborative perspective of engagement we need to be aware of the different linkages within the model of engagement. It is also important to identify the different levels of partnership development. Vic Health identified the following model by A. Himmelman.<sup>4</sup>

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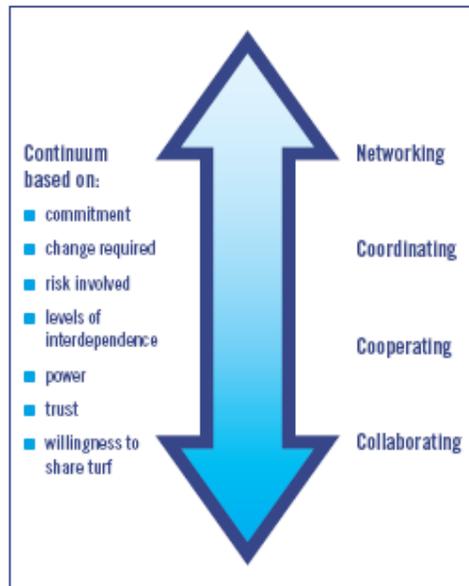
<sup>1</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2004](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2004)

<sup>2</sup> [www.londoncouncils.gov.uk](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

<sup>4</sup> Himmelman, A. 2001 "On Coalitions and the Transformation of Power Relations: Collaborative Betterment and Collaborative Empowerment', American Journal of Community Psychology, Vol 29, No 2, pp 277-284 in [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/FAct%20Sheet\\_Partnerships.pdf](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/FAct%20Sheet_Partnerships.pdf)

The following diagram and terms explore the concept of partnerships more.



**Figure 1: Himmelman, , 2001 - Partnership Development Model**

This diagram highlights the different levels that a group may work through in developing a partnership. However it should be noted that not all partnerships would necessarily move through this continuum. This partnership matrix identifies the various stages including networking, establishing relationships, gaining commitment, identifying and recognising other possible stakeholders and managing expectations of the partners.

It is at the point between cooperation and collaboration where a level of trust and sharing has been established that projects are most likely to be identified. It is during this part of the process that parties have become engaged and are most willing to collaborate to meet a common goal.

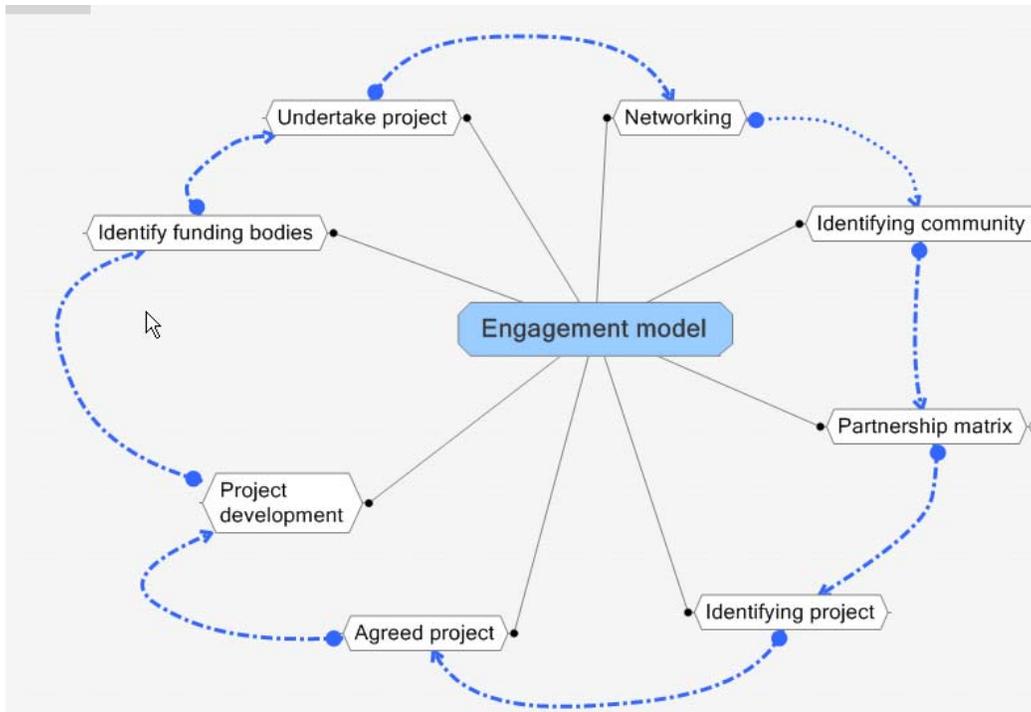
#### **Developing a model for engagement**

Project Cycle management (PCM) is the term given to the process of planning and managing projects, programmes and organisations. Drawing on the steps in Blackman's PCM<sup>5</sup> of; identification, design, implementation, evaluation and lesson learning a series of steps can be used to take an idea from conception, through consultation and design to implementation and success.

Based on experiences of past projects the following diagram identifies steps that could be involved in developing a model for engagement between the university and its partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Blackman, R. Project Cycle Management



**Figure 2: Model for engagement**

This model has various entry and exit points as the project develops and where reflective practice can be undertaken. Each project may also have a different life cycle and is dependant on the partners in the project.

It should be noted that as in Figure 1, partners may not always proceed through the different stages as identified in Figure 2. The various steps in the model could also be revisited at different times to build and gain commitment to a concept or project. To demonstrate the use of this model the following case study highlights the various steps and challenges faced when working with industry, funding bodies and university staff to achieve a successful outcome.

### **Case Study - Civil Engineering in Regional Australia**

This project emerged from an identified civil engineering skill shortage in regional Australia together with a decline in students applying to enter the Civil Engineering Course offered at the Bendigo Campus of La Trobe University.

In developing the concept brief to put to the various stakeholders it was envisaged that the project would comprise three distinct phases:

- Phase 1: Scoping of employer-partner requirements
- Phase 2: Development of program structure and governance
- Phase 3: Delivery and Reporting (ongoing)

#### **Phase 1 – Scoping of employer-partner Requirements**

It had been identified in collating this application that one of the primary challenges facing the recruitment of civil engineering students in regional areas was the limited

uptake of mathematics and sciences at High School level. A recent article in The Australian summarised the problem, outlining that “Student perceptions and the flight from school mathematics are the main problem confronting Engineering Educators” .... “the biggest hurdle [to attracting school leavers to a career in Engineering] is mathematics; the demand for mathematics among school students has plummeted”.<sup>6</sup>

This prevents many students from applying for TAFE or University courses that would lead to a qualification in civil engineering. It is understood that any successful collaborative venture within the target region would require a degree of active promotion to the high school sector in addressing the inherent shortages of TAFE / University-ready students.

Key steps – Phase 1:

- Develop Program advisory group: CMAs, Local Government, La Trobe University
- Develop a proposed articulation agreement with Leeton TAFE in Civil Engineering (a model successfully applied within the Bendigo region) to increase access for mature-age and resident students from the region.
- Promote engineering pathways to Secondary Schools – Years 9, 10, 11, 12.
- Develop and maintain program relationships with stakeholders (public / schools / partners)
- Ongoing program advertising
- Development of program website

A key feature of this program was the development of relevant partnerships between prospective civil engineering students, employer-partners and the scholarship program.

## **Phase 2: Program Development**

The second phase of the project concentrated on establishing appropriate employer-partnerships, selecting student candidates and stakeholder committees to manage the support of students within communities.

Key Steps – Phase 2:

Develop partnership frameworks with prospective employer-partner organisations and education institutions towards ensuring that environmental and community needs are met.

Promote program to key stakeholders in targeted catchment area

Finalise agreements with funding and program partners.

Identify and engage local schools and employers – promote civil engineering and the scholarships program through seminars and publications

Identify and select employer-partners (including CMA's, water authorities, irrigators, etc) and students – promotion by letters, meetings, media and advertisement

Develop on existing community support towards attracting students to apply for the scholarships and civil engineering program.

Establish Selection Committees:

Nominee of local government/s

La Trobe University, Bendigo; Civil Engineering and Physical Sciences Department

Selected Employer-Partner organisations

(Each successful candidate will, at minimum, be required to meet La Trobe University's selection criteria)

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<sup>6</sup> The Australian, Higher Education, Wednesday, January 11, 2006

Develop work placement program with participating employer-partners

### **Phase 3: Program Delivery**

Phase 3 of the program covered the operational aspects of the initiative. Key steps include:

Student enrolment

Development of contracts between student and employers-partner organisations

Commencement of work placement program

Ongoing program evaluation

Ongoing engagement with funding, industry and education partners

### **Networking**

Networks are a major factor in developing any collaborative partnerships between community/industry and the university sectors. It is through the building of relationships and the ensuing trust established that allow the parties to identify and pursue opportunities. In this case study the initial networking activities were crucial in scoping out the project.

To try and address this skill shortage, and using existing networks, an approach was made to the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) and the Pratt Foundation. The initial contact was to explore the possibility of a program that would assist regional students to enter the Civil Engineering Course offered at the Bendigo Campus of La Trobe University and thus assist regional businesses to continue to function and grow.

Other appropriate networks of both the academic and professional staff of the university were contacted to participate in the project. This projects highlights the value of networking in connecting and engaging with communities to achieve a common goal.

### **Identifying Community**

The Murrumbidgee Region was identified as having a major problem in recruiting and retaining Civil Engineers. In the initial stages of the project, a scoping study was undertaken to identify and ascertain which industries and local governments within the region would be interested in participating in such a program. This was done through various communication models including print, telephone and face to face interviews. Expressions of interest were gathered from the local communities and included Local Government, Industry and local schools. After identifying the communities that would be involved in the program further negotiations took place with FRRR and the Pratt foundation to obtain their support and to develop a program that would meet the needs of the identified area.

## **Partnership matrix**

The various levels of communication, in line with Himmelman's diagram (Figure 1) were evident in the steps towards development of this program. Some players did not proceed through to the conclusion of the project and left the cycle after the initial stages. Working with the various stakeholders required building a network, coordinating the different players towards a cooperative and collaborative program. One of the many challenges faced during this period was the building of trust across the different sectors. Once this was established the industry and education sectors collaborated in bringing together a successful outcome to the program.

## **Identifying and agreement on project**

After numerous discussions the project was developed to run over a ten year period with intake of students over the first three years. The agreement between the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) and the Faculty of Science and Technology was signed in 2006 to develop scholarships throughout the Murrumbidgee Region for students to undertake the Bachelor of Engineering (Civil) at the Bendigo Campus of La Trobe University. There were 10 scholarships provided over a three year period. The first cohort being four students within the catchment area identified as the Murrumbidgee region. The major thrust of this program was to involve industry in the development of the scholarship with a view to them employing a local student within their immediate vicinity and thus build capacity within their business. As part of retaining students within the region, employers guaranteed two years of employment at the end of the student's satisfactory completion of studies.

## **Project development**

In order to develop this program it was necessary to establish links with industry partners who had an interest in skilling engineers to meet their current identified skill shortage. Another aim of the program was to link the industries back to the university to allow for possible research and development projects that may become identified during the course of the scholarship. By linking with regional industries through these scholarships the university would have the opportunity to place students in real-time workplace activities and add value to the industry by having academic staff involved in projects that assist the industry to develop. The interest from FRRR and Pratt Foundation was to secure skilled and knowledgeable workers for regional and rural businesses. To this end the project was meeting the needs of the industry sector, the student body and the university.

