

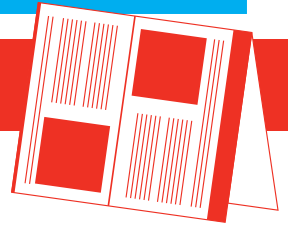


BEYOND TODAY NEWS

YOUR OFFICIAL IACE NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2009

LEARNING TOGETHER



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Professor Jude Butcher cfc
Director, Institute for Advancing Community Engagement

Learning Together shows how Australian Catholic University's students and staff experience quality learning during their engagement with communities.

Ballarat nursing and education students are more convinced of the importance of what they learn and how basic health and wellbeing knowledge is valued by the community. Visit the Maths Club and see children and ACU students showing how engaged learning makes a difference for all involved.

Community engagement at the Waterloo Salvation Army Centre has been transformative for Meghan Wallace where her Theology informed her engagement while she also became more compassionate to older people and people with mental illnesses.

Engagement with a community has given "legs" to a theologian's learning and teaching. Quality teaching and learning are seen in the field of inclusive education as well as with people involved in bush regeneration.

This newsletter shows how community engagement-based teaching and learning has made a difference.

Contact IACE to share your own accounts - iace@acu.edu.au



TODAY'S TOP STORIES

Health and Wellbeing with Ballarat Arts & Sciences Senior Lecturer, Ms BJ Johnson.

Engaging in New Experiences - an insight into Community Engagement courses with Anthony Steel

Talks and discussions with ACU students Meghan Wallace, Kelly Otte and student / lecturer Dan Fleming.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING - KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING



Ballarat Arts & Sciences Senior lecturer, Ms BJ Johnson says: "Community engagement, where ACU students interact directly with the local community, is an invaluable teaching and learning experience. "

"These experiences enhance my teaching as they help get clear messages across that previously were only theory. Community engagement has sharpened the students' desire to communicate their knowledge and has reinforced the importance of their chosen careers," says BJ.

Local lack of knowledge

Ballarat Nursing and Education students have found that the basic health and wellbeing knowledge covered in their course is clearly lacking in the community. They were amazed at the lack of knowledge about health in a recent forum they conducted for early high school students, covering topics such as the importance of exercise, nutrients and a varied diet.

The program, part of the award-winning Ballarat Learning for Life Project, was developed with ACU staff and students, together with Michelle Anderson and Julia White from the Smith Family.

Apple, apple, apple

One vivid example of lack of knowledge came in a blindfold taste test as part of the forum, where one high school student guessed everything as apple.

When questioned, it became apparent that this student had never eaten an apple. ACU students started to question a diet without this common fruit. Was this possible in Australia today?

In another workshop the recommended daily intake of calcium was being discussed. One high school student responded that he couldn't drink that much milk because he wasn't allowed: the family had to make it last.

Reciprocal benefits

"The engagement was definitely reciprocal, " says BJ Johnson. ACU students gained practical insight into community health knowledge and the high school students engaged with ACU students, giving them the idea that they too might attend university.

ENGAGING IN NEW EXPERIENCES

ANTHONY STEEL

Community Engagement as an academic course

Anthony Steel has been teaching the unit called THCP207 Christian Community Engagement in the Theology Faculty. It is to be continued by UNIV201 – Community Engagement and Transformation.

He says: "A challenge for students is to see Theology not just as academic study but as the foundation of all we do in ministry. The values and beliefs in this Theology unit serve as an excellent foundation for those in the helping professions.

This unit transformed many students who were challenged to reflect on their current values and beliefs, to step outside their comfort zone and to engage in new experiences such as developing relationships with the elderly or those with mental health issues."

Challenging and beneficial placements

Anthony needed to make sure there was a useful alignment between the academic component of the course and the students' practical placements. It was important, too, for students to choose areas of placement for themselves but to be helped to choose





◀ Anthony Steel and student Meghan Wallace discuss Community Engagement placements.

