



A U C E A

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**"Embedding University Community Engagement: The Good,
the Bad and the Ugly"**

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Conference Papers

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**The Good, the Bad and the Very Small –
What are the special challenges/opportunities of Micro-university
sites?**

Keywords:

Regional engagement
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Collaboration

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Abstract

Micro-university sites sit at the axis of the relationship between a large institution and local community, bridging differences in language, protocol, expectations, and highlighting the importance of clarity, commitment and communication. Sites like RMIT Hamilton in rural south west Victoria see 'the good, the bad, and the ugly' of community engagement from both the university perspective and the community perspective. They understand firsthand the dual challenge of embeddedness. But their voices are small. This paper considers key issues identified by staff at one micro-university site, and asks: How can micro-university sites document their experiences and leverage their knowledge, so as to achieve their strategic potential as sites of embedded community engagement?

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Introduction

The role and definition of the university is changing. One characteristic of the modern university is that it attempts to be flexibly structured and demand-driven, tuned to the needs of its market. Rather than relying confidently upon the supply of knowledge universities have to offer, the focus is increasingly on student and industry demand for knowledge, and how to offer knowledge in a way that meets their needs.

The trend toward the demand-driven university has twin motivators. First is the economic imperative for competitiveness, borne of a rationalising policy environment that pressures universities to earn their own way. But there is also a deeper and more constructive driver – the philosophical quest for relevance. It is a desire to leave the walls of the metaphorical ivory tower and link academic knowledge with industry and community. This has the advantage of drawing applied knowledge into academic frameworks, and also, as Moodie (2006) recently observed, stimulating innovation by adapting academic knowledge into local environments, where it can be used.

The two-way interchange between ‘community’ and ‘academia’ thus has much to recommend it. A recognition of the value of such interchange for both non-academic and academic parties, underpins the quest for university–community engagement. Writers such as Edgar (2001) clearly see a critical role for learning organisations to educate people, making them more able to handle economic and social change. Working with communities in specific geographic places or regions, universities can both ‘engage with’ particular communities, and assist these communities to become more actively ‘engaged’ with issues and opportunities.

Temple (2004), Watson (2003), and Ansley and Gaventa (1997) are amongst those who discuss the responsibilities of universities in regional community engagement. It is suggested that ‘universities have a new order of responsibility – not just for regional provision but also for collaborative regional development’ (Duke 2003). Spatially specific ‘regional’ strategies for community engagement seek to engage with communities (industries, organisations, residents, and so forth) *in a specific place*. The scholarship of ‘regional engagement’ thus highlights the importance of place-based engagement strategies in which ‘regional’ can mean either a rural region or an urban region, and may be located in Australia or abroad.

One way that universities have operationalised regional community engagement – engagement with communities *in place* – is via the establishment of satellite campuses and ‘regional’ relationships. Such campuses and other forms of regional outreach are established with the expectation that these will prove beneficial both to universities and to communities in host regions (see e.g. Dudley and Longley 2004; Garlick and Langworthy 2004, Garlick 1998). Thus, while Australian universities have traditionally been very metropolitan-centred, most metropolitan universities now have at least one campus located in a ‘regional’ area, in Australia and/or abroad.

In this paper we look more closely at this kind of regional engagement, with reference to what we call ‘micro-university sites’. We define micro-university sites as small campuses or outposts of big universities centred elsewhere. These small offshoots of large universities may or may not be called ‘campuses’ – they may be merely ‘sites’, ‘units’, or ‘centres’ – but they have at least some university functions (involving teaching and/or research). Micro-university sites are ‘regional’ – not necessarily non-metropolitan, but located intentionally in a specific geographic space, comprising a strategy for engagement with a particular geographical community – whether urban or rural, in Australia or elsewhere. They are characterised by relative smallness (in terms of staff and student numbers) and low visibility vis-à-vis the larger institutions of which they form a part.

In this paper, we argue that such micro-university sites have much to reveal about establishing relationships between a large institution and local geographic communities. Micro-university sites offer an up-close lens to explore issues of university–community engagement as it plays out on the ground. In such sites, engagement can happen via mainstream teaching and research, and/ or via tailored ‘community engagement’ strategies designed to encourage and support local learning and community development. In all cases, however, we would hypothesize that micro-university sites face the ‘dual challenge of embeddedness’ – the challenge of being ‘in and of’ the larger university, while also being ‘in and of’ the regional community. As Watson (2003) urges:

In terms of community it [engagement] presents a challenge to universities to be of and not just in the community; not simply to engage in ‘knowledge-transfer’ but to establish a dialogue across the boundary between university and its community which is open-ended, fluid and experimental. (2003:16)

The potential stresses and contradictions of being ‘in and of’ both a large university bureaucracy and ‘in and of’ a geographically defined community are, we suggest, characteristic of regional engagement efforts (see e.g. Garlick and Langworthy 2004:21, on the ‘incongruity of space and organisation’). We argue that the stresses and contradictions of dual embeddedness are, however, often overlooked when planning and implementing satellite sites in specific geographic regions. In addition, the opportunities that such dual embeddedness offers are poorly understood.

This paper explores the implications of dual embeddedness with reference to a research case study of a micro-university site in Victoria’s Western District. We report on locally based staff’s reflections on their own experiences of offering teaching, research, and professional development programs over the past five years as a small rural outpost of a large urban university. We present our findings on both the challenges and opportunities of dual embeddedness, and then suggest that these findings may be relevant to other micro-university sites working ‘at the coalface’ of regional community engagement.

Case Study – Reflections from RMIT Hamilton

Introduction

RMIT University's Hamilton learning site is located in a community of less than 10,000 people in Victoria's Western District. It has ten local on-site staff, plus additional research project staff and commuting staff from RMIT's City Campus in Melbourne. RMIT Hamilton offers one complete undergraduate program, postgraduate teaching/supervision, professional development, and social research.

The RMIT Hamilton Learning Site grew out of a relationship between RMIT University and the local community, developed through the 1990s (see Scholfield 2005, Nadarajah 2004). The regional community itself played a significant role in bringing the university 'into' the region (Scholfield 2005). From the University perspective, the Hamilton site was specifically conceived by the university as a community engagement process, 'working with this community in partnership' by 'integrating the region's strengths and needs with RMIT programs and strategic capability' (Mulrone 1999). The RMIT Hamilton site was officially opened in April 2003, though RMIT teaching and research programs have been offered at this site since 2000.

The presence of a large urban university in this rural region is clearly valued by local stakeholders; for instance, the Southern Grampians Shire Council notes that: 'The introduction of RMIT University to Hamilton presents the region with significant opportunities from a marketing, economic and social development perspective.' (SGSC 2001). Funding for the university facilities was seen as part of a larger effort 'to stem the tide of young people moving to metropolitan centres and boost access to post-compulsory education in regional areas' (RDV 2004).

The site has offered a number of successful programs over the past five years, but not without difficulties and failures. This paper offers a snapshot of this micro-university site at a particular point in time: October and November 2005, based on ethnographic observations in the work environment including conversations with on-site staff working at RMIT Hamilton. The authors have both worked with RMIT University in Hamilton over a period of several years. This paper reflects the perspectives of Hamilton-based staff: those who live locally and are involved day-to-day in the running of the site. It did not include other RMIT staff with a close involvement with RMIT Hamilton, i.e. those based in Melbourne. This paper is intended to present a specifically local perspective on a micro-university site, with the limitations that entails. A research process that includes the perspectives of non-local staff would be an important next step in the continuation of this research.

We focus on the local perspective, positing that locally based university staff are in a unique position to shed light on the meeting point between university and regional community. Local staff are simultaneously embedded in the university (as university staff) and in the regional community (as community members). They thus have a privileged position from which to reflect on the way universities engage with regions, from both university and community perspectives.

The Context

There are two major issues in the community engagement process that need to be considered in understanding this case study: the nature of the Southern Grampians community; and the nature of RMIT's involvement.

The community in this region has traditionally been conservative. It is comprised of small, local populations, with the close social networks common to rural communities. Most people, for example, have several roles, and often the line between work and community can be very blurred. Yet at the same time, traditional 'silos' (where individuals or organizations are constrained by firmly drawn boundaries, both attitudinal and institutional) are present; these include class distinctions, agendas, a history of competing for funds, and old power bases (both perceived and real). To some extent these impede networks. There is also a history of interest in education, and of wanting to achieve good things for the community, as well as the traditional civic duty referred to in Garden's (1984) history of Hamilton.

The other issue that shapes the community engagement process in this partnership is the nature of RMIT University's involvement. Changing university funding and policy landscape have been among the challenges faced by the parent institution in its engagement with Hamilton. Key personnel and leadership changes have also played a role, breaking continuity of knowledge and networks. Personal commitment to a site does not necessarily transfer when personnel changes. There has also been a fear of raising expectations in the community that the university would be unable to meet. From the perspective of the parent institution, there is the question of whether and to what extent extending the university's scope of activity into a small regional site can complement core university priorities of teaching and research. It has often been unclear, from the perspective of the larger institution, how a micro-site like Hamilton can support these core university priorities, rather than being seen as peripheral to them.