## **Identifying funding bodies**

The funding bodies used in this project were identified during the networking phase of the project. However, they had not committed to the program until it was demonstrated that the program was relevant to the regions and that there was also commitment from industry and education. At this stage a full concept brief was developed with budget, targets and key performance indicators. Once the major funding bodies had committed to the project it was then necessary to re-establish links with the stakeholders and to gain their full commitment to the project. Industry players had also committed funds to the project. It was then necessary to visit the stakeholders and to work with them in identifying prospective scholarship applicants through the local schools.

Part of the funding of the scholarships was obtained from employers. It was felt that by committing to part of the funding for the scholarship, organisations would become more committed to the program. The industries and local government agencies approached recognised the value of this proposal and did not hesitate in contributing to the scholarship.

It was important during this stage of the process that Industry was involved in the process of student recruitment. The industries also displayed a keen interest in working with local schools in identifying potential students, and for them potential employees.

In proceeding to the next stage of the model it will be seen that the different stages within the model will be revisited as the project unfolds. **Undertake project**

After identifying the project and gaining commitment from the various funding bodies, the following process was developed to undertake the project.

STEPS	Process
Establish agreement with funding body in order to progress program	Development of funding framework and budget process including identification of number of scholarships, timelines, rules of engagement and reporting mechanism.
Identify possible stakeholders and developing common ground	Letters sent to identified stakeholders with expression of interest form to participate in program
Making the connection and building a relationship	Visit to each stakeholder to gain commitment and to provide further information on program
Promotion of scholarship	Visit to Year 12 schools in the region to promote scholarship program and gain commitment
Commitment	Signing of contracts for scholarships with industry players
Scholarship process	Involvement of industry in application process including type of scholarship and involvement by industry and student in ongoing program development
Legal development	Ensuring scholarships are legally binding to both university, student and industry player.
Faculty administration	Development of documentation within faculty guidelines
Marketing of program	Visits to schools within region by Academic staff and Manager, Industry and Community Engagement
Awarding Scholarship	Calling for submission by students. Industry working with local students to apply for funding.
Marketing of successful candidates	Development of media releases and promoting model to other industry bodies
Evaluation	Program evaluated and adjustments made for second round.

	Partners advised of current status and brought up to date with next round process
Develop future networks	Identify possible future stakeholders and prospective students

*Figure 3: Outline of process for Civil Engineering Scholarships*

### **Drivers:**

Major drivers of this project were:

- Commitment by partnership players to the program
- Need to increase enrolments in Civil Engineering Course
- Identified skill shortage in regional Australia
- Industry having a say in the type of student/employee undertaking the scholarship.
- Need to include industry in owning and solving the problem
- Commitment by FRRR and the Pratt Foundation to increasing capacity within regional Australia and providing access to education for regional students
- Commitment by industry to offer career opportunities to local students

### **Challenges**

The major challenge of this program was identifying students who had the capacity to undertake the degree and linking them with industries within the local regions. It has been found that a large number of students are not undertaking maths and science at a level which provides them access to the Engineering courses. This was found to be particularly so in regional schools in the area. It was therefore a challenge to match students and industry players within identified regions.

The industry players were keen to undertake the program and it was not difficult to have them commit to the funding proposed. Having FRRR provide a subsidy was a major attraction of the program as industries in regional areas do not always have the funding to support students throughout their degrees. One of the other factors that made this program attractive was that students would be provided with work during their term breaks and that they would be contracted to undertake two years employment with the industry at the conclusion of their studies. Industry saw this as a good investment and were thus very keen to participate in the program. Of the four scholarships being offered in the first year, three have been awarded. Although a vigorous campaign was undertaken in the school sector, there was a disappointingly low number of applications for the scholarships.

The challenge for the education sector was, and still is, to engage with students and excite them about a career in science and engineering. To this end a number of different processes are being explored that will add value to the current project and make the program relevant to the student body and industry in the region.

### **Conclusion**

This model was used to develop further projects that involve industry, education and community. By building a reputation with the industry players the university has been able to attract further projects such as:

- **Podiatry** – development of prizes and scholarships with a view to undertaking research projects for both the industry and the university and the development of a Graduate Diploma program which will link Industry and Education.
- **Health Services** – development of a post graduate degree between university partners and a private health provider to meet the needs of the industry sector
- **Agribusiness** – scoping study to identify assets and application for funding to assist export networks across the region
- **Community Indicators** – development of projects to work with local government to assist in adding value to current indicators at a more local level
- **Indigenous education** – development of programs with local learning networks, local councils and indigenous groups for successful learning outcomes for indigenous communities
- **Professional Development** – development of short courses to meet industry needs, such as Economic Development Officer Bootcamp. Increasing of networks and linking between sectors.
- **Civil Engineering** – development of projects to address industry needs in the water industry
- **Mining** – consultancy with a view to further research in identifying problems in the gold mining process
- **Attraction, retention and HR Practices** – project assisting various human resource personnel in Central Victoria to understand and deal with staff issues.
- **Waste management** – project to work with various industries
- **Waste fruit management** – project to identify possible new industries in this area

The list shows not only the opportunities for education that can be accessed through industry and community engagement but also the complexities of working within and across different industries within a region and disciplines within the university. Each of the above projects were developed using the steps in the Model for Engagement (Figure 2).

Universities play a major role in community and industry development. Developing networks and working across sectors can assist in developing projects that add value to the community. Building trust and credibility are essential to securing the project and tying the knot. In any community and industry engagement that involves universities there needs to be the following:

- A level of trust between the parties involved in the engagement.
- A degree of knowledge of the particular industry sector which can be achieved through using existing networks and relationship with government agencies.
- Demand for the project to be undertaken to meet the needs of the industry with industry willing to commit to the project.
- Supply of the service – commitment and willingness by academic staff to participate in the project.
- Opportunity to add value to both the industry and the university.
- Alignment between industry demand and university aims and goals.
- Ensuring all players are involved in the process and kept up to date with the current status of the project.

Community engagement is often defined in terms of how university and community view each other and themselves. This also depends on how one specifies the role of higher education and universities.

Universities need to actively develop partnerships to survive politically and develop intellectually “...knowledge does not just reside in the university...there are many kinds of knowledge, developed and held by different sectors of society, and further advances of knowledge require joint activity” (Wiewel and Broski 1997: 16 in Hudson 2000)

The community engagement activity at La Trobe University, Bendigo has been crafted around and within the core scholarship activity and resources of the campus:

- Learning and Teaching – the development and support of relevant teaching programs such as the Regional Executive Education Program and short course programs that meet regional skills needs;
- Research – development of partnered research programs that align academic interest and expertise with community problems and opportunities. The ARC Linkage Grant scheme provides key support to such research programs.
- Infrastructure – creative use of infrastructure to support the community, such as hosting the Commonwealth Youth Games, and supporting high-growth IT business at the university’s Central Victorian Innovation Park.

An underlying principle of the engagement has been to nurture partnerships to jointly develop, identify and implement projects and programs that will use university scholarship and infrastructure to add value to community programs and that contribute to community sustainability. The programs should also add value to core university activity and involve creating, sharing, applying and preserving knowledge for our communities (of place and of interest). The Civil Engineering Scholarship program through FRRR and the Pratt Foundation is an example of this type of partnership.

La Trobe University in Bendigo has been actively committed to growing our region as an integral basis of community engagement activity. Partnerships with key stakeholder groups will directly and indirectly contribute to sustainable growth of our region.

These partnerships and regional growth will provide:

- opportunities to enrich academic study and increased opportunities to contribute to scholarship through collaborative research;
- increased student/graduate employment opportunities;
- work placements for students that are relevant to academic interests, for example through the BendigoStudent program;
- better integration of our communities into the knowledge economy;
- co-development of campus infrastructure – for example co-development of laboratories with industry partners; and,
- co-development of community infrastructure – for example co-development of Central Victorian Innovation Park with City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo Bank and Victorian State Government.

Put simply, many of our collaborative programs have been either *demand-driven* (based on community need that is matched to academic expertise), such as the Civil Engineering Project, or *supply-driven* (based on academic activity that is matched to community need), as in the case of the development of regional economic modeling software that is based on academic economic modeling expertise, and matched to the data needs of local governments.

In conclusion, effective alignment of university and community collaboration is important to develop the inaugural basis of a sustainable relationship that will develop mutual responsibility and commitment. Identifying shared agendas and finding the inaugural project to tie the knot requires collaboration between community/industry and the university sector in the development of sustainable networks that embrace inclusiveness, open dialogue, trust, commitment, and honesty in the development of projects. Development of a model that serves to assist in this process clarifies points within the cycle of engagement where the inaugural project can be identified and decisions made by the various partners as to whether or not to proceed.

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# South Australia's Strategic Plan, Engagement and the University of South Australia

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## **Abstract**

This paper considers the relationship and coincidence of interests of the University of South Australia's community engagement objectives and South Australian Government development strategies as consolidated in *South Australia's Strategic Plan*, version 2, January 2007 (the State Plan).

The nature of university community engagement and aspects of the environment in which it occurs are introduced. For the University, engagement is identified as a strategic goal in the context of its Act and planning documentation, while the State Plan is presented as a strategic, determinative and opportunity creating focus for the South Australia community, including the higher education sector, for at least the three years leading up to the next State election.

The adoption of the State Plan allows an examination of the relationship between a University's engagement strategy and a State Government's strategic aims. The paper does this in the context of a crystallised State agenda that is much less ambiguous than a Party political platform or election policy.

## **Introduction**

Universities are complex organisations with an engagement impact beyond that comprehended by narrowly understood teaching, learning and research activities. Like all institutions, universities impact upon broader society irrespective of their specific missions. As historically evolved and publicly supported knowledge-based institutions, they have the particularly important task of contributing to and challenging the overall social, political and economic environment. This can only be achieved by engaging actively with relevant communities. In this context, engagement can be seen as a broad, inherent and constructive process that constitutes the processes and relationships through which a university develops and maintains reciprocal commitments with other interests and groups in society (Ramaley, 2006).

Currently, Australian Universities engage in the context of many external demands, including systemic quality assurance overseen by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), the desire by the Commonwealth Government to improve teaching and learning performance, measured, and possibly provoked, by the advent of the Teaching and Learning Performance Fund (TLPF), and the overwhelming drive to increase research related outcomes engendered by the Research Quality Framework (RQF). The RQF itself is still formative, compounding a generally uncertain operating environment for the university sector. The advent of the second version of the South Australian State Plan this year is an additional external factor facing the South Australian university sector. This relatively recent and quite specific State based environment compels consideration of how public university strategic engagement planning will relate to and engage with the Plan.

This paper examines how the State Plan articulates with the refinement of one university's strategies, as currently being developed within the University of South Australia's (UniSA) *Regional, Industry and Community Engagement Project*. This project was established specifically to develop an overarching engagement strategy for the University, and will be one of a suite of overarching strategies that ensure thematic integration between operational level planning and activities and broader University objectives. An important task is consideration of how UniSA engagement strategies coincide with the explicit and implicit targets and outcomes established in the State Plan. The paper begins with a brief analysis of the University engagement literature.

