Performance Indicators for Community Engagement

Background

Australian Catholic University is committed to regular reviews of its performance against its Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. To this end, the University in 2003 adopted the phrase ‘culture of evidence’ to characterise its organisational environment as one where collection, analysis, and reporting of data are used to evaluate and improve its performance. A number of performance indicators were adopted at that time to define and measure the University’s progress in achieving its strategic goals in the areas of teaching and learning, research, and income generation.

Performance indicators in the area of community engagement, a key area given the University’s Mission, were not identified at the time but instead the Community Engagement Advisory Committee was asked to recommend those it considered most appropriate. The Committee has discussed the task at its meetings through 2004-2006 and has sought information from various sources on approaches used elsewhere.

Progress to Date

The Committee noted the approach taken by McKinnon, Walker, and Davis in their report on Benchmarking with its differentiated set of benchmarks. It also considered the proposed revision of the benchmark on community engagement by Butcher, Howard, McMeniman, and Thom (2005) in their report, Engaging Community – Service or Learning with its emphasis upon an integrated policy and plan which is both embedded within the university and articulated with the community. It noted too the approach suggested by Barbara Holland, as well as a number of other sources, including the questionnaires developed by the University of Western Sydney. It is aware of projects undertaken by AUCEA and by the University of New England that are directed to measuring community engagement and awaits development of these.

In its own discussion paper on Community Engagement, the Committee noted that the success of community engagement can be determined from the following:

- Communities report that ACU National is involved in real engagement and worthwhile activities rather than activities for activity sake
- Research and scholarship contribute to engaged citizenship and social action
- There is an explicit commitment to the common good within and beyond ACU National
- Internationalisation is intrinsic to the life and identity of ACU National

The Committee is of the view that performance indicators need to be both informative and practical. It is furthermore of the view that complicated indicators or those expensive or difficult to obtain are unlikely to be used. It recognises that community engagement projects differ in scope and purpose and that not all parties to a project(s) may agree on what constitute the best indicators, which makes identification of ‘universal’ indicators difficult. The Committee also
noted that many of the indictors used in the higher education sector are quantitative and that qualitative indicators may be more appropriate, for at least some types of engagement activities.

The Committee considers that mutuality, respect, reflection and reciprocity are central to community engagement and hence should be reflected in any indicators chosen. It took into account the fact that university staff have for some years accepted the tripartite classification of academic work as involving teaching, research, and service, and have seen a need to contribute to their communities through a variety of services. Such services continue to be important and need to be recognised and affirmed by the University, although it is not considered the heart of community engagement. The Committee saw a useful distinction to be made between service rendered by a staff member to the community and what might be considered fuller engagement, where there is a partnership established to work on objectives of mutual interest.

Categories of Engagement

The distinction between service and engagement gives rise to three possible categories to assess community engagement by staff and students.

1. A category of service to the community (as distinct from service to the University) which can be further considered in terms of:
   - service to professional bodies (local/State and national; as a committee member or office holder);
   - service to policy advisory bodies (Church, government, community organisation; member or office holder);
   - contribution to the common good and public interest [volunteer (Church, school, service club), speaker/presenter at public meeting; media interview or contributor];
   - contributor to a non-professional magazine;]

2. A category of community engagement through Teaching and Research that involves:
   - undergraduate or postgraduate units or courses that require participation in some form of community engagement. These could be categorised into those units that are compulsory units in a course versus those that are optional. (A few optional units may mean that the student body for the most part avoids engagement.) Alternatively, the distinction could be between those that are mandated by a body external to the university (e.g., practicum experience in teaching or nursing) and those that are initiated by the university. (A large number of mandated units may simply reflect the requirements of the discipline mix of the university rather than its commitment to community engagement.)
   - research projects initiated with community groups or organisations to identify, clarify, or address social issues.

3. Partnerships with community groups or organisations that are directed to areas of mutual concern or benefit where there is a sharing of resources. A formal MOU between the university and the community partner would normally be involved.
Principles

The Committee considered that any set of indicators of community engagement should attempt to embody the following principles:

- Community engagement is to be a whole-of-university commitment that involves academic and administrative staff.