Actions

Local staff at RMIT Hamilton identified seventeen 'case studies' of RMIT University initiatives undertaken between 2000 and 2005 in the Hamilton region. Each of the seventeen initiatives involved some combination of undergraduate teaching, postgraduate teaching, TAFE, professional development, and research. Thus, most were directly related to the university's core business of teaching and research, though some initiatives (TAFE and professional development) focused on 'pathways in' to the university. Many of these initiatives also had a specific and consciously articulated community engagement component. However, it should be noted that *all* involved at least some degree of engagement between the university and the regional community.

All of the seventeen case study initiatives identified were those which had actually gotten 'off the ground' – either as discrete projects, or as whole programs with many component projects. In some cases the initiatives were short-lived; in others they are successful and continuing. They range from highly successful programs such as RMIT Hamilton's mixed-mode undergraduate nursing program (Currie and Scholfield 2005), to unsuccessful ones such as a Hamilton-based offering of an on-line undergraduate Bachelor of Commerce. Teaching initiatives also included: a Master of Education by project, a short-lived but well-received graduate certificate in business, a range of TAFE-level courses (Advanced Diploma, Certificate III, and Koori programs, among others), and a Professional Development Centre (which itself organised a wide range of courses). In addition, the site contributed to other university teaching programs via hosting study tours as well as a program for RMIT University's international students, known as RICE.

Research initiatives at the Hamilton site included: a locally based research centre, the Centre for Regional and Rural Development (CRRD), with a broad portfolio of projects; as well as the innovative Handbury Fellowship program funding local community research; and the RMIT Globalism Institute's work in Hamilton. Also noted was RMIT Hamilton's role in hosting and coordinating 'other RMIT research' which had at one time or another used RMIT Hamilton as a base.

In addition to the seventeen case study initiatives, discussions among local staff also highlighted a few potentially important projects (such as new degree programs) that had not yet gotten 'off the ground', for various reasons. Overall, there was the sense that in the site's five-year history, much had been done, but that there was – and indeed, always had been – potential to do much more. There were also clearly structural and organisational obstacles to effective embeddedness of the university in the region. In informal discussions, local staff analysed the challenges and opportunities of regional university engagement from their own specific perspectives.

Issues

The following issues were identified by local staff in their discussions and confirmed by the authors' ethnographic observations during their years of work at the micro-university site:

- Managing community expectations
- Structural issues
- Communication
- Clarity and consistency of vision and commitment
- Sustainability and performance evaluation
- Understanding the role of local knowledge

Each of the issues identified in the research process is discussed briefly below.

Managing community expectations was a key concern of the larger institution, but it also had specific ramifications for local staff. As locals employed by RMIT, local staff are the metaphorical 'meat-in-the-sandwich'. They are accessible to the community at their children's sporting events, social gatherings, the supermarket, even while on holidays. Locals ask for things – new programs, new courses, new places – and the university cannot provide everything. Local staff must manage the balance between what is wanted, what is possible, and what is likely to happen. When higher-level management decisions in the parent institution lead to the withdrawal or downsizing of programs, it is local staff who must present the situation to their communities and their own personal networks.

Structural issues involved the day-to-day interface between the small RMIT Hamilton site and the much larger parent institution. Communications and operational issues were foremost. There was a need to establish new and workable operating procedures for a new site; systems and procedures all have to be invented or adapted to apply to the 'micro' setting. There were issues around informal relationships versus formal management relationships, and flexibility versus inflexibility. The often repeated statement is: 'we always have to invent it differently for Hamilton!' Yet the reality is this small university site sits inside a large bureaucratic institution.

Communication is a major factor in maintaining relationships within the university and between university and community. Language, jargon, authority and communication channels are all important considerations when communicating across a large bureaucracy with its many departments, and when communicating with community and its many sectors.

Lines of communication and authority have implications for power relations, as do questions of resources – who holds the purse strings? Those who sit at the blurred edges of both community and university have small voices and may possibly find a lack of authority dilutes their capacity to influence agenda setting. They may be unable to challenge management decisions even when they can see that difficulties will follow. Physical distance from the centre lessens visibility, and lack of size contributes to a lack of voice, which again has implications for resourcing.

At the same time, this place at the edges – at the boundary – gives space for creativity. There is the potential of being creative, trying new things, the dynamism of new relationships and approaches. To be in the liminal position, as McRae-McMahon (2001:6) indicates – is also to be at the ‘threshold’ of new possibilities. Provided flexibility can be built into the *modus operandi*, then there is the potential to respond to new, previously unconsidered possibilities – and achieve real responsiveness to local communities.

Perhaps therefore, the deepest issue involved the parent organisation’s *vision* for its satellite site in Hamilton, and thus the nature of its commitment. From a local staff perspective, there was a lack of *clarity and consistency* of the university’s vision for its new site. The issue of clarity and consistency reflects a confusion as to what the vision for the university site is – or could be. Exogenous pressures often result in reactive planning, rather than proactive, and therefore raise questions of motives and commitment. Whether or not a micro university site has ‘champions’ in influential roles can influence the level of university commitment to the site, as well as whether a clear and consistent vision for the site is reflected in university policy.

Underpinning *commitment* is the need to understand the motive for engagement and, just as importantly, what people perceive the motivations might be. Unless this is clear, the scene is set for all sorts of assumptions and presumptions and even the potential for misguided management decisions. Mutual understanding is just as important as mutual respect, and in this, each party needs to be able to clarify their motives and their processes.

Garlick appeals to universities to think more clearly about what they are doing in the regions:

Universities need to underpin the rhetoric of their stated connectivity with their regional communities with management systems that allow this connectivity to be manifest in real economic development associations built on their teaching, research, leadership and other attributes. The current practice of expanding the number of regional campus locations, to meet access and equity requirements and to generate income from teaching, needs to be underpinned with more strategy than simply organisational size or marking out turf. Enhancing national and regional economic objectives in a rapidly changing and increasingly connected global environment dictates that relevance and flexibility be dimensions in these campus location management strategies. (Garlick, 1998: 70)

Related to issues around consistency of vision were deep concerns about the *sustainability* of the site and its programs. In a climate of rationalising resources being small might be considered being vulnerable – perhaps the ‘bad’ side of small! Not all of the benefits of a micro-site to the larger university are necessarily captured in the site’s own budget lines, leading to questions about how the site’s performance is evaluated and its future secured. The issue is not only one of internal accounting, but also an ability to recognise and value the non-monetary benefits a micro-site can bring to its parent institution.

There is a tension between universities’ internal and external agendas, as noted by Watson (2003). How do universities prioritise between their own teaching, research and organisational choices and their community obligations? When universities make an investment in regional engagement, they need to be clear how this commitment intersects with their own university interests or mission. They may generate an important social good for regional communities while not necessarily

generating a direct benefit for the university. Yet can such a commitment be sustained over the long term, in the face of fiscal challenges? Can the eventual benefits, both tangible and intangible, justify a long-term investment, and will they be recognised? One advantage that micro-sites such as RMIT Hamilton offer their parent institutions is that they provide an opportunity for *doing things differently* – such as piloting new efficient and effective ways of delivery in a relatively low-risk setting.

Finally, in the local setting, there was considerable confusion and frustration around *understanding the role of local knowledge*. Locally based, community engaged staff have considerable local knowledge which in itself, positively viewed, is a significant asset to the university. The time taken to build trusting and trusted networks, the ‘feel’ for a community, geographic knowledge, historical and cultural knowledge, can bring positive benefits to the broader university’s activities. Where ‘outsiders’ take short cuts, listen to the ‘squeaky wheels’, and ignore local sensitivities, local knowledge can be useful. On the other hand, sometimes local knowledge is difficult to articulate to others looking for a quick explanation, and it can itself be biased.

Ansley and Gaventa (1997) have much to say on the subject of knowledge and power and particularly in relation to ‘democratic’ models of research, such as participatory action research, that partner universities with communities. Nevertheless, measuring tacit knowledge, its ‘quality’ as research, its authenticity and authority may be problematic for academic purists. The engaged university at the margins – the smaller sites, embedded in their communities – will have much to contribute to the discussions about truly applied approaches to research. Indeed Moodie (2006:38) suggests that whilst ‘knowledge and information abound’ their adaptation to ‘local environments’ needs to be addressed. Perhaps this is an interesting challenge on which embedded micro university sites could focus. The RMIT Hamilton experience provided many positive examples of applied research across a range of fields.

Learning’s for other ‘micro-university’ sites

How does a small ‘micro-university’ site such as RMIT Hamilton meet the expectations of the parent institution in terms of teaching, research and measurable Community Engagement, while also meeting the expectations of the local community? We suggest that any university outpost that takes regional engagement seriously will face, to one degree or another, this challenge of dual embeddedness. There is much to learn from the creative work of university outposts that stand visibly at the meeting point of university and community, testing the feasibility of productive interchange between ‘town and gown’, and laying bare many of the issues involved.

Local university staff, because of their dual role, sense the organisational pull most acutely, and understand the difficulties – as well as the opportunities – of developing the university–community interface. Hamilton’s experience, from the perspectives of its locally engaged local staff, indicates the need for a more respectful and flexible partnership than is often possible under current university and larger policy structures. Previous informal discussions at AUCEA conferences suggest that this may also reflect the experience of other small university outposts.

Micro-university sites sit at the axis of the relationship between a large institution and local community, bridging differences in language, protocol, expectations, and highlighting the importance of clarity, commitment and communication.