## **Engagement Themes**

Universities inevitably engage with communities through reciprocal activity with external stakeholders based on inherently 'collaborative relationships that lead to productive partnerships' (AUCEA 2006). The precise basis of such relationships is moot. Is it an expression of the two core academic functions, research and teaching/learning or is there another functional category, one that creates 'the classic triad of faculty roles and responsibilities – research, teaching and service' that has long characterised this approach (Ramaley 2006, p 5)?

A version of the triad notion posits an activity continuum blending academic functions with a service agenda, where scholarship generates, transmits, applies and preserves knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in a manner consistent with university objectives (from Michigan State University, in CIC, 2005 p31). The influential Russell Group of Universities Report (Molas-Gallert, Salter, Patel, Scott and Duran, 2002) reframes this notion by proposing that universities, although based principally on teaching and research, have always made direct and indirect contributions to society through 'third mission' activities 'concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments' (Molas-Gallert, et al, 2002, p iii/iv).

Recognising more than one type of university capability acknowledges that the relationship of universities to the rest of society isn't limited to interaction through academic programs. Furthermore, as large, complex organisations a university's knowledge capability isn't limited to academic programs, since knowledge also is generated through other institutional means.

In any event, university engagement implements an institutional obligation to respond to public good imperatives in ways complementary to those inherent in academic program delivery. It follows that if a university's institutional obligations are not expressed solely through structured 'scholarly' programs, then the perception and development of a university's role with respect to the State Plan needs to be developed in a wide context. It will not just be about interactions related to academic disciplines, important and substantial as these are, but must also accommodate the University's overall socio-economic impact in the State and elsewhere.

An engaged university accepts parity with its stakeholders. Cherwitz and Hartelius (2007, p268) argue that engagement 'demands mutual humility and respect, joint ownership of learning, and co-creation of an unimagined potential for innovation – qualities that move universities well beyond the typical elitist sense of service.' Ramaley (2006, p6) also stresses that it is not a characteristic of engagement to 'define and serve the public good on behalf of society, but to create conditions for the

public good to be interpreted and pursued in a collaborative mode with the community'. An adequately resourced State Plan, properly consulted, provides a potentially powerful opportunity through which to foster dialogue and mutual endeavour across sectors, including higher education. A feature of the development of the State Plan 2007 was a cross-sectoral, cross-community consultation process.

Garlick and Langworthy (undated) propose that engagement is defined by its focus on reciprocal, mutually-beneficial knowledge-driven relationships with community partners, and that some academic goals can only be achieved successfully through collaborative relationships with community sources of knowledge and expertise. However, while it is true that universities are characterised by their role in nurturing and extending scholarship, they cannot claim complete 'ownership' of knowledge generation and application. Holland suggests that the 'engaged institution is committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration and application of knowledge expertise and information', while building greater public understanding of the university's role as a knowledge resource (in Wallis 2006a, p4).

While it is proper for universities to respond to Commonwealth initiatives such as the RQF, AUQA, and LTPF, it also is important as State based institutions that they respond to, connect and engage where they can with State Government developmental objectives. The South Australian State Plan provides an innovative and transparent opportunity to do this.

### **The South Australian Strategic Plan**

Governments are major engagement partners across all sectors. They also have a status derived from their representative function within our social democratic polity. For the university sector, while the Commonwealth government provides most funding, State Governments are especially important as they provide the statutory auspice for the operation of public universities. Given this relationship, it makes sense that a university has a strong interest in the development of a State Plan and how it can engage with the Plan's broad aims, as well as its implicit and explicit objectives and targets.

South Australia's Government first adopted a State Plan in 2004 with an updated version released in January 2007 following extensive review and consultation (SAG 2006a). It has two complementary purposes; to identify and track state-wide progress against eighty four targets, and to provide a framework for stakeholder activities. In the Premier's words, it is to 'be a plan for everyone – for business, for the community, and for government – not for government alone' (SAG 2007, p3).

Education, including higher education, features in the State Plan, with relevant targets in areas such as increasing worker numbers in the creative industries and defence industry, research commercialisation, Aboriginal leadership, regional education, learning/earning for 15-19 year olds, maths and science competency for high school graduates, sport and recreation as primary health initiatives, higher education participation, and doubling the State's share of overseas students. Education is linked to opportunity, mirroring the outcomes of the recent review of the State Certificate of Education (SAG 2006b) to emphasise the streaming of school students to vocational education, jobs, or higher learning in the context of a workforce development strategy.

This resonates with UniSA's statutory mission to provide education in such areas as it thinks appropriate to meet the needs of industry, commerce, the professions or any other section of the community (SAG, 1990, Clause 5), while expressing higher education's 'strong linkages with industry to meet specific workforce needs' noted in the Government's major Skills policy paper (SAG 2006c, p5), which in turn are reinforced by the State Plan.

A core theme is education's role as a strategic State asset, with the Premier asserting that the guiding thread of the plan is a 'knowledgeable community' (SAG, 2007 p4). This emphasis suggests it may be an error for universities to limit their articulation with the Plan only to the specified targets. For example, UniSA's regional aspirations find a supportive context in the Government's commitment to regionalise the State Plan over the next two years.

Education's importance to the Plan is asserted strongly in the narrative text. It comes from its capacity to provide people with 'the basic knowledge, skills and attributes they need to participate fully as confident and competent citizens in society' (SAG 2007 p37), while investment in 'skills and knowledge' will 'equip us to tackle the major challenges of our time – from climate change to globalisation, from providing good jobs and rising living standards to dealing with an ageing population' (SAG 2007 p26). Education helps determine quality of life and 'is central to creating and expanding opportunity' (SAG 2007, p34). The State Plan emphasises education's fundamental role in fostering social inclusion, addressing inequality, and maintaining community diversity.

State development under the Plan will rely on initiatives that foster creativity and innovation. As well as investing heavily in education and skills, and building on the education export industry, these initiatives are seen to require alliances between government, industry and education to increase research, commercialisation and innovation, and investment in research infrastructure. A State Plan commitment is that by 2010 public expenditure on research and development, as a proportion of Gross State Product, will match or exceed average investment compared to other Australian States (SAG 2007, p28).

The Government has also established a Unit within the Premier's Department to undertake feasibility work to develop Adelaide as a *University City*. The recent establishment of Carnegie Mellon University in Adelaide on the basis of substantial Government assistance illustrates a determination to globalise South Australian higher education. It is an environment with the potential for universities to influence what it means to be an effective and creative higher education sector, recognising that such an exercise cannot only be about the discrete, and necessarily limited, targets identified in the State Plan.

The emphasis on education in the Plan reflects a national interest in higher education's contribution to innovation and economic performance, which is 'occurring at a time when some ... State and Territory Governments are taking a close interest and involvement in the contribution of higher education to state and regional economic and societal development' (B-HERT, 2006b, p4). It is important to appreciate and acknowledge that the stress in this statement is on a university's contribution to wider development objectives. Similarly, Wallis quotes an OECD observation that for universities 'there is now a greater concern to harness university education and research to specific economic and social objectives' (Wallis 2006b, p3).

Conceptualising UniSA's engagement strategy in the context of the State Plan mirrors the situation identified in the 2002 Russell Group of Universities Report where a university's interactions 'cut across different economic, political and social networks' and demanded 'a holistic approach that examines the main channels that bind universities to the rest of society'. This complexity was captured by the metaphor that engagement happened through a 'web of interactions that span universities and the rest of society' (Molas-Gallert et al, 2002, p iv).

### ***UniSA and Engagement***

UniSA views itself as modern, flexible, open and innovative, is committed to partnerships, and has equity and diversity as core values (UniSA 2003 p1). The *University of South Australia Act* (1990) identifies the University's mission to preserve, extend and disseminate knowledge, while enabling the provision of tertiary education in disciplines and areas of study that are appropriate to meet the needs of industry, commerce, the professions or any other section of the community. Specific tasks are identified to provide education programs for Aboriginal people, to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged groups, and to enhance the community's diverse cultural life (SAG, 1990, Clause 5).

The UniSA Strategic Plan adopted in December 2006 expresses a strong engagement mission, aimed at helping to build the capacity and resilience of communities, while asserting that the University will 'be distinguished for engaging with communities [and] for working in partnership to help build social capacity and community resilience, and for developing in graduates professionalism and good citizenship' (UniSA 2006b, p16). This engagement commitment finds expression through five key result areas: innovative and effective access, highly engaged education and research, social responsibility and civic-mindedness, development of business opportunities, and embedded responsibility for engagement at all levels (UniSA 2006b pp 16/17).

The 2005 Annual Report likewise reinforces that 'community engagement is a defining characteristic of all that we do and the University is enriched through its interaction with different communities' (UniSA 2006a, p35). This reflects a need for the University to be 'other regarding even as we are self regarding enough to secure a resource base sufficient to sustain our operations' (Harding, 2006, p4). Engagement has considerable support across the UniSA community and is an activity for which the University has a strong legacy (Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 1995, p61).

### **Coinciding Engagement: UniSA and the State Government**

Engagement is the purposive endeavour through which universities 'make contributions to government and civil society as well as the private sector, assisting not only with economic performance but also helping to improve quality of life and the effectiveness of public services' (Molas-Gallert et al 2002, p iv). Particularly helpful here is the reference to *quality of life*, an attribute that resonates with the essential university commitment to free inquiry, or an intellectual life that is not determined by (if necessarily coexisting with) immediate public or economic policy imperatives. In this sense there is a dimension of engagement that cannot be reduced simply to achievement of specific short term economic or human services outcomes.

In South Australia, the State Plan process opens the way for the universities to explore how higher education's many contributions to quality of life can be supported and reinforced; given that this 'is determined by a number of things, including education and employment opportunities, a healthy environment, a rich cultural life, and good health' (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, quoted in DEST 2002, p51).

It is possible to look at explicit areas in which State development and UniSA interests may coincide. This is illustrated in [Table 1](#) below through a comparison of the draft *engagement themes* identified by the project team for the current UniSA engagement strategy project, and State Plan objectives with which these themes, by default or by design, coincide.