- Marist Brothers – Thursday Island

Community Engagement for volunteers and as an academic unit

The Institute for Advancing Community Engagement (IACE) offers opportunities for all staff and students to volunteer with its programs. In addition, it provides academic courses in engagement, which differentiates ACU in the Australian university sector.

More information - Anthony Steel at anthony.steel@acu.edu.au or iace@acu.edu.au

something challenging.

They were encouraged to stretch themselves, not to do what they had experience with, or where they would be comfortable. They were invited to examine their motivation for placement and areas of personal growth they wanted to work towards.

Background to placement

- There was a range of readings that helped the students prepare for, and then reflect upon, their placements to understand the transformative power of this experience. This ensured that they had the correct theological context for their placement and that they were well prepared for the reality of being in mission.

- The readings and topics discussed in class had a focus on theology, ministry and hope, as well as practical issues like professional boundaries and responsibility.

- Students did a personal skills audit, followed by an open discussion of their strengths and attempts to identify where they chose to grow. This guided choices of placement.

Genuine Partnership

A key understanding of the placement was that it was a time for the students to be engaged in reciprocal relationships.

"They were not there to 'do for' but to 'do with' people."

On the ground

Contexts for the placement included:

- Waterloo Salvation Army Neighborhood Centre
- Catholic Chaplaincy at Macquarie university

A NEW CENTRE FOR MEGHAN'S LIFE

ACU STUDENT MEGHAN WALLACE



Placement out of her comfort zone - Meghan Wallace, a Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Theology student at the Strathfield campus, looks back at her placement in Anthony Steel's unit.

"I did change with my placement. I was challenged to do things I wouldn't normally do, especially in relationships. At the Waterloo Salvation Army Centre there were a lot of people with mental illnesses and aged people whom I wouldn't talk with normally.

I found myself enjoying conversations with them and the feeling was mutual because they kept asking 'when are you coming back?' It was definitely two-way."

"I went into this placement feeling 50 hours is a really long time! I just wanted to get it over and done with quickly "And I thought 'I won't change!'" said Meghan.

"I know the difference I made to people during my placement and I know that I am a different person – a better person."

Well, I have had a real attitude shift – now I think about when I am able to go back to the centre – when is my next visit?"

What I learned – how I changed

Meghan writes: The key thing I think was the different perspectives I developed. I see people in a different light now. The people I met really touched me. The relationships they had with each other were amazing too. I was able to observe and reflect on relationships – that was a powerful experience.

I would find myself talking about my time at the Centre to my family at home. My family watched me go through this placement and, although I was compassionate before, they feel I have become more compassionate and more understanding.

The relationships I developed and observed were the key for me. I think the 50 hours could maybe be longer. I worked my 50 hours over two months. However, if the placement hours were extended, you could really build more solid relationships.

Well-prepared for placement

Meghan felt that the fact that the lecturer Anthony Steel covered professional boundaries, before the placement, turned out to be really important. With a responsibility to others things like co-dependence can arise, which can be upsetting for people affected if they don't know what to do.

Anthony had set weekly readings as part of the placement. Of these, Meghan says; "I really related to these readings during my placement – I could see they applied each day in the relationships around me. They were not just readings - they were practical insights into my daily life and the relationships I was experiencing. "



'READING, 'RITHMETIC - MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**ACU STUDENT
KELLY OTTE**

"Professionally my teaching, communication and organisation skills have improved significantly. Personally, working with people in the community and with students in schools has been a huge boost to my confidence – I can talk with anyone now!" says Kelly.



Kelly Otte, 4th Year ACU Bachelor of Education student, Ballarat campus, is making her mark in the local community. Working with The Smith Family Ballarat for the last two years, Kelly has gained invaluable experience.

Kelly says "With my community engagement experience I will have a few things up my sleeve for my first days of teaching next year".

"I am making a life-long difference to the literacy and numeracy skills for students in the programs" said Kelly "That is a great thing to be able to say."

Partnerships

Kelly organises and runs the student2student program with The Smith Family's Glenda Sharp and Julia White.

She also participates in the Maths Club as part of the elective unit Numeracy in the Early Years with Dr Ann Gervasoni, Senior Lecturer, Education Ballarat.