How can micro-university sites document their experiences and leverage their knowledge, so as to achieve their strategic potential as sites of embedded regional community engagement? There is clearly value in collaboration. The experience of RMIT Hamilton’s Centre for Regional and Rural Development suggests a potential approach. For this small research centre at RMIT Hamilton, collaboration has been a key strategy. In 2003, then-Director Professor John Martin led the

creation of VURRN (Victorian University Regional Research Network – see www.vurn.com.au), an innovative collaborative effort across five Victorian universities. In VURRN, small research centres in regional Victorian universities joined together in a network to address their common issues.

The outcomes thus far have shown the value of this strategy to be multi-layered. Researchers have been able to leverage their work by collaborating with colleagues from other universities who have complementary knowledge and interests. There have been examples of mutual support and mentoring, as well as sharing knowledge – given that small research centres cannot hope to staff the range of knowledge needed. Colleagues from other universities have specific knowledge in fields such as mining, governance, natural resources, health, ICT, business and education which can be drawn upon for particular projects. As a network they collaborate collegially, but still have to work within existing bureaucratic structures established out of a traditionally competitive cross-university environment. Nevertheless, VURRN members have been able to work together on publications (including the establishment of VURRN Press) seminars, conferences, joint papers, consultancies and grant applications, leveraging the work of the small research units well beyond what each could accomplish on its own.

Conclusion

The RMIT Hamilton experience is evolving. There is clear evidence that understanding of the role of the site within the larger institution is changing, and that this case study represents only a moment in time. Recent developments indicate that overall, the university is becoming more aware of the issues, challenges and opportunities of its micro university site at Hamilton. Yet whilst these remain the experience of one institution and its tiny 'offspring', much of what has been learned might have resonance for others where the parent campus is very large, and possibly remote from the micro site. This essentially is the question this paper raises. Does what we have highlighted have resonance for others? If so, is there value to be gained from establishing a network of micro university sites in Australia?

Previous informal discussions at AUCEA conferences have supported the idea. The paper recommends that representatives of micro-university sites at this conference explore the strategic potential of forming a collaborative network to raise awareness of their common issues and their key role in regional university–community engagement.

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Catherine Koerner - Flinders University: Inspired Learning: Creating engaged teaching and learning environments for university and school students through university to school mentor programs

**Inspired Learning:
Creating engaged teaching and learning environments for university
and school students through university to school mentor programs**

Catherine Koerner - Flinders University

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A U C E A

Abstract

This paper is written in two sections. The first will discuss the Higher Education sector's involvement in school-based mentoring programs as a strategy for University community engagement that creates an engaged teaching and learning environment for both the university and school students across all discipline areas. The second section will look more closely at the adoption of the school-based mentoring model by the Teaching Experience Office of the School of Education, at Flinders University of South Australia. Second year Education students are placed on 20 days of teaching experience in schools over two semesters in their second year.

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Introduction

The INSPIRE Peer Mentor Program operates out of Flinders University of South Australia in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, and has received funding from the FaCSIA Mentor Marketplace Program. The first funding was to pilot the program from 2004 until July 2005 and the second round has extended the funding until July 2009. The experience gained during INSPIRE's relatively short existence is indicating that a mentoring program between the University and schools located in the local region south of the University, which includes key areas of low socio-economic status, can be a major form of community engagement activity for Higher Education. Flinders University has committed, in the funding application, to continue to fund the program at the end of the current funding round from FaCSIA.

This paper is written in two sections. The first will discuss the Higher Education sector's involvement in school-based mentoring programs as a strategy for University community engagement that creates an engaged teaching and learning environment for both the university and school students across all discipline areas. The second section will look more closely at the adoption of the school-based mentoring model by the Teaching Experience Office of the School of Education, at Flinders University of South Australia. Second year Education students are placed on 20 days of teaching experience in schools over two semesters in their second year.

Section One

Before a discussion on mentor programs as a strategy for community engagement by the tertiary sector, mentor programs themselves need to be considered. The last twenty five years has produced an impressive amount of academic literature on mentoring, though there is reportedly a lack of consensus on defining mentoring (Colley 2003, p.30). Certainly, in contrast with role modelling, tutoring, coaching and buddy systems, mentoring is concerned with a 'whole of person' development that is actively supported by the mentor: "...mentoring focuses on explicit action by the mentor to assist the young person to reach their goal" (MacCullum and Beltman 2002, p.8). Further, Mentoring Australia (2000) defines effective mentoring as:

- A relationship that focuses on the needs of the mentee
- Fosters caring and supportive relationships
- Encourages all mentees to develop to their fullest potential; and
- Is a strategy to develop active community partnerships?

What does the research say about the outcomes or benefits of mentoring, and what kinds of mentoring programs are worth the time and effort that they take to set up and implement well? There is a large body of research emerging out of the United States, where formal mentor programs, such as Big Brother/Big Sister, have been operating for 100 years. The research came out of a concern that mentor programs were becoming more prevalent without the accompanying rigour of empirical research to determine if the participants really do benefit, what those benefits actually are and also to develop bench marks and models of good practice for existing and new mentor programs. With an increase of interest in youth studies during the 1970's and 1980's, research documented the growing number of young people without sufficient adult support for to meet the adolescent developmental needs (eg Coleman, 1974; Timpane et al., 1976; Lipsitz, 1977; Hamburg, 1987; Steinberg, 1986).

Youth programs targeted specific issues (such as homelessness, drug use and teenage pregnancy) and focused on developing specific skills (academic skills for school, job search skills etc), but did (and still do not) allow for the development of a substantial relationship with a supportive adult to support their development through adolescence (Sipe, unknown, p.1). If the mentor is a student in a tertiary institution, they also become a resource to the school, teacher and young person, in addition to providing a link to the University that is personalised.

Mentoring is one way to provide the support of an adult for children and young people. If we consider that '...young people who leave school prior to completing year 12 are twice as likely to become unemployed by age 24 than if they had completed year 12' (Bean, 2002 p.2), then it is beneficial for University's to be active participants in programs to improve retention rates in schools.

Cynthia Sipe (date unknown) provides a synthesis of 8 years of research undertaken on mentoring programs in the United States and the following section is taken from this synthesis. By looking at ten studies (Freedman, 1988, 1991; Styles and Morrow, 1992; Greim, 1992; Tierney and Branch, 1992; Furano, Roaf, Styles and Brancy, 1993; Mecartney, Styles and Morrow, 1994; Roaf, Tierney and Hunte, 1994; Morrow and Styles, 1995; Tierney, Grossman and Resch, 1995) over the eight-year period, Sipe is able to report the major findings organised around five questions that guided the research:

1. Can participating in mentoring programs make important and observable changes in the attitudes and behaviours of at-risk youth?

An impact study on young people matched with Big Brother/Big Sister mentors and a control group of young people waiting to be matched, by Tierney, Grossman and Resch, (1995) provides clear evidence that young people can benefit from being involved in a well-run mentoring program. The findings include that the matched young people (called Little Brothers/Little Sisters) were 46 percent less likely than controls (who were young people on the waiting list to be matched with a mentor) to initiate drug use and 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use. They were nearly one-third less likely to hit someone and had 50 percent less days of school absenteeism as the control group. They reported feeling more competent about their ability to do well in school, and even achieved slightly higher grades. The benefits extended to reporting more positive relationships with their friends and parents than the control group from the same background. The effects were reported for both boys and girls and for all racial groups. The limitations include the age range of research subjects being between 11 and 14 years, so the study cannot be generalised to other age groups. Additionally the study was conducted over a 4 year period, but with only an 18 month follow-up period for young people. It is therefore not possible to determine if the impacts reported continue over a longer period of time.

2. Are there specific practices that characterize effective mentoring relationships?

Effective mentors are more likely to engage in the following practices:

- They involve young people in deciding how the pair will spend their time together.
- They make a commitment to being consistent and dependable – to maintain a steady presence in the young person's life.
- They recognize that the relationship may be fairly one-sided for some time, and may involve silence and unresponsiveness from the young person. The adult takes responsibility for keeping the relationship alive.
- They pay attention to young people's need for 'fun. Not only is having fun a key part of relationship-building, but it provides young people with valuable opportunities that are often not otherwise available to them.
- They respect young people's view point.
- They seek, and utilize, the help and advice of program staff.

The findings across the ten studies indicate that at least 6 months of regular meetings are required to before young people report that they have a trusting relationship with their mentor. These findings support those reported by Hartley (2004, p.15) in Australia, that short-term mentoring relationships, or

broken/disbanded mentoring relationships have the potential harm children reinforcing vulnerabilities of young people feeling abandoned. Consequently the importance of appropriate support for mentors in their role is paramount to the success of mentoring relationships.

3. What program structures and supports are needed to maximize “best practices among mentors?”

Across the ten studies the strongest conclusion drawn is the importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and to develop a positive relationship with the young people. The structures that need to be in place include orientation and training for mentors; ongoing supervision and support; and that matching is the least critical element, requiring consideration common interests, demographic backgrounds etc which were over-ridden by the mentors approach as mentioned in point 2.