**Table 1: Coincidence of UniSA Engagement Themes and SA State Plan**

UniSA Engagement Themes <i>from 2006/07 Engagement Strategy Project</i>	SA State Plan Objectives* <i>indicative linkages with UniSA Strategy Project</i>
<b>enhanced student learning outcomes</b> , including opportunities for experiential learning and awareness of contemporary issues and needs, and contribution to <b>curriculum development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T6.16</b> – increase proportion of 15-19 year olds achieving SA Certificate of Education or comparable qualification</li> <li>- <b>SP 37</b> – emphasis on education's role in developing innovation, high skills and technological capacity</li> </ul>
<b>productive research outcomes</b> - <i>engaged research</i> may result in knowledge transfer, commercialisation of intellectual property, the establishment of spin off companies and joint venture activity, while potentially providing educational, social and environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>SP 26</b> – SA as a research/innovation hub</li> <li>- <b>KI 26</b> – research infrastructure investment</li> <li>- <b>T4.6</b> - commercialisation of research</li> <li>- <b>T4.9</b> - by 2010 public expenditure on research and development, as a proportion of GSP, will match or exceed average investment compared to other Australian States</li> </ul>
improved community <b>professional and intellectual infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T6.19</b> – equal or better the national average of labour force with non-school qualifications</li> <li>- <b>KI 26</b> – biennial Festival of Ideas etc</li> <li>- <b>T6.1</b> - improving competency in maths, physics or chemistry in tertiary level entry students by 15%</li> <li>- <b>T5.1</b> – increasing participation of women on government Boards and Committees</li> <li>- <b>T1.24</b> – migration to SA</li> </ul>
<b>community health and well being</b> , including through very practical efforts such as student-based health and welfare clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>SP 22</b> – environmental sustainability</li> <li>- <b>SP 18</b> – health system to focus on primary health</li> <li>- <b>KI 18</b> – investment in programs that focus on primary health and early intervention</li> <li>- <b>T2.12</b> – improve work-life balance</li> </ul>
<b>economic development</b> , including for <b>regions and local communities</b> , and for particular economic sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T1.1</b> – economic growth</li> <li>- <b>KI 12</b> and <b>KI 26</b> – support for University Centres and Institutes to enhance competitiveness and innovation</li> <li>- <b>SP 15</b> – high-level skills and knowledge underpinning export growth</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T6.14</b> - regional education</li> <li>- <b>T5.9</b> – regional population levels</li> </ul>
indirect economic and social benefits e.g. engagement that addresses social disadvantage can lead to improved societal health, less dependency on remedial education and welfare and increased rates of volunteerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T6.15</b> - learning or earning for 15-19 year olds</li> <li>- <b>T6.20</b> - increasing the State's higher education participation rate to be 7.5% of the national total by 2014</li> <li>- <b>KI 30</b> – volunteer infrastructure</li> </ul>
development of institutional, group and private <b>citizenship attributes</b> that support informed debate and help drive social cohesion and social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>KI 34</b> – supporting the work of the Social Inclusion Board</li> <li>- see <i>graduate qualities</i> and <i>human/social capital development</i> below</li> </ul>
Development of desired <b>graduate qualities</b> – for students to be active and knowledgeable citizens, and to be work- and community-ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>SP 26</b> - vibrant intellectual and artistic culture, nurturing talent and excellence requires investment in education and skills</li> <li>- <b>T5.4</b> and <b>T5.5</b> – enrolment of young people to vote, and participation in local government elections</li> <li>- <b>SP 34</b> – education and training as part of effective workforce development</li> </ul>
<b>local/global connectivity</b> i.e. linking the community and the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T1.16</b> - doubling South Australia's share of overseas students</li> <li>- <b>KI 12</b> – building education export industry</li> </ul>
enhanced <b>human</b> and <b>social capital</b> development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>T5.7</b> and <b>T1.26</b> - Aboriginal leadership and education as a link between employment and the wellbeing of Indigenous communities.</li> <li>- <b>T1.13</b> increasing employment in the defence industry</li> <li>- <b>KI 34</b> – professional development and support for maths and science teachers</li> </ul>
<b>reciprocal access to facilities</b> and other resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- implicit in several other categories</li> </ul>
<b>artistic or cultural</b> and <b>recreational</b> activities in local and regional communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>KI 26</b> – supporting youth arts sector</li> <li>- <b>T4.1</b> - increasing the number of workers in the creative industries by 20% by 2014</li> <li>- <b>T4.4</b> – improving cultural engagement</li> <li>- <b>T4.5</b> - supporting Aboriginal culture</li> <li>- <b>T2.3</b> - sport and recreation</li> </ul>

\* Referenced to the State Plan by either: *Targets* (e.g. **T6.1**), *Key Initiatives* (by page number e.g. **KI 12**) or to general *Text* (by page number e.g. **SP 15**).

The table demonstrates how the documentation of strategic objectives clarifies a potentially powerful set of relationships and synergies for both the University and the State Government. It identifies common interests and commitment across various sectors and agendas, thereby creating a basis for the development of an agreed

strategic focus and specific mutual activities. Achieving such a focus will require detailed consideration of intersecting objectives, and further analysis in areas where connectivity is not so explicitly articulated.

While this outline is part of a strategic work in progress for UniSA, and without wanting to overstate the significance of particular State targets and other indicators, it is instructive to note that the table identifies 23 out of 84 targets and 10 key initiatives where there is apparent common ground. This association is, of course, complemented by the strong narrative thrust in the State Plan regarding the centrality of education.

### **Concluding Comments**

Wallis has noted the potential for university engagement to drive social change (Wallis, 2006b, p3/4). It also is identified with 'enhanced human and social capital development, accelerated economic growth, improved professional and intellectual infrastructure in communities, progress towards sustainability and research outcomes that can benefit the social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions of society' (AUCEA 2006, p2). Enhanced employability comes from integrated learning, internships, international experiences and exposure to curricula that are informed by real world problems.

Such widely desired outcomes support the usefulness of a critically engaged approach by UniSA, and integration where possible with State Plan objectives that complement its statutory and strategic missions. The University's current Regional, Industry, and Community Engagement strategy project seeks to build on a rich engagement history and connect the university's engagement strategy with its stakeholders across broader environments. The State of South Australia is one of these environments.

An opportune way of strategically articulating the University's goals within the broader South Australian environment is through articulation with the State Plan which, as this paper has shown, has amenable targets and strategic goals.

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## **Sustainable Online Community Engagement**

**Philip Marriott**

University of South Australia

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the concept of sustainability in relation to online community engagement. This is done in the context of a series of related projects involving university students working with community groups on a variety of information and communications technology tasks. The intention is to provide a specification for an online structure that enables community groups to support one another to achieve a range of online ICT outcomes.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **SWIRL (Story Writing in Remote Locations): A 12 year IBM/Victoria University community learning partnership in remote Indigenous communities**

**Lawry Mahon & Brenda Cherednichenko**

Victoria University

### **Abstract:**

SWIRL is a community education program developed over the past 12 years in partnership between IBM Australia and the School of Education at Victoria University. It involves up to 40 preservice teachers and youth workers, with their academic colleagues working in remote Indigenous communities to conduct a month long holiday program, focused on first language and English literacy with young people and their families. The project has encouraged many graduate teachers to return to teach in the Northern Territory communities. This paper reports the practices and outcomes of the project over the past ten years and the directions for the future as it strengthens the program and develops national consortium of universities with state and federal government support.

SWIRL began as a small informal relationship between Victoria University staff and students and remote communities with a focus on educational support. It quickly developed with IBM support to a standard component of teacher education at Victoria University to complement and extend VU and IBM commitment to inclusion of Indigenous education in teacher education. It became evident that Aboriginal students in communities were highly engaged in the literacy and physical activity programs offered in SWIRL and the learning for everyone was significant. As the program has grown it now demands a significant research and development focus to more fully document its impact and potential.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## **The effects of community engaged learning and teaching on instructors involved in academic service learning: Learning through community service**

**Florence E. Mc Carthy**

University of Western Sydney

### **Abstract:**

While there is abundant literature about the outcomes of academic service learning for students, there is much less attention paid to outcomes for academics who are teaching community-engaged subjects. Pribbenow (2005) argues that “generally, service learning led many faculty to be more meaningfully engaged in and committed to teaching” (2005:27) as well as to other aspects of their academic life. This paper explores similar effects on instructors teaching academic service learning through Learning through Community Service (LCS) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). The data being discussed in this paper focuses on the restructuring of instructors’ pedagogical approaches in their LCS strands; alterations in instructor’s relationships with their students and in their knowledge about their students; and changes in instructor’s orientation to teaching. Data are based on a series of semi-structured, open-ended interviews completed with the 10 instructors who have taught LCS strands.

A copy of this paper can be found in the [AUCEA eJournal Vol 2 No 1](#)

## The pleasures of slow learning: cultivating communities through food education

**Adele Wessell**

Southern Cross University

### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the nexus between engaged learning and community engagement by looking at how food can be integrated into the curriculum and identified as scholarship. Cultivating, cooking and eating provide different ways of thinking about engagement – with the learning process, object of study, the context and community in which we live and the human condition. To these forms of student engagement, identified by Stephen Bowen (2005: 4-7), I will discuss the scholarship of engagement, the work of teachers in integrating their roles as researchers, educators and active community members. The slow metaphor of the food movement is extended here to the classroom to consider intensifying the pleasures of learning and the cultivation of community. Case studies using two different approaches, learning *about* food and learning *from* food, will be considered in terms of opportunities for engagement. A central concern of the paper is how engaged learning can also be integrated with university engagement in the community. What are the opportunities for cultivating communities through food that can be fostered by research and teaching?

The use of food to engage students has a long history, but few attempts have been made to review this in light of the scholarship of engagement. Given the current crisis of obesity and paradoxically, an interest in food production and quality and the urgency of food security, the integration of food into education has stimulated considerable interest and public attention. Consider for example, the popularity of *Jamie's School Dinners* and the involvement of high profile chefs such as Stephanie Alexander in Australia, and Alice Waters in the US, in edible classroom projects. These two examples, along with other case studies highlight the way that food can engage learners and engage learning institutions with the communities of which they are a part. Culinary excursions or field trips have been employed at a number of universities. This activity is more common in food studies, taking students off campus to engage in the community. A different initiative that uses food as a curricular focal point for a broader range of subject areas is producing food on campus, (or in schools), and developing partnerships with the community to nourish local people and the economy. Both types of activities could be argued to cultivate community, engage students and integrate the roles of academics, required to contribute equally to research and teaching and engage with their community in a climate of shrinking resources, greater accountability and increasing workloads.

Food Studies is well positioned to incorporate community engagements because of its subject. Eating is one of the primary ways that we initiate and maintain human relationships and a point of intersection between the individual (body) the natural world and society. In a class about food the social and information settings in which learning occurs comes to the fore. Opportunities for active engagement in the community through food abound because it involves everyday practices and ones that also relate to the local community.

Like many other institutions, my own university recognises community engagement

as a central platform and aims to 'take a prime role in the intellectual, economic, environmental, social and cultural development of our region' demonstrating 'commitment to regional economic prosperity, social and cultural wellbeing and environmental sustainability' (Southern Cross University Office of Regional Engagement). Integral to community or regional engagement is the design and delivery of teaching programs and research that can achieve such objectives.

Scholarship of engagement was coined by Boyer (1991, 1996) to refer to the use of university-community partnerships as a foundation for research and teaching activities. Boyer considered service as part of the trinity of academic life, alongside teaching and research but acknowledged that it was given little attention and all too frequently did not relate to scholarship. Boyer's concern was to integrate academic responsibilities under the umbrella of scholarship; to be considered scholarship, service activities must be 'tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity.' Scholarship, rather than service, is the starting point for defining the activities. An important requirement therefore of engaged scholarship is to demonstrate impact in multiple forms including research outcomes and student learning, curricula change and strategic planning.

Learning about food is not essentially pedagogical but experiential. How this engages students is what matters most in this enquiry and the most significant contribution of engagement, as Stephen Bowen has identified, is that it brings the student's personal relationship to learning to the fore. A focus on the learner is essential to the improvement of teaching and should therefore also be the starting point for a scholarship of teaching. Community engagement activities involving students also need to consider their experience and the quality of learning opportunities.

The idea that students learn best when they are engaged is much older than the movement of "engaged learning" and food was used in early efforts to engage students. John Dewey (1859-1952), representative of American pragmatism and progressivism in education, founded the University of Chicago Laboratory School on the principle that engaging students in growing, preparing and eating food would provide the best learning opportunities. Louis Menand has described how food was used in the curriculum to teach mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, geography and so on. The philosophical rationale was clear; 'preparing a meal is a goal directed activity, it is a social activity, and it is an activity continuous with life outside the school' (Menand, 2001: p. 323). Dewey was critical of instruction and defined education as the *reconstruction of experience*.