- Community engagement, because of its significance for the University, has discernible effects on the structures as well as the functioning of the university.

- Community engagement moves from a stance of compassion for those in need to solidarity with and sustained commitment to them.

- Community engagement is be expressed at the local, national, and international levels.

- Community engagement must involve reflection and the capacity to form new knowledge as a result of engagement.

The Committee saw a need to place community engagement indicators within a framework that could give effect to these principles. This framework should be university wide, and enable the institution to track its own progress towards a fuller realisation of community engagement. It found the framework developed by Holland, when suitably modified, was appropriate for this purpose. The modified framework is presented in Table 1. Several of the dimensions allow for a university wide stocktake and others provide for the development of indicators to be used at the organisational unit and individual level.
Table 1. Levels of Commitment to Community Engagement. Characterised by Key Organizational Factors Evidencing Relevance to Institutional Mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level One Low Relevance</th>
<th>Level Two Medium Relevance</th>
<th>Level Three High Relevance</th>
<th>Level Four Full Integration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>No mention or undefined rhetorical reference</td>
<td>Engagement is part of what we do as citizens</td>
<td>Engagement is an element of our academic agenda</td>
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<td>Promotion, Tenure, Hiring</td>
<td>Service to campus committees or to discipline</td>
<td>Community engagement mentioned; volunteerism or consulting may be included in portfolio</td>
<td>Formal guidelines for defining, documenting and rewarding service</td>
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<td>Organization Structure</td>
<td>None focused on service or volunteerism</td>
<td>Units may exist to foster volunteerism</td>
<td>Various separate centers and institutes are organized to advance engagement</td>
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<td>Student Involvement &amp; Curriculum</td>
<td>Part of extracurricular student life activities</td>
<td>Organized support for volunteer activity</td>
<td>Opportunity for extra credit, internships, practicum experience, special events/activities</td>
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<td>Faculty Involvement</td>
<td>Service defined only as campus duties, committees; little interdisciplinary work</td>
<td>Pro bono consulting; community volunteerism acknowledged</td>
<td>Tenured/senior faculty pursue community-based research; some teach service-learning courses</td>
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<td>Community Involvement</td>
<td>Random or limited individual or group involvement</td>
<td>Community representation on advisory boards for departments or schools</td>
<td>Community influences campus through active partnerships or part-time teaching or participation in service learning programs</td>
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<td>Public Relations and Communications</td>
<td>Community engagement not an emphasis</td>
<td>Stories of student volunteerism or alumni as good citizens</td>
<td>Emphasis on role of campus centres/institutes, advocacy and influencing public policy</td>
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Interim Indicators

It is recommended that the following interim performance indicators be adopted:

1. Interim Indicators
   1.1 A count of service activities by staff members each year, disaggregated by category of service and engagement (see above).
   1.2 A count of units/courses that involve external participation, disaggregated by level of requirement involved (compulsory for students versus optional; mandated by an external agency versus freely adopted by the University).
   1.3 A count of research projects initiated with community or organisational partners and directed to social issues, disaggregated by whether or not the researchers explicitly refer to promoting the common good.
   1.3 A count of the partnerships entered into by the university with external groups or organisations, disaggregated by the scope of the partnership (local, national, international) and the duration (sustainability) of the partnership.
   1.4 A one page/overview summary of the nature, extent and duration of across University community engagement projects/programs undertaken by students and staff.
   1.5 The number of reports of community engagement activities indicating reflection on the activity, disaggregated by whether or not the report is published.
   1.6 Map of university wide and organisational unit based structures which have delegated responsibilities in the area of community engagement.
   1.7 Listing of community engagement dimensions involved in appointment, tenure and promotion of staff.

Experimental Indicators

As well as the interim indicators that are considered to be relatively crude ways of assessing community engagement, the Committee is exploring a number of other approaches.
One of these involves the use of journaling to capture ongoing changes and outcomes being achieved at individual, institutional and community levels during the course of a community partnership. This is considered to provide a richer insight into the yield of community engagement and to illustrate the reflective process considered essential.