Jekielek, Moore and Hair (2002) have also found that the quality of mentoring relationships correlates with good program structure and planning. Interestingly their findings highlight the importance of the mentor and mentee’s interests in the matching process, social and academic activities and undertaking social activities that assist to build trust by taking a ‘youth development’ or youth-centred approach to the relationship, which contrasts with the findings in Sipe’s synthesis of ten research projects in the United States (date unknown), which found that matching (as in the individual process for matching the mentor and mentee) is the least important part of effective mentoring relationships. In an early consideration of school-based mentor projects in the U.S., Herrera found that “agency support for school-based mentors is essential in creating strong, long-lasting mentoring relationships that can make a difference in youth’s lives” (2004, p.26, see also MacCallum and Beltman, 1999 pp 29-30 for features of successful mentoring programs). The feedback in the INSPIRE evaluations are consistent with these findings. Schools that have good communication and support for mentors have a much higher retention rate of mentors (some returning for 3 years). Schools that do not have good communication with their mentors do not retain their mentors despite the mentors who left early reporting that the support from INSPIRE project staff was excellent (INSPIRE Mentor Feedback, 2005).

4. Can mentoring be integrated into large-scale youth-serving institutions?

The ten research projects in Sipe’s analysis of mentoring found that not allocating sufficient resources to programs (i.e. youth services attempting to provide mentoring programs on top of their already full work load) did not succeed. Sipe argues that mentoring as stand alone programs cannot operate effectively without adequate structures in place. Similarly, Bernard (2002) found that mentoring should not be the only intervention, but one of a number of strategies in place. Conversely, in a meta-analysis of 55 programs by DuBois et al, programs found that programs effectiveness was not based on the goals of the program, or whether it was provided as one of a range of youth services rather than a stand alone strategy. Anecdotal evidence from INSPIRE suggests that positive impacts can emerge from mentoring as a stand alone intervention for young people where there is appropriate support in place for their mentors.

5. Are there large numbers of adults with enough flexible time and emotional resources to take on the demands of mentoring at-risk youngsters [sic]?

The studies in Sipe's review found that over a six month period, the BB/BS programs received over 2,500 inquiries, with 1,099 following up with a formal application. INSPIRE's recruitment reveals similar levels of actual application (less than 50% of inquiries lead to attendance at a training session). However, community based mentor programs in Adelaide have reported a serious shortage of mentors in contrast to the school-based mentor programs run through INSPIRE. By being based at a university, INSPIRE, (like other university-based programs such as STAR at Murdoch) has the whole student body to recruit mentors from. INSPIRE'S partner organizations include two community-based mentor programs operating in the area that are unable to recruit enough mentors for their school-based programs with students at risk. INSPIRE recruits and trains the mentors, while these partners identify the young people requiring the support. This has actually meant that the two local programs can continue to operate, maintaining service provision in the south, rather than losing them. INSPIRE mentors increased by almost double numbers each year over it's first two years of operation from 45 mentors in the first semester to 140 in Semester 1, 2006.

The literature on School based mentoring also indicates outcomes for young people including: academic improvement, increased achievements for particular subjects, increased retention and increased participation in class room or school activities. Other benefits include "personal and social development...such as increased feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. This results in students being more willing to attempt school tasks (MacCallum and Beltman 1999). The evaluations and feedback by INSPIRE partner's (eg schools and alternative education programs) concur with these findings. Herrera's study of school-based mentoring in the U.S. is more cautious, stating: "youth involved in school-based mentoring appear to receive some benefits from their involvement, but these benefits may be limited" (2005, p.26), however.

An evaluation of the Mentor Marketplace Programs in 2005 reports that mentor programs can build community capacity by contributing to the capacity of participating communities to develop mentoring projects and by developing community capacity more broadly (Wilczynski et al 2005, p.63). For example, INSPIRE hosts an annual 'good practice' peer conference where school staff, youth workers, mentors and young people show case their successes to other partner organizations involved with INSPIRE. The mini-conference provides the space for community participants to be the experts in their own programs; creates networks of teaching staff, mentors and young people across suburbs and promotes good practice at the same time. Lastly, the research by MacCallum and Beltman (1999, p.20) and feedback from INSPIRE mentors in 2004 and 2005 showed that mentors gained significant community-based experience, some finding employment opportunities from their volunteer work, and all have stated that they increased their communication skills, negotiation skills, conflict resolution skills, planning and time management in addition to their own self-confidence and feeling of being connected to their own community.

Section Two: Changing the Teaching Experience

The success of the INSPIRE Peer Mentoring program provided encouragement for the development of a new model for the teaching practicum program for the Flinders University School of Education.

The decision to introduce a double degree for education students provided the incentive for a staff forum held in December, 2003, to examine the possibility of changing the teaching practicum. The existing teaching practicum program had been operating for some years and was relatively easy to administer. Four year undergraduate students and two year graduate entry students were placed in schools for a four week practicum followed by a six week practicum in their third and first year respectively and both completed an eight week practicum in their fourth or second (final) year. For many students, the first experience they had in a school since their own school days, was not until after they had completed two or more years of their degree course and in some instances, students then discovered they no longer wished to pursue a career as a teacher.

At the same time, a number of students had volunteered to act as mentors for the INSPIRE Peer Mentoring program in their second year (or first year graduate entry). Anecdotal evidence suggested these students were far better prepared for their teaching practicum and they demonstrated a greater awareness of the general operational aspects of a school. As one secondary principal remarked, the INSPIRE students 'knew what went on in the corridors of the school and their experience was not just restricted to a couple of classrooms.' As the INSPIRE program developed and expanded with more secondary and then some primary and junior primary schools becoming involved, more second year and first year graduate entry students were gaining a 'school experience' that clearly assisted their preparation for the teaching practicum the following year. Many of these INSPIRE students continued to mentor a student or students over an extended period, even through to the end of their degree.

Flinders School of Education staff advocated promoting schools as 'Communities of Enquiry' to support the pre-service (student) teachers in their developmental journey and self-development as co-learners, co-reflectors and co-teachers and to help them develop their professional identity. (Cattley, 2004)

It was recommended that this could be achieved by supporting groups of students in schools rather than students being allocated to specific teachers, providing students with a wide range of in-school experiences and integrating university studies with school experience.

A survey of some 300 teachers from government and non-government schools in March 2005 showed that over 80% of teachers responding to the survey preferred student teachers to complete 20 days of observation in a school as a general 'school experience' in the student's second year (first year graduate entry). This school experience was not to be assessed and was to give student teachers an experience of the overall operation of a school and an indication of the complexity and value of teachers' work. The new 'Teaching Experience' program was introduced in semester one, 2006.

All second year undergraduate students enrolled in a double degree (and all first year graduate entry students) would be placed in a school for 10 days of school experience in semester one and 10 days in semester two. This 'school experience' would be linked to specific education topics.

The first teaching practicum block of 20 days would be in semester two (school term 3) of the third year of the double degree course for undergraduates (the first year for graduate entry students). All students would then be placed for a six week block in school term 2 for their second (final) practicum the following year. Prior to commencing their second teaching practicum, all students are now required to spend 10 days in the school in school term 1, as preparation for the final practicum.

In addition, a Teaching Practicum Elective topic has been incorporated into the teaching experience program. Offering a range of choices, the teaching practicum elective also gives the INSPIRE Peer Mentoring students recognition for their work in schools. INSPIRE students are awarded a non graded pass in the teaching practicum elective after completing a minimum of 120 hours of peer mentoring, completing a reflective journal, or a 1,000 word reflection of how the experience has benefited them as a beginning teacher and gaining a brief report from their school.

The overarching notion was to develop a partnership with schools where the professional experience is seen as an essential element of teacher education and a positive way to create links between university students and staff and professionals in the field.

The recognition that in-school learning is the focus of professional experience, rather than mere assessment of the student teacher, creates a very different environment from traditional supervision practices. For pre-service (student) teachers, being welcomed into a school community leads to learning and professional growth that cannot be simulated in the university setting. The experience allows them to observe teachers in all aspects of their role, experiment with pedagogical practice and begin to understand how supportive learning environments are established.

Changing the language and terminology of the teaching experience was seen as a way of influencing changing attitudes and practices. School experience is different from a teaching practicum, which by necessity, has to be assessed.

Supervising teachers are now referred to as teacher mentors and the university supervisor is now a university liaison to reflect the new role of linking university studies with the school experience.

Feedback from teachers who take on a mentoring role is overwhelmingly positive (Churchill & Walkington, 2002). They speak of the satisfaction they receive from fostering a future teacher. Teacher mentors also speak of what they learn from the student teacher and about how they are challenged to reflect on their own practices.

The trend towards a more broad based school experience is clearly developed in the OECD publication, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, OECD 2005

In particular, there is evidence that teachers who receive increased amounts of field experience remain in the profession at significantly higher rates than those prepared through largely campus-based programs.

The duration of the field experience varies widely. Some programs provide for brief periods of classroom experience, others are year-long internships with regular teaching obligations. Most often, practice teaching occurs following coursework near the end of the teacher education program. However, this training is increasingly being incorporated throughout the entire teacher education program, especially in concurrent programs, and its scope is being broadened. Teacher trainees are asked to participate in school activities, observe classrooms, tutor young people and serve as teacher aides prior to actual practice teaching.

The trend towards establishing specific school and college or university partnerships that create linkages between teacher education coursework and school practice is gaining ground.

Actual school and classroom experience has the potential to provide teacher trainees with insight into the complex dynamics of schools and teaching, and opportunities to learn about strategies and their capacities for implementing them.