Alice Waters and Stephanie Alexander have both promoted edible schoolyards and school gardens to further children's understanding of food and food production. We are told often about a health crisis looming, Alexander complains, but 'Nobody is talking about the absence of love and enjoyment in the preparation of food, let alone the ability to care for oneself by preparing simple healthy dishes' (2006, p. 6). The success of the edible schoolyard also relates to the integration of the garden and kitchen classroom into the school's curriculum. Further to this though, Waters' and Alexander's food education provides a learning opportunity and lifestyle option, in de Certeau's terms a 'tactic' calculated to make a difference (1984). 'Everyone should have the right to wholesome, affordable food' Alice Waters has stated, 'What could be a more delicious revolution that to start committing our best resources to teaching this to children?'

According to Boyer 'the scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge what anthropologist Clifford

Geertz describes as the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us' (Boyer, 1996, p. 20). Extending the slow food metaphor to the formal education system elevates the transformative potential of learning. It has wider application as an aspect of what philosopher Albert Borgmann describes as a 'focal practice' – a way of living and being in the world that focuses on what really matters – the skills, relationships, experiences that enrich our lives. The culture of the table Borgmann suggests is one example of a focal practice:

In the preparation of the meal we have enjoyed the simple tasks of washing leaves and cutting break; we have felt the force and generosity of being served a good wine and homemade bread. Such experiences have been particularly vivid when we came upon them after much sitting and watching indoors, after a surfeit of readily available snacks and drinks (Borgmann, 1984: p. 200).

Learning *about* and learning *from* food offer ways of integrating student experience, scholarship of teaching and community engagement. Knowledge is produced at the intersection of those activities. My aim is to consider teaching and learning in their social and cultural dimensions. When we read we traverse great expanses of time and space but we live as students in a locality and in a direct relationship with the world.

Learning *about* food through culinary excursions produce direct engagement with the *object of study*. Field seminars have been employed in food studies courses in order to provide authentic experiences related to community. At the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy, students have the opportunity to carry out a course of theoretical subjects complemented by first hand experiences of food production. The Masters of Gastronomy at the University of Adelaide similarly uses excursions to provide context for the theoretical perspective offered in lectures and tutorials. The excursions are also used to implement Barbara Santich's teaching philosophy, which is that learning should be enjoyable.

Students profit most from their university experience when inspired to learn and when learning is enjoyable. As well as making my lectures lively and stimulating, often by inviting students to respond to questions or to contribute by recounting their own experiences, I introduce variety into the teaching program by way of excursions, guest lectures, activities and film or television viewings followed by discussion.

The excursions are a pedagogical strategy intended to encourage *student engagement with the learning process*.

In both these cases the engagement with the community had the aim of strengthening learning, and this had the reciprocal intention of strengthening engagement and knowledge of the local community and local issues. In the philosophy of slow food making informed decisions about food raises people as partners in the production process. Their approach is worthwhile in the context of education:

We believe that everyone has a fundamental right to pleasure and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that make this pleasure possible. Our movement is founded upon this concept of eco-gastronomy – a recognition of the strong connections between plate and planet. Slow Food is good, clean and fair food. We believe that the food we eat should taste good; that it should be produced in a clean way that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or our health; and that food producers should receive fair compensation for their work. We consider ourselves co-producers, not consumers, because by being informed about

how our food is produced and actively supporting those who produce it, we become a part of and a partner in the production process (Slow Food).

Other benefits are cited as the opportunity for professional experience. The scholarship of engagement requires movement beyond pedagogy, the use of food as an instructional method, to develop mutually beneficial, supportive and fair relationships between universities and the community.

Culinary excursions were used in my own teaching practice to support an assignment that required people to select an ingredient sold for profit in their local area. The objectives of the essay were to relate food to contemporary environmental and cultural factors by considering food production and social, political and economic forces. Combining the activities with opportunities to engage in critical reflection enhanced the experience and gave them a sense of purpose. The outcomes were not limited to student learning and assessment, however, and for the process of collaboration to be meaningful, the more challenging task of sharing resources, providing expertise and reciprocating the hospitality of food producers who invited us on to their land was necessary.

Many of the students have gone on to become more ethical consumers and vocal advocates of local food systems, although this was never an explicit intention of the activities. The tangible community services included the production of student work; an exhibit of historical photographs at a pecan plantation and café, the compilation of recipes using local ingredients, a collection of oral history recordings for other researchers lodged with the local historical society and seed saving. Each of these projects required *engagement with the contexts in which the study is situated*. Rather than a narrow focus on the historical dimensions of the ingredients, it was necessary to consider complementary disciplinary perspectives, to consider ecology, the local economy and culture, broader market issues, popular culture, environmental issues and so on.

An important ethical dimension motivates many community engagement projects and is a consideration in encouraging active involvement in the community. A significant role of universities, recognised in community engagement, is in developing a more just and civil society. *Engagement with the human condition* is an important approach to learning, particularly in the humanities and culinary excursions can locate food clearly in its social, cultural and civic dimensions. Recognising knowledge as created rather than learned, contemporary humanities subjects put emphasis on an understanding of the sociocultural context. Following from this, many educators have rejected the idea that learning about healthy food (as an example) will necessarily improve people's diets, enhance food systems or raise awareness about the environment.

We have now entered the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014. This global initiative is intended to take place within formal and *non-formal and informal* learning spaces and provides an important context for considering community engagement. The Yale Sustainable Food Project has similarities to the school initiatives mentioned earlier. The goal is to develop more positive relationships with food that will strive to achieve the goals articulated above. The focus on childhood obesity and diabetes could be the reason why there are more examples of school projects, but the Yale experiment shows that universities can also play a role. The project demonstrates Yale's commitment to nurturing informed, responsible citizens. One acre of garden supplies food for the campus dining halls, a teaching space and a forum for community events highlighting food and agricultural practices. The garden provides a model for sustainable agriculture and a topic for a

range of papers from different disciplines. Partnerships with local farmers have increased the quantity and range of foods provided in the dining hall and a test kitchen has been established. The project has also had financial rewards; in the 2004-2005 academic year about \$1.5m of Yale's food budget has been diverted into the local economy to support farmers, producers and processors practicing sustainable methods (Duster and Waters, 2006, pp. 42-47).

The Yale project provides a clear experience of the appeal of engaged learning; engagement with the learning process (or active learning), engagement with the object of study (or experiential learning), engagement with contexts (or multidisciplinary learning) and engagement with social and civic contexts (community engagement). It provides material for scholarship that is not separated artificially from the everyday things that matter and the communities in which we live. As scholars we traverse a number of different worlds, food may provide the opportunity for bringing some of these together.

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## ***UNI and YOU!* A school-community-university initiative to develop family educational literacy in disadvantaged communities**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper reports the work of the VU Access and Success Project's Student Ambassador UNI and YOU program which was developed to provide culturally responsive information sessions for parents and young people who are wishing to increase their chances of access and success in the later years of schooling. The project focus was to enhance family educational literacy in communities where students and parents have limited knowledge and experience of post-compulsory schooling. The project is aimed at all 12-19 year olds and their families to provide support for successful engagement in school, VET and higher education programs and pathways. It responds to the need for students and families to have explicit and appropriate information about what post-compulsory study is available, what happens there and how TAFE and higher education operate, before they can consider further study as a post-compulsory schooling option. Similarly, it aims to support students in their first years of TAFE and/or higher education studies in the university so that they can continue to develop on-going knowledge of the university and the opportunities it offers for career, pathways, international study, social life and work integrated learning.

### **Introduction**

From Dewey to Friere and Vygotsky and Giddens, the power of education is realised in knowledge development, informed action and individual agency. For disadvantaged communities, education is often inaccessible and this is particularly so for VU's region of western Melbourne (see Teese 2003, Teese and Polesel 2005 and Teese 2007 forthcoming). Similarly the recent work by Milne and Gabb (2005) demonstrates the need for families and students to have clear expectations and be well prepared for post-compulsory studies if they are to be successful and confident in completing their first year of tertiary study. This paper situates the UNI and YOU! project in the context of similar international programs in the US (University of Texas El Paso and the Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania) and UK (University of Liverpool). For the student ambassadors, involvement in programs such as this enriches their own experience of university, provides an authentic engagement with the development and demonstration of their own emerging professional skills and competencies and enables them to articulate their own experience as knowledge (Newmann et al 1996).

The *UNI and YOU!* project was designed to enable the University community to work collaboratively with parents and young people in schools to provide critical new knowledge, respectful engagement with their questions, concerns and knowledge and so to build new knowledge and confidence in the University experience for young people. In so doing, the project sought to build the skills and knowledge of parents, increase awareness of opportunity, stimulate aspirations for young people and

enhance the university learning experience of their tertiary studies program through their leadership of this program.

### ***UNI and YOU!* A Victoria University Access and Success Initiative**

The *UNI and YOU!* project is managed by the Victoria University Access and Success initiative and is linked to the Centre for Commencing Students Ambassador program as well as the Student Services Leadership program. It invited preservice teachers with an interest in community education, careers and work education to act as student ambassadors. These university students were keen to develop their career advisor skills and to participate in the Career Education and Young People higher education elective in preparation for this role. For their work in this project, they receive recognition for both the Career Education elective and for the elective unit in Student Leadership and Mentoring as part of their course. The Victoria University Access and Success project, School of Education, Student Career Services and Student Services provide academic leadership of the program and undertake the action research evaluation of the project.

The VU Access and Success project was initiated in 2006 with the explicit aim of improving the access and successful participation of young people in post compulsory education and training through collaborative research and deliberate informed strategic action through partnerships with schools in the western region of Melbourne. Access and Success connects directly to Victoria University's Mission to and Strategic Objectives, specifically

Students: To inspire students to learn and to provide a foundation for their careers and their effective participation in local and international arenas.

Communities: To embrace the diversity and dynamism of the University's local communities and to assist these communities to build their capacity to meet local, national and international challenges.

Access and Success seeks to respond to Teese's research on the educational experience of young people in disadvantaged communities which identified pedagogy, literacy and numeracy and educational pathways as having powerful influence in academic success. Access and Success aims to deliver 3 distinct outcomes:

- Achieve significant increases in educational capital, choices and outcomes for young people in Melbourne's west
- Reform teaching and research at Victoria University to support improved educational outcomes
- Position Victoria University as an international leader in education for disadvantaged communities

The Access and Success project works across the whole University as well as with schools in Melbourne's west to develop collaborative projects which extend and expand opportunities for young people to enhance their educational experience, choice and outcomes. Building the educational capacity and outcomes through enhanced educational literacy in families is one strategy which the Access and Success project has identified as an essential area for development in the region. *UNI and YOU!* is a pilot initiative for 2007 and plans for wider implementation are underway in 2008 and beyond.

## **UNI and YOU! VU Students as Leaders and Mentors of Young People and Parents**

The Student Ambassadors for the *UNI and YOU!* project were recruited to support a range of languages other than English and then worked with Career Educators. They spend approx 40 hours learning, planning and researching to prepare for, develop and conduct up to 3 connected workshops for school students and first year university students and their families as an extension of the Student Services Parent Orientation. These will be conducted across 2007 and multi-lingual workshops respond to local communities, eg Vietnamese, Arabic, Horn of Africa languages as appropriate. Workshops cover orientation to university experience, services and support arrangements, preparing applications and consideration of careers and pathways.