Over the phone

student2student is a reading program with a twist. High school students mentor primary school students in their literacy skills by helping them with reading 2-3 times a week. The twist is that this is done over the phone.

Kelly said the idea for student2student was based on research showing primary school students felt less intimidated reading over the phone than face-to-face. Parents say that the children love the program and can't wait for their mentor to phone each week.

The phone idea removes a barrier to participation because it happens in the home. Parents are present when their child is reading and they gain confidence too, with an increase in the number of parents helping with reading.

Good results for program

With pre and post testing for the program, results show significant improvements in the children's literacy skills.

It is a great gift for parents to see their children, some of whom were really struggling, read with such confidence. Confidence grows with their improved literacy skills and their mentors also gain increased confidence as they see the difference they are making.

All together now

Ballarat is a community reading together – volunteers, children, families and teachers!

Ballarat Maths Club

As part of Dr Gervasoni's Numeracy unit, pre-service teachers go to local primary schools and tutor the students after school at Maths Club. This is an initiative from The Smith Family and the university works with them in a joint effort to improve the numeracy skills of local children.

Reciprocal benefit

The pre-service teachers benefit from the experience of putting theory into practice and the school students benefit from the individual attention and focus on Maths.

For the young teacher-to-be

Maths Club is an invaluable experience for a future teacher. Kelly says; "We are in a classroom environment and work in small groups applying the tools and tasks we learn during our unit of study. This is great experience because we can see the difference we make to the children's progress.

We also learn flexibility - if we are not seeing improvements in a child's skills we are challenged to

change our approach."

For the children

Kelly says that at the beginning of Maths Club the children start by saying that they can't do Maths or they don't like Maths.

Once Maths clicks for them and they realise they can do Maths, it is a great boost to their self-confidence. A strong will to persevere develops in the children - they tackle the challenges and don't give up." That's the difference Maths Club makes to these children.

Maths Club fun

"Maths Club is fun and interactive and we play games with the children like Number Busting. The kids thrive – they love Maths Club and they don't want it to end," says Kelly.

Parents are invited to participate in workshops, learning to use simple resources such as a deck of cards or hand-written flash cards. Parents get involved with their children's Maths; it's a benefit for everyone.

The children talk about Maths Club with their friends. Kelly heard one child when asked "Why do you do Maths Club?" answer "I do Maths Club because I am good at Maths and it is fun."

"I am so passionate about this experience that I feel it is an incredible advantage to pre-service teachers if they get this type of experience in the wider community."





▲ Jessica Benson, Rosetta Farr and Michelle Shand

FOR A BETTER BUSH

**BRISBANE ACU STUDENTS
WORK WITH COMMUNITY
BUSH REGENERATION
GROUPS**

Bush regeneration is a community program that provides an opportunity for future teachers to contribute to the sustainability of the natural environment. The students work with local volunteer Bushcare regeneration groups in the Brisbane City, Moreton Bay Shire and Redland Bay Councils.

What do the Bushcare groups do?

These volunteer groups work to preserve the flora and fauna habitats in local parks, remnant bushland and waterways. Their strategies include:

- weed control and revegetation
- planting native flora to meet needs of wildlife
- increasing knowledge and skills of members
- supporting events such as Habitat Brisbane

See:

www.kedronbrook.org.au/bushcare_groups.html

Who is involved?

First year Education students at the Brisbane campus complete the Bush Regeneration project.

Education lecturer and project coordinator Dr Barbara Odgers is delighted with the dedication of the students to the unit and says: "It is a fantastic exercise for young people who will be the educators of tomorrow, to learn first-hand about the sustainability of our natural environment."

What is their program?

After testing water quality at Nudgee waterholes, and designing a catchment management plan for the area, students study forest and disturbance ecology.

Dr Odgers explains:

"This work is incredibly important, as the main cause of degradation is disturbance of the natural



vegetation which leads to weed invasion and soil erosion. Weeds take over natural habitats and alter the area's ecology, meaning native animals no longer have food sources."