The contribution of field experiences to teacher preparation is enhanced when they are well prepared and based on a close co-operation between the teacher education institution and the schools; when student teachers are well prepared in subject matter and pedagogy before practice teaching; when teacher trainees are given opportunities to conduct research in the classroom, and to integrate the course-based and field work components; and when both teacher educators and supervising teachers receive appropriate and often shared training. (OECD, 2005)

Starting the new model for Teaching Experience, incorporating the new School Experience and a changed Teaching Practicum format, has not been without its challenges. It was far easier to organize and administer the former teaching practicum format.

A member of the senior leadership team from one metropolitan secondary school remarked that establishing the new school experience program into their whole school program had taken a significant amount of extra work, but that extra work had been worth the effort in creating a far superior teaching experience for the student teachers. He especially noted that second year students teachers had 'crossed over the line' from being a student teacher to becoming a beginning teacher much earlier in their degree program.

One principal of a metropolitan primary school refused to take university students for the school experience program as 'it was too much extra work'.

Principals of country schools attended an information session at Flinders University and voiced an opinion that the new school experience was 'a metropolitan based program'. Modifications had to be made to the structure of the school experience, originally intended to facilitate visits to schools on a one day a week basis and linked to specific education study topics at the university, to allow students to gain experience in country schools, especially relevant as the majority of teaching vacancies are in country locations.

There were problems for students who worked a part-time job and now needed to make time to visit a school on a one day a week basis, similar problems for students with children, for students who rely on public transport and for students who attended university part time.

Initial confusion occurred with the use of the new term 'school experience' along with the term 'teaching practicum'. When senior school personnel were first asked to accept students for school experience placements, they often mistook the placement to be a teaching practicum. When later asked to accept teaching practicum placements, many principals and school coordinators remarked 'we already have 10 of your student teachers in the school – we can't take any more!'

The number of actual places available in schools presented an additional challenge. With over 250 second year and around 90 graduate entry students to place, the first indications were that fewer than 200 places had been secured. Many hours of telephoning schools and, at times, pleading with senior school staff after lengthy explanation of the benefits and intentions of the school experience, were necessary to gain the additional places required.

Expectations by academic staff also needed clarification back in the university. Some academic staff responsible for linking the school experience to the students' university studies expected far too much of the schools and the students and have had to review their students' workloads.

Also, an inconsistency occurred between the expectations for assessment by the topic coordinators for the middle school and secondary school topics and the topic coordinators for the junior primary and primary topics. Students became frustrated and confused while these inconsistencies were resolved.

In spite of the difficulties and challenges experienced by the Teaching Experience Centre staff, early indications are that the new school experience is having a positive influence on the development of students' understandings of the school learning environment, on the development of their professional skills and on their awareness of educational settings as their future worksites.

Students who in the past had often questioned the relevance of some university topics are now acknowledging the links between their studies and the way children learn. In their curriculum studies

tutorial workshops each week, students are enthusiastically talking about their school experiences and showing a depth of understanding and reflection not previously demonstrated.

While the difference between schools was first seen as a further challenge to students, it soon became apparent that students were developing a richer understanding of the nature of schools when they discussed their experiences with their peers and with their university tutors.

Furthermore, teachers and schools are developing approaches to collaborative mentoring rather than the previous 'one teacher to one student teacher' model and, in some instances student teachers have been encouraged to keep in touch with 'their' school throughout their teacher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if mentoring programs are adequately resourced, with 'good practice' structures and support, mentoring is an exciting method of community engagement for the tertiary sector. By using tertiary students, university's can directly contribute to increasing retention rates in their local secondary schools and build the capacity of local programs, staff, young people and their own student body. Additionally, mentor programs involve university students in volunteer work in their own community's, they access our students as a resource for the community and create opportunities for university students across all discipline areas to develop their graduate skills. In the words of one of the Principals involved: 'It's win-win all round!' (Lindsay Bowey, Principal, Forbes Primary School).

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**Supporting communities by
engaging adolescents through the use of University
after-school care:**

A case study.

Elizabeth Hudson - University of Queensland

Key words:

After-school care
Engaging adolescents
Program development

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A U C E A

Abstract:

In 1999, in response to a request from the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, an after-school care program was developed and began operating at the University of Queensland, Ipswich campus. Currently, this program offers participants a variety of term-length courses in areas such as leadership, sport and health, multimedia: film and music. It is currently undergoing a process of program development, examining areas such as its coordination, its curriculum and its evaluation. This paper provides an overview of the development of the 360° program, from its inception through to the current period, as well as the longer-term directions, that the program aims to take.

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Introduction

An after-school care program, including vacation care, was established at the University of Queensland (UQ), Ipswich campus in 1999 (Community Service and Research Centre, 2000). It began as an initiative of the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care and was collaboratively developed with UQ and the Bremer, Bundamba and Ipswich State High Schools. Funding was allocated to the UQ Community Service and Research Centre to manage the program (this centre has now been renamed the UQ Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre).

The purpose of the UQ Boilerhouse is to facilitate just and sustainable community outcomes. To achieve this purpose, the centre engages with diverse stakeholders from the private, public, and community sectors in developing informed and collaborative responses to both existing and emerging community issues. The 360⁰ Program is one such initiative focusing on engaging with young people in the West Moreton region offering learning and social opportunities through after-school care.

Under the current service agreement the 360⁰ program offers:

- An after school care program for 13-15 year olds (years 8, 9 and 10), operating 5 days per week from 3.30pm – 5.30pm;
- Transportation from secondary schools to the University daily;
- Quality programs that are safe, well supervised and age-appropriate;
- An interactive environment allowing learning opportunities that make the most of the access to the University academic staff and infrastructure;
- Opportunities to develop a broad range of skills in the areas of multimedia communications, IT, creative design, health and fitness, and leadership; and
- Equitable access for young people of diverse cultural, economic and academic backgrounds.

Through the past seven years, the program has experienced various levels of success. It continues to evolve through such experiences, reinventing itself to cater to the changing needs of the young people. This paper presents a rationale for running such a program through a tertiary institution, reviews some of the experiences that have set current directions, describes current operations, presents results from a pilot evaluation study, and in conclusion reflects on future challenges and opportunities.

Rationale for the Program

The Queensland Government affirms that child-care services are essential to the social and economic development of Queensland (Queensland Government, 2002). Such services support social, emotional, physical and intellectual development of the young people, enhance the family environment, and contribute to the overall wellbeing of a community. Of particular importance for families trying to balance work and family commitments are affordable quality care services that meet a range of child and family needs. However, this care is largely directed at younger age groups rather than high school populations.

Data from the 2001 census lists the city of Ipswich population at 126,663 people (Ipswich City Council, 2006). Of these, there are 4,214 school students who are in years eight, nine and ten who attend private and state high schools within a ten kilometre radius of UQ Ipswich. Anecdotal information from the Department of Communities, Childcare Information Service (CCIS), high schools and family day-care organisations identifies an ongoing lack of childcare for this age group in Ipswich. Adolescence is identified by Education Queensland as a period of significant emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development (Education Queensland, 2004). This is a danger period where students might disengage at school and become disinterested in learning (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005).

It was found that some high schools offer after-school care opportunities through student participation in extra-curricular activities. However, these activities are not listed with CCIS and can be considered incidental to a core after-school care focus. Family day care only offers care for children up to the age of twelve. Only one 'not for profit' organisation provided limited care for a maximum of forty adolescent students. Clearly, there is a gap in services in West Moreton for after school hours care directed towards this age group. From a university perspective there is also a clear logic in investing resources into this initiative.

Historically, this region has not had a strong focus on tertiary education. Until the opening of the University of Queensland Ipswich campus in 1999, ongoing study/training after completion of high school, was limited to TAFE colleges. Alternatively, young people from the region had no option other than to travel to university in Brisbane or other cities. Over recent years, the regional TAFE's and UQ have worked closely to increase the levels of higher education and training in the region. In addition, in 2006, the University of Southern Queensland opened a campus primarily catering to populations in the eastern suburbs of this region. However, the cultural shift towards higher education attendance in this region has only been slowly embraced by local populations.

In response to this situation, the University of Queensland set in place a deliberate emphasis on engaging with local communities in the West Moreton region. The UQ Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre fulfils a key role in this strategy. Engagement initiatives are intended to provide tangible returns back to the community in which it is based (see www.uq.edu.au/boilehouse for more details on UQ Boilerhouse engagement initiatives). In addition, diverse engagement processes provide an opening for local people, especially those who do not have a family background or familiarity with tertiary education, to explore what opportunities and career pathways a university might provide them.

The 360⁰ Program is one example of this higher education community engagement and provides a direct response to the identified lack of after school hours care for 13-15 year old students in the West Moreton region. It is expected that the 360⁰ Program will improve access to education and training for participants and possibly their families and friends, therefore enhancing individual employment opportunities with flow on implications for sustained economic and social benefits for the West Moreton region. In addition, through the ongoing advertising of the 360⁰ Program at each local high school, the University's profile is being raised. All of the local high schools act as feeder schools and the program should assist the University to gain increased enrolments.

As such the 360⁰ Program can be expected to facilitate broad benefits for students and their families, the community and government, and the university. In addition to these benefits there are also other more specific reasons for directing after hours care to this age group. For example, parents are faced with

rising fears about the health and safety risks of unsupervised children. Evidence from North America, suggests that teens who are unsupervised during after-school hours are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviours, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than children who are organized in focused activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This suggests that after school care programs have a dual function to both improve student's academic performance and to keep participants safe and out of trouble (The Afterschool Alliance, 2006).