*Uni & YOU!* connects to other activities in the University in a number of ways and is developing a series of 3 workshops for career educators, parents and students from year 8 to first year of university to provide an on-going induction to the university experience including

- Applying for courses
- Information about careers/pathways,
- Making decisions about subjects/courses,
- The first year experience
- Locating advice/support
- How parents can support the success of their children.

While not designed as a career education program, rather a conversation about futures, the program is concerned with career development which requires individuals to grow understandings about who they are and their place in the world at any particular time. It also requires that the individual develop independent learning skills enabling them to seek out reliable information about the world of work, education, training and employment options. The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a most useful resource as it identifies and elaborates the eleven career competencies that Australians need to build their careers. These competencies are grouped across three key areas – personal management, learning and work exploration, and career building – and expanded through performance indicators.

## **UNI and YOU! A Connected Approach**

The UNI and YOU program embraces a range of characteristics including

1. Collaboration between faculties/divisions, sectors and service areas of the University

*UNI & YOU* is a collaborative project between a range of VU Schools and services and provides a partnership with secondary schools and the 3 Local Learning and Employment Networks and Career Education Association of Victoria.

2. ***Community Engaged Learning and Educational Literacy Enhancement***

*UNI and YOU!* enables conversations between young people and families where similar recent life experiences, often related to age, nationality and culture, refugee status, English as a second language schooling and low socio-economic conditions provide points of connection. Families are able to listen, talk and be listened to. They learn with and from each other and from those who are experiencing the next stage of schooling, one which may still be seemingly unattainable. The university experience is de-mystified and educational literacy and aspirations of the family are increased as better informed conversations about further education and pathways are possible.

### **3. *Learner-centred and collaborative learning approaches***

*UNI & YOU!* provides workshops for parents and students which are learner centred and respond to the needs of participants. The workshops include later years VU students as leaders and mentors and VU teaching colleagues.

### **4. *Systemic ways of addressing student diversity including linguistic diversity***

*UNI & YOU!* responds positively to student diversity through multi-lingual approaches. It acknowledges the value of speaking languages other than English and accommodates the needs and communication requirements of many parents and students in VU's broader community. We build relationships based on recognition and respect for cultural and linguistic backgrounds and stimulate development of understanding with regard to diversity in the VU student and staff.

## ***UNI and YOU! 2007***

In 2007, *UNI and YOU!* involves 10 university students one day a week and in evening and weekend sessions. There are a number of University and community colleagues working with the program, including a school-based teacher researcher who is researching the project as part of her masters thesis, a community liaison and development officer who is supporting appropriate connections to community and the project co-ordinator who brings academic skills, teaching experience and who supports the learning of the preservice teacher leaders. As well a team of colleagues from the Centre for Commencing Students, School of Education and Student Career Services are working with the *UNI and YOU!* team to ensure their readiness to work with and lead community sessions.

University students keep action learning records to report their experience and learning in the project. They have initiated and established a webspace for the project and maintain explicit notes of their meetings, details of their planning and reading and an on-going evaluation is being conducted of the program capturing quantitative data about contacts and conversations as well as impressions about effectiveness and areas for improvement.

In 2007, *UNI and YOU!* will run in 6 communities with 2 schools and 2 community groups already in programs. The *UNI and YOU!* VU student leaders conduct 3- 6 workshops in each setting with up to 10 school students and their parents in conversations over several weeks. Further, this project aims to realise the development of University Student Centred Learning and Learning in the Workplace Policies through the connection of the practice to theory through the collaborative engagement of VU students in work with academic staff, secondary school students and their families.

## **UNI and YOU! On-going Outcomes and Outreach**

The most significant learning to date has occurred in the preservice teachers whose development in the area of career education has been significant.

Preservice teachers have worked with the DEST national Career Education elective (Cherednichenko, Martino, Malloch and Tyler, 2005) to broaden their understanding of work and career exploration and ways of stimulating and encouraging young people to think about education in the post-compulsory years (Beckett and Hagar 2001). They have also developed their knowledge about being a teacher who is focussed on student learning achievement.

*'One of the most important things I have learned so far, is that when I go into the classroom to teach, I cannot work alone. I know I have to be part of an interprofessional collaborative team to know my students well and help them learn.'*(UNI and YOU! Preservice Teacher, June 2007)

While only tentative findings are emerging at this stage of project, the information from preservice teachers, school teachers and students and community members indicates that there is a strong demand for this project and that the students in Melbourne's west, while perhaps not as well informed as some of their more affluent peers, are keen to know about what happens in a university classroom and about career and work opportunities, pathways and possibilities. The key benefits of this project to date are identified from the data and evaluation as:

- Improved knowledge for young people and their parents about post-compulsory education, pathways and career opportunities;
- Improved parent and school student knowledge of post-compulsory schooling access, processes and university practices;
- Improved knowledge and personal and communication skills for university student leaders;
- Leadership opportunities for VU students and enhanced capability to develop Core Graduate Attributes which are also credentialed on the VU transcript.
- Improved relationships between VU and schools and community.
- Improved graduate teacher knowledge of career and work education.

At this stage, the first implementation of the *UNI and YOU!* Career Conversations are underway and already the student leaders have committed to extending their involvement for the whole of 2007 with some indicating that they wish to work with the 2008 team. Their developing awareness and knowledge is possibly having a greater impact on them than perhaps those young people with whom they are engaging. In this way, the impact of this project may not be fully realised for some years, once these preservice teachers have entered the workforce and we are able to see the difference in their teaching. *"It is also clear that meaningful career education can only happen when all teachers take on the responsibility of helping young people to acquire the knowledge necessary to understand the range of educational and career opportunities available to them"* (Martino 2007).

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## University engagement with local government

**Max Standage and Tania Clarke**

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### **Abstract:**

The relationship between the Australian university sector and the Australian and State Governments understandably receives a lot of attention given that most universities are established under state acts of parliament and most of the public funding that they receive comes from the Australian and State Governments. The relationship between the university sector and the third tier of government, local councils, has received much less attention, but it is a relationship which is of increasing importance as universities embrace community engagement and as councils assume an increasingly important role in community and economic strategic planning and development.

In this paper, a case study in the broad area of economic development is presented of the relationship between Griffith University and the Gold Coast City Council. The reasons why this relationship has developed into a strongly supportive and mutually beneficial partnership are explored.

### **Introduction**

South East Queensland is the fastest growing region in Australia and the corridor from Brisbane in the north to the New South Wales border is a key driver of that growth. It includes the Gold Coast City which is Australia's second largest local government authority and sixth largest city with currently around 500,000 permanent residents and growing at 15,000 residents per year.

Large modern local government councils have sophisticated strategic planning processes that go far beyond the old adage that "local government is only interested in roads, rates and rubbish". Although the third tier of government is not even mentioned in the Australian Constitution, local bodies being established under State acts of parliament, several councils (Brisbane, Gold Coast) have budgets larger than the smallest states and territories and undertake strategic planning exercises and activities that embrace all aspects of their community's cultural, educational, social and economic development. Local government has recognised the importance of higher education in general and the university sector in particular as a key driver of growth and development and looks to the sector to play its part in the development of the community. The Gold Coast City Council's (GCCC) economic development strategy identifies the importance of the university sector to achieving the objectives of the strategy, which includes the development of a strong knowledge based component to the local economy, the so-called "new economy".

Since the establishment of a public higher education institution on the Gold Coast, first as a College of Advanced Education, and then after merging with Griffith University in 1990, as a public university campus, the college/university has sought to develop academic programs and research activities that not only responded to existing local interests, but opened up an extensive array of new academic programs, such as professional programs in accounting, engineering, education, psychology, dentistry and oral health, medicine, nursing, pharmacy and physiotherapy, matched

by research centres that conducted basic research and research commercialisation and consultancy activity. Griffith University's Gold Coast campus is the fastest growing campus in Australia and at 14,000 students in 2007 is already the largest and most diverse of the university's five campuses. It is set to continue to expand its student intake over the next few years and will host a new 750 bed university teaching hospital which is planned to open in 2012.

### **Gold Coast Council Strategic Plans**

In this section, one of the Gold Coast Council's major strategic plans, the *Gold Coast City's Economic Development Strategy* is briefly reviewed in relation to a number of explicit and implicit references contained in it concerning the role of higher education in the economic development of the city. The Strategy aims to:

create the conditions necessary for regional economic success and prosperity including a highly skilled and educated community, strong international connections, infrastructure that meets the needs of industry and an entrepreneurial culture focused on innovation. (GCCC 2004, p. 5)

It aspires to have the Gold Coast recognised as a globally connected city in which tourism and the associated development industry will continue to underpin the city's economic base, but will be augmented by a rapidly growing "new economy" economic sector.

The Strategy is implemented through the Economic Development and Major Projects Directorate and the Council is advised on the Strategy by the Regional Economic Development Board (REDAB) whose directors cover the major industry sectors represented on the Gold Coast including education. Griffith University's Pro-Vice Chancellor (Community Partnerships) and Provost of the Gold Coast campus is a Director of REDAB. The Strategy is based around eight "Fundamentals", eight industry action agendas and ten centres in what is known as the Pacific Innovation Corridor. The "Fundamentals" are Learning City, Innovation City, International Connections, Cooperation, Creative City, City of Experiences, Image and Identity, and Infrastructure. Throughout the document there are a number of references concerning the role of education and the university sector in the Strategy and some examples are given below.

The Learning City strategy aims to:

Create a culture within the Gold Coast community and industry that highly values life-long learning with outcomes including high rates of participation and continual involvement in many and various forms of formal and informal learning. (GCCC 2004, p. 14)

The Innovation City strategy notes that "research output acts as a catalyst for innovation, start up firms, rapid economic growth, new product development and export success". The strategy aims to "Increase R&D output, in universities, other research institutions and individual firms." "Support planning and development of the Griffith University Knowledge Precinct, Griffith University Technology Park...." (GCCC 2004, p.15)

The Creative City strategy addresses the development of the new economy with its focus on new ideas, innovation, and creativity and the need for a highly skilled and creative work force. Under this strategy the Gold Coast is to:

become a centre of excellence in creativity in field such as new product development, music composition and production, performing and visual

arts, film and interactive media and built environment design. (GCCC, 2004, p.18)

It identifies that a broader and deeper cultural base will be necessary to appeal to knowledge workers. The Infrastructure strategy aims to “present a strong case to the Commonwealth Government ... to obtain acceptance that universities be recognised as part of an infrastructure funding approach” (GCCC, 2004, p. 21).

The Strategy identifies the following key industries; Creative industry, Education & Training, Environment, Food, Health and Medical, Information and Communications Technology, Marine, and Sport. The Strategy refers to the role of universities in the following key industries.

The Gold Coast hosts a strong creative industry cluster around the Warner Roadshow Studio precinct. The Strategy refers to engagement of the tertiary education sector and mentions the Griffith University Bachelor of Popular Music program offered by the university’s Queensland College of Art facilities at the Gold Coast. As well, the Griffith Film School has close links with the film industry on the Gold Coast.