Journey mapping is a further methodology which can provide an objective record of the impact of the engagement on people involved.

Counting of activities in the second and third categories (units or courses, research projects, or partnerships) over some period (say, annually) would be one indicator of performance and this could be disaggregated in terms of whether the activity was new or continuing. Simply counting activities does not, however, address issues of quality and impact of the activity. These two characteristics have become standard in evaluating research work and could be applied to community engagement.

Simple but reasonably valid measures of quality and impact are difficult to identify. One approach may be in terms of a measure of satisfaction for those involved in an activity, particularly those external to the University. Satisfaction measures are now widely used in the higher education system in evaluating the quality of the student experience of teaching. Satisfaction measures do have difficulties, however, not the least of which is that high satisfaction may result from the quality of interpersonal relations among the parties involved independent of the quality of the activity or its impact.

The Committee will work with the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee and Research Management Committee in developing benchmarks of community engagement related to these two domains.

A second approach is to seek feedback from third parties not involved in the activity but in a position to comment knowledgably on it. The third parties could be nominated by those involved in the activity. The use of a third party provides an external perspective
and possibly a greater degree of objectivity than may be possible for those directly involved. The third parties could be asked to rate the activity on quality and impact, given suitable definitions of these attributes.

More costly forms of assessment are possible in terms of meetings with stakeholders, focus groups with a sample of those involved, or interviews with key personnel. These involve a time commitment on the part of all those involved and further processing of the output from these tasks. They may form part of the evaluation process decided on by those involved in the activity, but if they do not they would represent a considerable imposition and may not meet with high compliance.

If these six indicators are accepted as the performance indicators for community engagement, policy and procedures would need to be put in place to give effect to the timely and accurate collection of the relevant data.
Levels of Commitment to Service. Characterized by Key Organizational Factors Evidencing Relevance to Institutional Mission

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<td>No mention or undefined rhetorical reference</td>
<td>Service is part of what we do as citizens</td>
<td>Service is an element of our academic agenda</td>
<td>Service is a central and defining characteristic</td>
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<td><strong>Promotion, Tenure, Hiring</strong></td>
<td>Service to campus committees or to discipline</td>
<td>Community service mentioned; volunteerism or consulting may be included in portfolio</td>
<td>Formal guidelines for defining, documenting and rewarding service</td>
<td>Community-based research and teaching are key criteria for hiring and evaluation</td>
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<td><strong>Organization Structure</strong></td>
<td>None focused on service or volunteerism</td>
<td>Units may exist to foster volunteerism</td>
<td>Various separate centers and institutes are organized to provide service</td>
<td>Infrastructure exists to support widespread faculty and student participation</td>
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<td><strong>Student Involvement &amp; Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Part of extracurricular student life activities</td>
<td>Organized support for volunteer activity</td>
<td>Opportunity for extra credit, internships, practicum experience, special events/activities</td>
<td>Service learning and community-based learning featured across curriculum</td>
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<td><strong>Faculty Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Service defined only as campus duties, committees; little interdisciplinary work</td>
<td>Pro bono consulting; community volunteerism acknowledged</td>
<td>Tenured/senior faculty pursue community-based research; some teach service-learning courses</td>
<td>Community research and active learning a high priority; interdisciplinary and collaborative work is encouraged</td>
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<td><strong>Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Random or limited individual or group involvement</td>
<td>Community representation on advisory boards for departments or schools</td>
<td>Community influences campus through active partnerships or part-time teaching or participation in service learning programs</td>
<td>Community involved in defining, conducting and evaluating community-based research and teaching</td>
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<td><strong>Public Relations and Communications</strong></td>
<td>Community engagement not an emphasis</td>
<td>Stories of student volunteerism or alumni as good citizens</td>
<td>Emphasis on economic impact, role of campus centers/institutes</td>
<td>Community connection as key to mission; fundraising has engagement as a focus</td>
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