As such, initiatives like the 360⁰ Program have broad appeal as an effective strategy to both raise participant achievement and reduce possibilities of anti-social behaviour in the afternoon hours (Reinhard 1998, as cited in Schwendiman & Fager, 1999). Beyond issues of safety are the rewards that students and their communities can reap as a result of quality after-school programs. In addition, as Miller (2003) argues, important adolescent experiences occur outside of traditional schooling. There is a growing interest in supplementing school based learning with a variety of activities that enhance participant skills and learning. Indeed, quality after-school programs should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance participants knowledge, abilities and experiences, rather than just an obligation to occupy their time and keep them out of trouble. The 360⁰ Program looks to provide short courses that are vehicles for student's growth and creativity, delivered in a supportive and enjoyable social environment.

360⁰ Program: 2005-present.

In early 2005 a new Director was appointed to run the (then named) 'Community Service and Research Centre'. Working from a prior review of the Centre and input from staff and an external advisory committee the Centre was renamed and a new vision and mission articulated. Existing programs were reviewed including the 360⁰ Program.

Management of the 360⁰ Program had been contracted out to a church group from early 2004. It was decided to bring the 360⁰ Program back into the Centre, from the beginning of 2006, and redevelop existing courses to more effectively engage young participants with the University environment and staff. The UQ Boilerhouse facilitated a stakeholder workshop in June 2005 involving Qld Department of Communities (formerly the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care), 360⁰ teaching staff, UQ faculty of education staff, ZONTA representatives¹, and staff from the church group.

The workshop explored the opportunities and constraints facing the program and sought affirmation of support from stakeholders to review and revamp the courses. Stakeholder responses from this workshop indicated strong support for the program to be managed by the UQ Boilerhouse. The objectives listed in the service agreement (listed above) were reviewed and more detailed objectives identified and agreed upon by stakeholders.

¹ ZONTA sponsor the *Leadership for Young Women* course.

As such, in addition to the service agreement requirements, the 360⁰ Program newly articulated objectives include to:

- Provide equitable access to good quality, affordable child-care for Ipswich families;
- Build positive relationships between different schools and students;
- Provide an enjoyable and fun setting for students' after-school offering a variety of activities and experiences;
- Build self-esteem and confidence for individual participants;
- Promote student's community involvement with program sponsors and also to take pleasure in using the University as a place of learning;
- Provide opportunities for students to gain relevant skills in an area of their interest which can possibly lead to a career path; and
- Facilitate engagement with UQ that builds understanding of how tertiary education works and creates pathways to University and changes family and participants perspectives of University.

Following direction from this workshop, a part-time coordinator (3 days/week) was employed in November 2005 to begin work on three key tasks. These were to:

1. Review and/or develop new curriculum for five courses to be delivered starting first term, 2006;
2. Establish an evaluation framework for each course and the program (based on service agreement requirements and additional program objectives listed above); and
3. Set up effective and efficient administration and communication processes for the program.

Initially, there was a strong focus on communicating with school staff including Principals, Guidance counsellors, Heads of Departments and Teachers at all of the state and private secondary schools that fell within a ten kilometre radius of the University (subsequently, nine schools were targeted).

Individual meetings were held with key people at each school who were presented with a detailed briefing on the 360⁰ Program. New program brochures were designed and distributed to 4,214 students in years 8, 9 and 10 and teaching staff at the nine schools. Applicants were asked to fax, mail or deliver their enrolment application to the UQ Boilerhouse.

There were 15 spaces available for each of the five courses offered in first term 2006. These included:

1. *Leadership for Young Women*: participants were taught about different leadership styles, team work, career possibilities and goal setting.
2. *Digital Music*: participants were taught to use software to compose a song that could be entered into a "Screen Culture" competition as part of the Ipswich film festival.
3. *Film Editing*: participants were given the opportunity to write a script, film each other and make a short film.
4. *Personal Fitness Training*: participants were taught techniques to care for themselves through exercise, nutrition and general good health.
5. *Leadership for Young Men*: participants taught about different leadership styles, team work, career possibilities and goal setting.

The first four of these courses attracted at least 15 applicants in the first week after advertising. However, the *Leadership for young men* course was not popular with only two enrolments. It was decided not to run this course and a second *Film editing* course was offered. The waiting list of applicants filled this course. For term two, 2006, the four courses from first term were re-offered, along with the addition of a newly developed course on *Screen-printing*. Parental feedback from term one indicated a strong desire to re-enrol their child in term two and therefore there was an identified need to introduce a new course for some of these students. Again, demand has been strong in term 2 with all courses fully subscribed. Some parents from term one also indicated that they would like to enrol their child in term two, creating an ongoing client base.

In response to this request, brochures were mailed to these families prior to being distributed to schools. Many students have enrolled in two courses in term two.

A requirement of the service contract is that the UQ Boilerhouse will arrange transport for the students to attend the course. Parents/carers pick up the students at 5.30pm. Arranging transport is a cost intensive component of the program that requires a cost efficient response. The program coordinator has a standing booking for taxis to pick up groups of students at two of the schools. In addition, a small bus has been hired to pick up students from the remaining seven schools. As most of the schools finish around 3pm dual transportation methods were implemented so that school students did not have to wait unsupervised for their transport for any length of time. Students sign-in upon arrival at the University. If any students are absent UQ Boilerhouse staff notify listed contact numbers to confirm the child's whereabouts.

Introduction of the revamped 360⁰ Program in 2006 has coincided with a move by the UQ Boilerhouse into new premises that incorporates a state-of-the-art computer room with 15 workstations (plus a trainer's workstation) and advanced audiovisual technology and specialist computer software. In addition, the computing room is attached to a lounge and kitchenette area where students can have afternoon tea and socialise before starting their class. Students within the *Personal Fitness training* course utilize the University's ovals, tennis and basketball courts and have access to diverse sporting equipment and a newly built gymnasium.

Upon the completion of each day's activities, course facilitators wait with the students until they are picked up. Parents or nominated family members are required to sign-out their child as required under child-protection guidelines. University security staff are on call to provide safety or first-aid assistance if the need arises. Upon the conclusion of each course, each student is awarded a certificate of completion.

All program staff have current 'working with children' suitability cards (Queensland 'blue' card). The Program Coordinator has a dual degree in Psychology and Middle Years of Teaching. The facilitators have various undergraduate degrees and work in the field in which they teach (none of the facilitators have specialist teaching degrees). The facilitators use a high-energy, empowering approach and relate well to the young participants. The Coordinator supports facilitators teaching with advice on a variety of pedagogical techniques. Pedagogy is most often discussed with facilitators to assist them in maintaining a high level of student interest. To date, the program has had no serious incidences of student misbehaviour.

All courses are co-written by the course facilitator and program coordinator. Integral to the program's curriculum is providing authentic learning opportunities which develop the valued attributes of a lifelong learner. According to the Queensland School Curriculum Council (2002:4) a lifelong learner is:

- *a knowledgeable person with deep understanding;*
- *a complex thinker;*
- *a creative person;*
- *an active investigator;*
- *an effective communicator;*
- *a participant in an interdependent world; and*
- *a reflective and self-directed learner.*

Achievement of these attributes links to the identified objectives discussed previously and will be monitored in ongoing evaluation. Through an array of effective pedagogical teaching practices and program development the 360⁰ Program aims to provide enjoyable and useful learning experiences.

Evaluation: identifying challenges and opportunities

As noted previously, one of the key tasks of the newly appointed coordinator was to develop an evaluation framework for the 360° Program and a generic evaluation design for the courses. This task is set for completion by the end of 2006 and will feed into a broader UQ Boilerhouse evaluation framework which will be informed through evaluation data from all of the Centre's current engagement initiatives (Diagram 1).

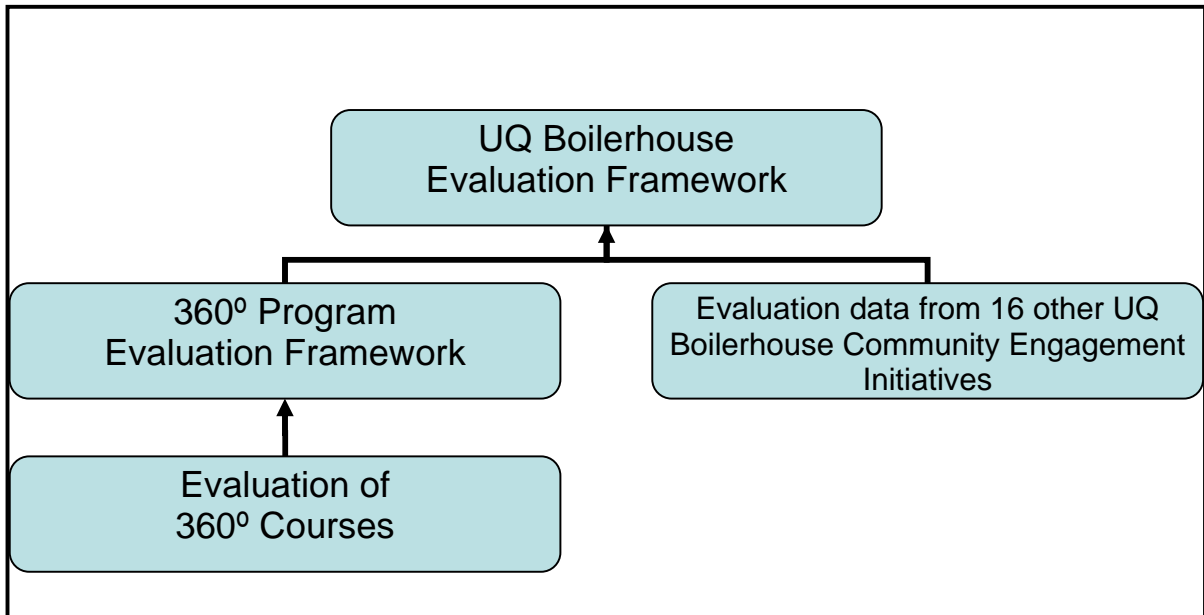


Diagram 1: Overview of links between UQ Boilerhouse and 360° Program evaluation

To date, preliminary evaluation data, relating to 360° courses, has been collected during the first term of 2006, including both structured and anecdotal information from parents (n = 60) and participants (n = 40). This data, drawn from a pilot survey instrument, provides some early feedback on participant and parent satisfaction, operational processes, and course development.