Education and Training is:

a key industry in the global economy, as a producer, consumer and export earner. The industry produces skilled people, creates knowledge, provides access for the community to the lifelong benefits of learning and is the enabling force for other industries. (GCCC, 2004, p. 28)

The Environment industry is regarded as an important component of the Gold Coast’s economy. Griffith University, with its strengths in environmental and health sciences is mentioned as a partner to the GCCC.

The Health and Medical industry is a significant component of the Gold Coast economy and is set to expand substantially as new facilities such as a 750 bed University Teaching Hospital on the Griffith University Gold Coast campus are constructed. The rapid build up of university programs in health on the Gold Coast, including the Griffith Medical, and Dental and Oral Health Schools are mentioned as is the growth of research and medical technology facilities.

The Strategy identifies the need to increase uptake of ICT studies in high schools and universities as one of the strategies to support the Information and Communications Technology Industry.

The Sport industry section of the Strategy identifies Griffith University as one of the GCCC partners.

The Strategy also highlights the Pacific Innovation Corridor Centres of which one, Southport, which includes the Griffith University Gold Coast campus, is described as a Medical, Educational, Technology and Business centre, reflecting the university activities in the area. Under individual precinct projects is “Support Griffith University to develop the Knowledge Precinct”.

### **Griffith University Strategic Plans**

From its establishment Griffith University has embraced a deep commitment to the principles of community engagement and this has been an important part of its mission. The University gave formal recognition to this commitment through its strategic directions set out in the *Griffith Project* in 2002, which stated that a new

department, the Office for Community Partnerships (OCP), be established to create new relationships to “bring together community, business enterprises, higher education and schools.” (Griffith University, 2002, p. 23)

The *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* articulates a new imperative for the University: to excel in research and learning, and lists as one of its core goals as social engagement. It re-affirms the University’s commitment to engage with its communities through research and learning, calling for “effective interaction” with community, industry, government and other institutions. Such engagement, it says, both enables better performance and differentiates Griffith from its peers.

*The Griffith Academic Plan 2 (2006-2010)* re-affirms Griffith’s commitment to engaging communities purposefully linking it to three key areas of activity: work integrated learning; engagement with industry and the professions; and graduate employment outcomes. This plan commits the University to investigating strategies to increase activity in these three important areas.

The University’s community partnerships goal commits the University to enhancing its engagement with its communities through sustained levels of interaction, resulting in the University being recognised as an integral part of its communities through contributions to their cultural, social and business development. In addressing this goal the university seeks to achieve community engagement, which is fully integrated with teaching and research, rather than an adjunct role. (Griffith University, 2005, p.14-15)

*The Griffith Research: Plan (2005 – 2010)* also re-affirms that community engagement is one of the University’s foundation values. “It manifests itself in the strong focus on the social benefit of Griffith’s research” to the community, no matter in what area of the University’s activities. (Griffith University, 2005, p. 9)

## **The Partnership**

At a strategic planning level, the Council has a strong appreciation of the importance of the University to the community and that the University recognises its responsibilities to the community it serves. Other features of the relationship are the mutual support for a range of projects undertaken by both institutions, the range of personal contacts between staff, and the cross-membership on committees and working parties. Often very senior Council staff participate on University advisory committees and hold senior adjunct appointments. For example, the Director of Engineering Services for the Council is a member of the Griffith Engineering School’s Advisory Committee and an Honorary Professor in the School. University staff have been members of numerous Council advisory committees over the years. The result is an extensive network of informal contacts that give staff in both organisations considerable knowledge of the capabilities, plans and aspirations of each other’s institutions.

Space does not permit a comprehensive listing of the benefits that have flowed both ways from the partnership, so here a number of the benefits the University has received are briefly mentioned.

The Council has funded two professorial positions in coastal management and urban management. This outcome has arisen because senior officers in the Council saw the need to build a local research capability in coastal and urban management

issues, and had contacts with relevant senior University staff who were able to work with their Council colleagues in jointly developing proposals for council funding to support two professorial appointments.

The Coastal Management Chair is also Director of the Centre for Coastal Management that does extensive contract work for the GCCC on a range of coastal management projects and manages contracts on behalf of council. The Centre runs a community engagement program designed to increase community awareness of coastal management issues and bridge the gap between decision makers and other stakeholders.

The Queensland Smart Water Research Facility is collaboration between the Queensland Government that is providing a \$10 million loan, and Griffith University and the Gold Coast City Council who are each providing \$4 million to construct a facility containing state-of-the-art water research laboratories and demonstration facilities. Griffith University and Gold Coast City Council staff will be based at the Facility.

The Griffith Knowledge Precinct is a concept that recognises the role the Griffith University Gold Coast campus has in the growth of the “new economy” on the Gold Coast. The Council has supported several feasibility studies in partnership with the University and the State Government. This work has drawn the attention of planners to the need to plan for the long term use of land around the campus site in ways that are synergistic with the University’s growth and development

The Gold Coast Innovation Centre is another example of a project developed in partnership with the Gold Coast City that was led by the Council’s Economic Development Branch and utilises purpose-built incubator space on the Griffith University Gold Coast campus to support start up companies. \$500k of funding was provided by the State Government that was matched jointly by the Council and the University to provide \$1 million over 5 years to support the management of the Centre.

## **Discussion**

There is now a significant body of literature on the role that universities play in regional development in terms of the impact of commercializing intellectual property or by taking a broader view that looks for social and cultural factors as well as commercialization activities. The former approach focuses on economic benefits generated by incubator activity, the formation of startup companies, licensing, and consulting, whereas the latter approach takes a broader view in which teaching and research programs may be regionally focused and social and cultural contributions and capacity building are acknowledged.

The term “institutional thickness” (Amin & Thrift 1994, Keane & Alison 1999, Gunasekara 2004) has been used to describe the social and cultural factors that are crucial to successful regional development. Dale & Nilsen 2000 identify four factors that contribute towards the construction of institutional thickness in a region: These factors include the existence of a rich network of formal and informal links between the institutions in the region, high levels of interaction in both formal and informal contexts, a strong mutual awareness and understanding, and a sense of common purpose.

Applying these ideas to university engagement with local government, institutional thickness in this context implies the university is part of regional networks that link the local government to business and other institutions, that there are a number of formal and informal links between the university and local government, that these links are actively exercised, and that there is a high level of mutual awareness and understanding.

Boucher, Conway & Van Der Meer 2003 examined regional engagement by universities mostly in the European context. They identified a number of factors, including regionalization of the higher education system, regional identity and networks, type of region and university, whose interactions shape community engagement of universities in their region. They found at the university level that competition and hierarchy issues between universities in a region were particularly important. In essence, they found that a large scale “single player” university in a “peripheral” region was most likely to engage strongly with that region. Where several universities were located in either “core” (capital city, or equivalent locations) or “peripheral” regions, then either competition and/or hierarchy issues distracted these universities from focusing as strongly on community engagement.

## **Conclusions**

What have been the factors for success in the relationship between the Gold Coast City Council and Griffith University?

It is clear from the above discussion, that the factors that contribute to “institutional thickness” are present in the relationship between the two institutions. As well, another indicator for success, that the University is a large scale “single player” in the region is also satisfied.

Clearly an important factor has been the significant strategic planning undertaken by the Council in response to the many issues arising primarily from the rapid growth of the region. Without this commitment to strategic planning, it is doubtful if the Council would have recognised the nature and range of issues that had to be addressed, the significant role of university education, or the consequent need for research and consultancy work.

There is little doubt that having senior Council staff actively involved in advisory roles to a range of academic elements on campus and in some cases holding adjunct appointments have given them an awareness of the University’s capabilities, so that appropriate resources could be identified to carry out and/or manage the required research and consultancy activities.

Another important factor is that the University has been in a position to respond to the region’s needs through a period of rapid growth by investing in staff, academic programs and research activities of relevance to local issues. The development of a large scale campus with a broad range of academic activities increased the opportunities for collaboration. It should be noted that in the Dawkins era the Federal Government’s expectations of the then fledging Gold Coast campus in the early 1990’s was of essentially a teaching only feeder campus to the University’s Brisbane campuses. From the outset, Griffith University rejected this view and established a full suite of teaching and research facilities at its Gold Coast campus.

The outcome has been that the partnership between the Council and the University has delivered very significant benefits to both parties and, most importantly to the broader Gold Coast community.

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## **UniSA in Mount Gambier: regions connecting to meet community needs**

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### **Abstract:**

Following much community consultation, a new university presence was established in Mount Gambier and began operating in 2005. A longitudinal study is following the first cohort of students through their undergraduate studies and into subsequent employment in order to investigate the impact of this venture on those students and their communities, and identify changes that can be implemented to improve the operation. This paper summarises key features of the experiences of those involved, together with teaching and learning implications revealed and addressed. It affirms the positives apparent from the inception of UniSA's Mount Gambier Regional Centre, but does not avoid negatives identified. Changes and new procedures implemented in response are explained. This particular example of university outreach is characterised by two regions, in opposite directions from the state capital, making connections and mutually benefiting from them.

### **Introduction**

Established in 2005, a new University of South Australia (UniSA) presence in the Limestone Coast Region of South Australia is now into its third year of educating professionals in business and enterprise, social work, and nursing. It provides as far as possible the equivalent of an on-campus experience for students who previously would have had to move elsewhere to study or be off-campus students. This response to expressed community needs has depended on collaboration with other institutions within the region. Details of motivations, preparatory work and initial establishment were presented at the 2006 AUCEA Conference (Pullin and Munn, 2006).

Much of the impetus for the development of the Mount Gambier Regional Centre (MGRC) came from work over a long period by community members anxious to have a university presence in the second-largest city in the state, as well as ground-laying work by University personnel (Pullin, Petkov, Munn, Bouilly, and Crozier, 2006). It has drawn on existing social capital and continues by its presence and ongoing work to contribute to building further social capital (Watkinson and Ellis, 2006).

The new situation provided an opportunity to study the impact of such a development on the community, the students and staff involved and other stakeholders. This would also inform ongoing adjustments to course delivery and facilities provision. A research team is following the first cohort of students through their studies and into employment, as well as gaining input from relevant staff and community members. The discussion section includes both comment on these data and a summary of changes made in response to some of the data, to Course Evaluation Instruments (CEIs) and Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs), and to informal, anecdotal data.

The MGRC teaching and learning context strives for on-campus university experience equivalence. It involves the use of TAFE facilities, and a science laboratory at a nearby Catholic college. Course delivery is coordinated by Whyalla

staff of the University's Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE) and is a blend of lectures video-conferenced from Whyalla, face-to-face tutorials run by local part-time staff and, increasingly, face-to-face lectures, with some lectures now also video-conferenced from Mount Gambier to Whyalla. Information and communication technologies of various kinds are integral to the effective delivery of courses. Lecturing staff from Whyalla (two flights away) visit at strategic times.

### **Regional education and employment issues**

While rural students were an 'equity group' identified by the Commonwealth Government's *A fair chance for all* (DEET 1989), and a national inquiry (HREOC, 2000) found that they were less likely than metropolitan students to complete schooling, let alone university studies, their under-representation in higher education depends on more than just campus proximity – university relationships with communities are crucial (Stevenson, Evans, Maclachlan, Karmel and Blakers, 2001).