▲ Ryan Nilsson



▲ Lara Martin

LEARNING GETS LEGS



ACU STUDENT / LECTURER DAN FLEMING

Dan Fleming, Bachelor of Theology, lecturer and Honours student, Strathfield campus – what community engagement means to him.

“Put simply, my engagement in the community has ‘given legs’ to what I have learned and what I teach,” says Dan.

Dan is now doing his Honours year as well as taking tutorials in Theology, which he finds “a wonderful combination”. He has also been heavily involved in working with young people as a volunteer and is now employed in a very active Catholic parish.

Engaged with the parish

He visits Parish primary schools, reading stories, talking about the messages in them and providing meditation times. He also organises social times for older children.

Dan writes for the parish bulletin, reflecting on the biblical readings for the week, challenging misunderstandings about Catholic teaching and providing insight into contemporary issues from a Catholic point of view.

Dan writes on engagement

Being engaged with a community has helped me seek out the practical value and application of all that I learn. This can be challenging in a subject like Theology, which can often be taught in the abstract.

Through this community engagement I have learned to acknowledge where the people I am teaching are, and how to cater for this when I am delivering material.

This, to me, is a pastoral sensitivity but it is also a key principle of community engagement; building an understanding and awareness of a person’s own standing, readiness and ability to receive new information. Such an approach is crucial in a subject like Theology, which so often touches on matters that are incredibly personal to people - students, teachers and the faithful alike.

Everyone a winner

“In the process of my engagement, my learning becomes more thorough and holistic which is of benefit to my students. Engaging with a community gives my knowledge a strong, practical edge, which benefits me and the community. Everyone wins – me, my students and the community,” says Dan.

LIFE CHANGING FOR PARIS PETELEVITCH

FOCUS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND DISABILITY STUDIES



"Life changing" is how Paris Petelevitch (student Inclusive Education and Disability Studies) describes her community work. Paris, based at the Strathfield campus says; "After my first community placement I changed my career direction. I was personally challenged by the community engagement and now I know I want to see where I can make a difference: not just to one person's life but in the community as well."

Vivienne Hill and Trudy Van Dam, lecturers, School of Education point out that their students do an enormous amount of community work in this course - a minimum of 10 to 15 hours per week, on top of the normal course requirement. The course is about applying theory to real community issues.

Community work is a critical part of student's learning. Trudy says; "Community work brings teaching into the real, the now. We want the students to ask 'How do I really feel about this?' and to have growth they wouldn't achieve in a lecture or tutorial."

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive Education and Disability Studies cover inclusion and disability as well as social justice, cultural issues, diversity, working for sustainable outcomes, leadership and reflection - all focused on individuals and their communities.

"We challenge our students to go to places that test their beliefs, fears and concerns and, in that challenge, to experience personal and professional growth," Trudy van Dam, pictured top right.

Making a difference

Paris says: "In this course we are a small, close-knit group of students. Sometimes you feel overwhelmed. You think 'what can I do that will make a difference?'"

The community engagement experience helps you to grow personal and professionally: you remove the obstacles, let go of the labels and barriers to success and realise you do make the difference!

As a group, we hope to pioneer change in schools and the community."

Community placements with a purpose

Students are encouraged to pursue placement in areas that are of interest to them and the direction that they want to pursue.

"Trudy and I negotiate places for the students at industry seminars and conferences. This exposes students to professional debate, creates excellent contacts for them and develops their advocacy skills" said Vivienne.

Reflection in journals

Each student keeps a journal reflecting on the placement which helps tailor teaching to their needs, since it give an understanding of their position, personally and professionally.

"It works!" Paris says. "This course, with Trudy and Vivienne's guidance, has been an extraordinary learning experience!"



INFORMATION, CONTACTS, CONTRIBUTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

If you would like to report on community engagement initiatives or for further information please: email Institute for Advancing Community Engagement iace@acu.edu.au or contact Helen McLucas on (02) 9701 4176 email helen.mclucas@acu.edu.au