Responses from parents indicate that previously some had held perceptions of an *invisible wall*, that only wealthy or smart people could attend a university or use its facilities. For example, one parent described how she had always had a negative perspective of Universities where she felt it was only for the *elite*. Of particular note is that 73% of parents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their child has developed a positive perception about higher education after completing a 360° course. Such responses provide some initial evidence of a wise investment from a UQ operational perspective.

Other parental feedback indicates that both participants and their families feel welcome and safe using the university facilities, and that the program was well delivered, affordable and beneficial to their child's development. Some comments include:

- *It was an opportunity to become familiar with the University Campus.*
- *Has improved my daughters' self-confidence especially in meeting new people [and] making new friends as we are new in Queensland.*
- *Just a fabulous positive program for mentoring and supporting young adolescents.*
- *[It is excellent] that it was offered and that a community institute cared enough to make something worthwhile for young adults. There is nothing here otherwise. The courses on offer link to young people very much and what they are interested in - great for self-concept and self esteem.*

Parents noted that the social interaction between participants from diverse backgrounds and schools had a positive impact on their child. One parent commented, [my child] *made friends, came home positive, more outspoken*. Another said it was, *an opportunity [for my child] to develop other skills not necessarily covered at school*. Provision of transport to the courses was also noted a contributing factor to satisfaction with comments including:

- *The transport was excellent and the only way my child could go.*
- *I liked best that it was immediately after school and transport was provided.*
- *Fuss free pick up from school, a balance, interesting programs based on fun not condescending or childish.*

Outcomes from social interaction between young people will be monitored in ongoing evaluation processes. This interaction provides both developmental opportunities and provides a satisfactory response to concerns relating to boredom and anti-social behaviour after school. One parent specifically noted that, *my (yr 8) daughter would have been home alone if not for this course*. Survey responses identified that if not for the 360⁰ Program, 35% of the participants would be home alone after-school.

In summary, 81% of parents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the variety of courses delivered, and 95% were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall 360⁰ Program. Two parents comments, in particular, summarise this overall high level of satisfaction. One stated, *“This has been a wonderful course, I have recommended it to other parents – keep up the good work & thanks!, the second looked to future involvement, I can’t wait to see what courses are going to be on next time, this was our first time and it was great.”*

Participants also recorded high levels of satisfaction with their individual courses with 87% responding as satisfied or very satisfied. Some typical comments relating to the two key evaluation criteria are listed below:

1. Statements regarding the course facilitators:

- *Yeah he’s awesome. He had good skills in film and stuff.*
- *She was very inspirational, kind and very patient with all our comments. She is also very willing to get to know us and she is very easy to approach and talk to.*
- *She was very inspiring she treated us equally and if we didn’t feel up to the challenge she didn’t push us.*
- *He was rad as and taught us such things as how to use programs that were fully hectic.*

2. Statements regarding learning/skills development

- *It was inspiring and I feel more confident with the decisions in life.*
- *We met all different kinds of people which was fun.*
- *The freedom it gave to do what you thought sounded cool.*
- *What I liked most about the course was that everyone joined in and we all shared.*
- *I thought this was a great learning experience. This inspired me and I now look at things with a different perspective.*
- *The safety net and trust with the people also in the course and the instructor.*
- *It was always fun, inspiring and motivational. I had a great time, learnt lots about myself and met new people.*
- *I enjoyed sport for once and it was fun.*

Another result of note, for the Digital music course, was the success of students in a local Ipswich Culture Festival. Of four finalists in the *Sound design section* of the festival, three were 360⁰ Program participants. The overall winner, Blake Firman, was a 360⁰ Program participant who took home a \$375 cash prize. Two other participants were runner’s up being awarded a Screen Culture Certificate. Karlee Mattiazzi, the facilitator of the course was glowing in her praise, *“...these students are amazing, they’ve only just been introduced to creating digital music. With the skills they’ve learnt and the aptitude they have shown, their career opportunities look good”*.

Conclusion

As shown, parental and participant feedback is strongly supportive of the program. In addition to the formal evaluation results staff have been involved in an ongoing reflective learning process relating to their experience of managing and teaching courses during this period. This process has identified some ongoing challenges, particularly in maintaining support from schools. Some examples include:

- school staff who are aware of the program change positions meaning new staff have to be introduced to the program;
- there is an existing perception that many students will be entering trades and apprenticeships and therefore there is little value in attending any courses at the University;
- teacher workloads constrain them from supporting after-hours activities, for example, they have limited time to read or distribute the flyers; and
- it is too difficult to distribute flyers and that it creates more work for their administrative staff.

Measures to overcome these and other challenges are being addressed. For example, the Program Coordinator prepares quick reference sheets for distribution in all school staff pigeon holes and takes a highly visible role in presenting the program outline at school assemblies. Also, key school staff regularly receives gifts of chocolate! It should be noted that the program, in its current redevelopment stage, is only in the first six months of course delivery and ongoing evaluation will be a critical factor in ensuring the longer term viability of specific courses and aspects of the program (eg. transport arrangements). Opportunities are also being pursued as they are identified.

For example, currently the *Leadership for young women* course is sponsored by the West Moreton Zonta Club. Zonta assists the running of the course in various ways. They provide financial sponsorship for the \$40 student enrolment fee. They also assist with recruiting course applicants, sourcing cheaper or free resources for the course and present awards at the graduation ceremony. Additionally, Zonta members offer mentoring and work experience placement opportunities to participants.

The UQ Boilerhouse hopes to create more community partnerships similar to the community support provided by Zonta. Partnerships with local groups and businesses are actively being sought to assist with running the program. For example, the program is currently looking to gain financial assistance to assist with transport; equipment (eg. digital cameras and art materials) and also for sponsoring individual participants (\$40 per child). Ideally, the UQ Boilerhouse hopes to set up a pool of money that can be used to assist families who are unable to pay the enrolment fee. Although to date all fees have been paid, the UQ Boilerhouse would not exclude a child who could not pay and wanted to attend.

If adequate support can be realised the program will look to deliberately target students who are deemed at-risk with adverse problematic behaviours. This challenge has been set down for 2007. Obviously this may be a difficult task across many criteria, from identification and recruitment, maintaining attendance, specialised teaching requirements, and risk management processes. However, with a very explicit social justice focus, identified in the *UQ Boilerhouse Strategic Plan (2006-09)* (UQ Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre, 2006), this sort of challenge is placed at the forefront of the centre's higher education community engagement agenda.

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Realising opportunity:

A University of Queensland higher education access research project focusing on potential students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

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Keywords:

Social equity
Community engagement
Migrants and refugees

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A U C E A

Abstract:

Despite on-going social equity initiatives, there is still a clear discrepancy in regards to access to tertiary education for potential students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This paper reports on an action research initiative which uses higher education community engagement principles to develop stronger relationships between the University of Queensland and culturally and linguistically diverse communities,² to increase access to tertiary education.

This community-based research project focuses specifically on local migrant and refugee communities in south east Queensland. It explores the attitudes, understanding, expectations and aspirations of potential students³ and their families to tertiary education, to clarify how those who fit under the 'socially disadvantaged' label view tertiary education. A second stage of this research will then seek to identify innovative 'inside-out' approaches for immersing outreach activities *into* migrant and refugee communities. This will involve working closely with community groups to establish appropriate processes whereby these groups, with support from UQ, will be able to identify, nurture and support potential students in their efforts to gain entrance to tertiary education.

The project has been designed using a reflective, collaborative process with local communities, working in particular with Pacific Island communities. The need to utilise culturally appropriate methodologies which engage community members is essential, and has been assisted by the recruitment of Pacific Island community liaison officers, who play a key role in negotiating culturally appropriate pathways.

This paper reviews the issue of access to higher education for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and outlines the strategies employed by the research to ensure that communities are engaged in a way that encourages both "ownership" and mutual reciprocity. Preliminary findings are highlighted, together with the longer-term directions that the project aims to take.

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² For the purposes of this research, "culturally and linguistically diverse" has been defined as migrants from non-English speaking countries (including second and third generations) and refugees. Indigenous populations are not included in the definition of CALD for this research project. During the early stages of research, the term CALD communities generated confusion for many project participants, and so reference was made to migrant and refugee communities.