Retaining young people in regional areas has often been difficult. Moving away for employment and/or study, many have built new lives in metropolitan areas. A longitudinal survey that explored various factors influencing such movement identified 'the pursuit of further educational opportunities, particularly attending a university' as 'a significant influence' on the likelihood of a young person relocating to a major city (Hillman and Rothman, 2007, p. vi). One motivation for undertaking higher education is a desire to follow areas of interest; while this was identified in a recent national survey concerning the first year experience, a greater focus on employment outcomes was evident among students from rural backgrounds (Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis, 2005). Likewise, the attraction and retention of professionals has often proved difficult, leading to gaps in services. People who are able to achieve tertiary qualifications in a rural/regional area are more likely to stay to work there (Penman, Oliver and Petkov, 2003). Their retention in a higher education program also depends on making the right choice, experiencing satisfaction with their student experience, and feeling supported through unforeseen difficulties. In all this, the first year is a key to their subsequent pathways. It is not only teaching and learning matters that determine outcomes: a good social transition can help new students settle in at university (Kantanis, 2000), while new networks can have direct benefits for study (Peat, Dalziel and Grant, 2001).

### **Research design and methods**

It was envisaged that aspects of this study would be in the nature of action research – following planning and initial data gathering, observation and reflection on the data would lead to actions that would be evaluated in the next survey. The process would involve 'deepening the participants' understanding of social processes and developing strategies to bring about improvement' (Noffke and Somekh, 2005, p. 91). However, this would not be conducted in isolation: at the same time, student responses to CEIs and SETs would be taken into account in implementing further changes, which would doubtless also influence later student evaluations.

The first stage of the research involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data concerning the perceptions of students, staff and community stakeholders of the new venture. Focus groups were held with participants from each of these groups. Focus group data also provided a check that all relevant issues were included in the student survey conducted late in 2005. This was an online anonymous questionnaire, which collected demographic and study status data, and explored

students' experience of the learning context, using rating scales and providing opportunity for further comment.

Perspectives of students from the first cohort who had withdrawn were also sought. Telephone interviews were conducted early in 2007 with as many of these people as could be contacted and were willing to participate. These interviews collected demographic data and asked for the underlying reason for withdrawal, as well as indications of future study prospects. Interviewees were asked to rate a number of aspects of the learning environment on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), and were given the opportunity to add any further comments.

It is planned to survey the students again later this year (their third year), and a final time after graduation. Code names allocated to the 2005 cohort will allow anonymous matching of data with the later surveys. Stakeholders, with whom the University continues to liaise, will also be surveyed as part of the concluding stage of the project, providing an update of student/alumni and community perceptions.

## **Results**

### **Focus groups and survey**

Numbers involved were: student focus groups – 17 (all female, representing all programs); staff focus groups – 7 (6 females, 1 male, all programs, representing both locations), stakeholder focus group – 13 (7 males, 6 females); student survey – 21 (20 females, 1 male; 2 Business, 6 Nursing and 9 Social Work) out of a total of 68 students.

Key points from the focus groups and survey include: general gratitude for the new university presence and opportunities (students and stakeholders); staff feeling that they were being of service and contributing as pioneers; student appreciation for helpfulness and concern shown by staff; a desire for consistency in marking and feedback; some frustrations caused by technological glitches and resource delays; and a strong preference for face-to-face interaction with staff, while recognising that video-conferencing provided opportunities that would not be available without it. Student satisfaction levels were generally positive – in the survey, most dissatisfaction was expressed with library service, printing required and textbook purchase procedures, followed by video-conferenced lectures, and individual issues with parking and timetables, but for all categories those expressing dissatisfaction were in the minority. For overall satisfaction with their first year, only one student was moderately dissatisfied, while 5 (24%) were extremely satisfied, 11 (52%) were very satisfied, and 4 (19%) were moderately satisfied. More detail has been included in a paper currently under review, concentrating on the teaching and learning context, and in one focusing on the impact on individuals involved and on the region (Watkinson and Ellis, 2006).

### **Telephone interviews**

Of those from the 2005 cohort who had withdrawn (17), the 6 students reached were willing to take part in the short telephone interview: 3 males and 3 females, representing all program areas (Business 3, Nursing 2, Social Work 1), ages ranging from people born in the 1980s (3) to the late 1950s (2), one being born in the 1970s. Their domestic situation was: 4 single, 2 partnered (1 having a child at home). Half

of them lived very close to the MGRC, two had a 30 km trip to the Centre, and one lived 140 km away. Their prior education and entry pathways were: Year 12 (3); TAFE (2); and Special Tertiary Admissions Test (1).

Reasons given for their withdrawal from their program were: a combination of health, relationship and employment issues; financial need; poor choice of program; pressure of employment; and moving to the metropolitan area. One of the students interviewed has subsequently re-enrolled in the original program.

Their rating of the learning environment varied considerably as is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Rating of aspects of the learning environment by withdrawing students (from 1 = poor to 5 = excellent)

<i>Aspect of the learning environment</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Lecturers		-	1	1	3	1
Tutors		-	2	-	4	-
Video-conferenced lectures	1	1	3	1	-	0
Library accessibility	1	2	2	1		
Response time for queries from administrative staff		-	-	2	1	3
Response time for feedback on assignments		-	-	3	3	-
Working environment		-	1	4	1	-
Facilities		1	1	1	3	
Family friendliness		-	1	2	3	-
Social scene		2	-	3	-	1

Other comments included positives about helpful administrative staff, a strong preference for face-to-face teaching, issues about inconsistent marking when more than one person was marking in the one course, and other negatives about frustrations with the video-conferencing for lectures – time lapse, difficulty in hearing everything. The hours for lectures did not suit everyone, because of other employment, or long travel, particularly for evening classes. A part-time student envied the networking that the full-time students enjoyed.

Students who had withdrawn appreciated the University presence in Mount Gambier and understood that a new venture means difficulties to be ironed out. One expressed readiness to go back to studying with UniSA if a future opportunity arose.

## Discussion

In response to the data collected by this research and also by course evaluations, various changes have been implemented to enhance the learning experience of MGRC students. Some changes made initially for the benefit of staff have had flow-on benefits for students, such as staff development activities to increase confidence and expertise in using new technologies. Others include administrative changes and the upgrading of resources and facilities. While reasons for student withdrawals may not relate to MGRC course delivery, comments on aspects of these former students' experience reinforced some of the earlier data, particularly with regard to library services and video-conferenced lectures.

Concerns about the service provided by the Adelaide-based 'university preferred' book supplier led to arrangements with the local bookshop to provide all textbooks for MGRC students. Students have since reported greater satisfaction with delivery timelines, cost and customer service. While the majority have purchased locally, students still have the option of sourcing textbooks from other suppliers.

UniSA made a deliberate decision not to enter into a partnership with TAFE for the provision of library services on campus, because the TAFE service model did not fit in with the strong online learning environment that UniSA promotes. Instead, MGRC students have free access to UniSA's Flexible Delivery Service (FDS), which provides a 24-hour turnaround to an online request; reference material is delivered to a student's nominated address. Initial delays experienced and reported by some students were investigated and quickly addressed by FDS staff. Additional emphasis was given to explaining the effective use of the FDS.

In February 2006, a UniSA-funded building development (Stage 1) created several new classroom and office spaces, including a new computer pool with a faster printer, thereby more than doubling students' free computer and printing access compared with 2005. As TAFE maintains the equipment, students use a TAFE login to access the UniSA website via the TAFE network and so are not bound by UniSA print and e-mail quotas, leading to problems in keeping up supplies of consumables. However, awareness-raising with both staff and students has led to more sustainable use.

The building project also provided a larger reception area for the MGRC, more office accommodation for permanent and sessional staff and, more recently, a 'hot office' set up to provide access to university online resources and facilities for local sessional and visiting staff, an expanded Nursing Skills Laboratory, and a larger multi-purpose lecture room/video-conferencing facility – double the size of the main 2005 lecture space. Upgraded video-conferencing technology, operating on a simple 'touch screen' system, has improved its usability and reliability. Training for new staff, web pages with extensive hints on appropriate video-conferencing methodologies, and lunch-time professional development sessions have increased staff confidence in its use.

The third year of each program was introduced in 2007, placing more demands on the video-conference and teaching space. In addition, a Foundation Studies program commenced in 2007 as a pilot project, attracting 16 commencing students, many of whom, it is hoped, will complete the one year full-time program and progress to further CRE programs.

While the partnership with TAFE is a harmonious one, room use is at a premium on campus for both UniSA and TAFE activities, requiring close communication between the two organisations to optimise use of available teaching and office space. In order to alleviate the pressure and to accommodate the increasing student population, UniSA has secured funding for a Stage 2 building project to be completed by the beginning of the 2008 academic year.

The first full-time academic appointments were made in 2006, with two Nursing and one Social Work academic commencing in January. A Business academic was appointed in February 2007, relocating from Whyalla. There are currently 15 local professionals who provide tutoring and lecturing on a sessional basis.

The terms of reference for a CRE teaching and learning working party established in 2006 include monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and implementing

strategies for improvement at both Whyalla and Mount Gambier. The working party provides a forum for discussing learning and teaching issues and aims to support staff in achieving good practice and improving the retention and success rates for all student cohorts. Inconsistency issues raised by the students are being addressed through greater moderation of assignment marking, and electronic lodgement of assignments allows more timely feedback.

Orientation activities have been well attended by commencing students at Mount Gambier, thanks to the closer interaction developed between students and the Mount Gambier based staff, who emphasise the importance and benefit of attending. A new CRE Student Handbook, designed to assist students to access generic UniSA and CRE-specific administrative and student support information more quickly, was distributed to all first year students during 2007 orientation sessions.

Staff and students have gradually been developing the social dimensions of life on campus. Monthly 'happy hours' at a local restaurant were initiated in 2006 for all full-time and sessional staff, and students established informal program-based gatherings. Staff and students get together to celebrate the end of the academic year.

## **Conclusion**

When the Centre for Regional Engagement was first established, it was envisioned that the MGRC would be the first of a number of regional hubs to be set up in South Australia. What is learned from the current project will be invaluable in implementing such future developments and also, we anticipate, for other universities planning similar outreach.

This development has been in harmony with the 1990 Act that established the University, which included among its functions the provision of tertiary education to meet the needs of industry, commerce, the professions or any other section of the community; and also to meet the needs of groups considered to have suffered educational disadvantage (*University of South Australia Act 1990*, section 5(1) <http://www.unisa.edu.au/policies/act/act.asp>). Moreover it demonstrates the University's commitment to its positioning statement: 'Educating professionals. Creating and applying knowledge. Engaging Our Communities.' The MGRC is contributing to meeting the employment needs of the region as well as providing new higher education opportunities for the community.

While greater use of new technologies by universities may suggest that traditional face-to-face teaching may not be so necessary, and hence a physical university presence could perhaps be replaced by a virtual one, our findings nevertheless clearly indicate the preference by students, as well as many staff, for face-to-face course delivery where possible, while recognising that the use of other media provide opportunities that they did not enjoy before. Having a physical presence in a regional location also brings other advantages that come from the resulting visibility within the community.

The University of South Australia, through its founding Act, has a mandate to consider the needs of the whole state. At the same time, ensuring the financial viability of such ventures as the MGRC is essential for long-term survival. Student satisfaction and consequent favourable word-of-mouth publicity, efficient and effective program delivery, and strong community support all have a part.

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