³ The term "potential students" is broad and initially included both young people still at school, as well as adults who may be thinking about returning to study. As the project progresses to the second stage however, the primary focus will be upon school-age students.

Introduction

Australian universities have been called upon to provide targeted programs of assistance for specific groups of recent immigrants, in response to the complex issue of tertiary access for groups from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (James et al., 2004, p. 43). This paper reports on an action research initiative which uses higher education community engagement principles to develop stronger relationships between University of Queensland (UQ) and its local CALD communities. The aim of the research is to increase access for these groups to higher education and other life opportunities.

Research is being implemented by the UQ Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre, which is a lead agency for UQ in facilitating community engagement. In this context, community engagement refers to the processes through which UQ works with stakeholders from the community, public and private sectors, in developing collaborative responses to local issues. The UQ Boilerhouse has developed strong connections with local CALD communities through community-based research undertaken within its Culture, Diversity and Community program over the past five years.

This paper presents a background to the research, description of research design, results from the first 12 months, and discussion of outcomes to date.

Context for the study

Despite ongoing social equity initiatives, there is still a clear discrepancy in regards to access to higher education for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This raises some questions as to whether conventional outreach methods are achieving their full potential in providing students from disadvantaged backgrounds with access into higher education. While research continues to demonstrate that students from low socio-economic (SE) backgrounds are under represented in higher education (James et al., 2004), representation of those from CALD backgrounds is subject to greater debate.

While some have argued that CALD students are over represented in higher education (Dobson, Birrell & Rapson, 1996), a recent analysis reveals a more complex pattern than this; some groups of CALD students are over represented while others remain under represented (James et al., 2004). This is further confounded by the issue of multiple disadvantage, with the analysis revealing that nearly 16% of CALD students belong to two equity groups, with the greatest overlap occurring with low socio-economic background (James et al., 2004).

Australia's higher education equity policy

Australia's national higher education equity framework was established following the publication of the 1990 discussion paper, *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1990). This paper outlined the objectives in relation to equitable participation in higher education, and identified six equity groups (Coates & Krause, 2005). These groups, identified as disadvantaged in terms of their access to higher education opportunities, are 1) people from a low socio-economic background, 2) people with a disability, 3) people from rural or isolated areas, 4) people from a non-English speaking background, 5) Indigenous people and 6) women, particularly in non-traditional areas of study and double degrees (Postle et al., 1997). These groupings are still used today as the basis for equity initiatives.

Implementation of the framework has been monitored by national performance indicators developed to measure access, participation, retention, success and completion among the six equity groups (James et al., 2004). At the same time, universities were also required to develop annual equity plans aimed at improving participation (Postle et al., 1997, p. 42). Despite such moves, higher education participation still remains inequitable, particularly in terms of access rates for certain target groups. Socio-economic status appears to be a dominant factor, and renewed efforts are required to address this (James et al., 2004, p. 11).

Factors influencing higher education participation and achievement

A preliminary review of Australian and international literature reveals a number of factors which have direct or indirect influences on the educational outcomes of students from lower SE backgrounds, while those who are also from CALD backgrounds face additional barriers. The relationship between parents' SE status and children's educational outcomes has been widely tested, and the positive impact it has arises from the material and interpersonal resources that parents can provide (Kao, 2002, p. 87). Overall, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds experience educational disadvantage due to their greater likelihood to perceive barriers to higher education, and a reduced likelihood of experiencing encouraging factors such as family support (James, 2000, p. 110).

The costs associated with higher education have been identified as a deterrent to participation (Andrews, 1999; Harvey-Beavis & Robinson, 2000; Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002). Contrary to expectation however, the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) has not been found to decrease participation among low SE groups (Stuart, Layer & Evans, 2005). Debt aversion is not considered to be an issue for lower SE groups, due to the income contingent nature of HECS (Stuart, Layer & Evans, 2005, p. 14)

Attitudes towards higher education are also influential, with fewer students from low SE backgrounds believing that a university career will lead to improved job and career prospects. They are likely to see TAFE courses as of greater use (James, 2002, p. 50). Potential students may also lack understanding of what can be gained from higher education (Andrews, 1999; Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002; Young, 2004). Those from low SE backgrounds have a greater tendency to consider higher education from a short term cost perspective rather than longer term gain (James, 2002, p. 50).

Lack of appropriate support and encouragement from parents, peers and the education system have been found to be barriers to participation (Harvey-Beavis & Robinson, 2000; Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002). A number of factors influence the level of parental support, including limited family experience of higher education. Support from peers and teachers, and more broadly a supportive school environment, are also influential (Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002).

Aspiration plays a key role in the decision to participate in higher education. It has been consistently shown that parental educational levels form the most reliable predictor of educational aspirations of young people (James, 2002; Tikly, 2005). In particular aspirations of immigrant parents for their children have often been found to be high (Kao, 2002, p. 101).

In addition, lack of knowledge about higher education structures and systems can inhibit higher education participation (Stuart, Layer & Evans, 2005, p. 13). However, getting this information to low SE groups, particularly those from CALD communities who may have English as a second language, can be problematic (Wirthlin Worldwide, 2002, p. 7).

While these represent some of the barriers for potential students from low SE groups, additional factors may affect those who are also from a non-English speaking background (NESB). Studies have revealed English language proficiency to be key to higher participation access (Andrews, 1999; Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004; Tikly, 2005), while parental proficiency in English can also have an impact (Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004, p. 26).

The impact of culture and religion has also been explored and some studies have suggested that religion and culture can impact on educational outcomes (Abbas, 2002). A review of evidence, on the performance of Bangladeshi students in UK high schools however, notes the need for caution before concluding that all Muslim or Bangladeshi pupils are performing poorly at school because of their religion or country of origin (Haque, 2000, p. 163).

Hannah (1999) found refugees experience additional barriers such as disrupted schooling, destroyed or lost qualification certificates, non-recognition of previous qualifications, lack of money and issues arising from previous torture and trauma which may affect concentration and motivation.

Higher education participation by students from low SE background has therefore been shown to be influenced by a complex set of factors. In particular, those who are also from a NESB or refugee background face additional issues. This situation highlights the issue of multiple disadvantage in higher education participation. Any approach to address such disadvantage will require the development of culturally appropriate processes involving multiple stakeholders including the communities of interest.

Realising opportunity: A University of Queensland higher education access research project

The *Realising opportunity* project seeks to develop outreach activities which specifically target potential students from migrant or refugee backgrounds, with the overall aim of increasing access to higher education. The project departs from traditional outreach activities, in that it seeks to develop collaborative relationships directly with local communities, as opposed to accessing potential students primarily through schools. The geographical focus of the project is the 'Western corridor' in south east Queensland. The corridor includes areas of socio-economic disadvantage, with comparatively high levels of people with a disability, unemployment and public housing (O'Regan, 2003). It is an area of great cultural diversity, with high proportions of Indigenous people and those from CALD backgrounds.

Project background

UQ already undertakes a range of outreach activities across Queensland, however those specifically targeted towards students from disadvantaged backgrounds are implemented primarily through *UQ Link*, UQ's special entry program. *UQ Link* targets students at schools in areas of disadvantage, in recognition that students facing ongoing socio-economic disadvantage may not perform to their full academic potential at school. The *UQ Link* program provides targeted outreach activities to increase access and retain students through initiatives such as the *UQ Link* orientation program, student counseling services and scholarships.

Expanding the opportunity for access to students from low socio-economic backgrounds is one of the strategic priorities outlined in the current *UQ Equity and Diversity Plan 2004 – 2006* (The University of Queensland, 2004) as evidence reveals these students continue to be under represented at both UQ and national levels, despite ongoing outreach activities. This project explores responses to this issue. The research adopts an innovative approach of working directly with CALD communities, to identify appropriate ways of increasing tertiary access for potential students.

Research design

The initial research design comprised two stages. Stage 1 sought to explore the attitudes, understanding, expectations and aspirations of potential students and families from CALD communities to higher education. The intent of Stage 2 is to explore innovative 'inside-out' approaches for immersing outreach activities into CALD communities. This second stage will involve working closely with two CALD communities to establish appropriate processes whereby they are able, with support from UQ, to identify, nurture and support potential students to access tertiary education.

The guiding research questions for the project include:

1. What are the attitudes, understanding, expectations and aspirations of potential students and their families from CALD communities to higher education?
2. What pathways have proven successful?
3. What support and encouragement are required to assist potential students from CALD communities access higher education? and
4. How can UQ work effectively with CALD community groups and leaders to support and encourage potential students?

A project steering committee has been established to help direct the research.

The project is using primarily qualitative methods associated with community-based action research. This has involved 1) 'informal' discussions with community workers, teaching staff and identified community leaders, and 2) formal semi-structured interviews and focus groups with potential students and their parents. A snowball sampling technique has been used for recruiting participants.

Research is largely exploratory in nature and the research design is intended to be flexible and iterative, relying on collected data to direct ongoing implementation. Some of the key learnings that have impacted on the initial research design are discussed later in the paper.

Limitations

From the outset, it was apparent that three key factors had the potential to limit achievement of the stated aims of the project.

1. Based on previous experience (Scull, 2003) it was expected that there would be some difficulty in building effective working relationships and trust with targeted CALD communities within a 12 month time frame, as well as completing data collection and analysis. However, funding was only available for this period. Additional funding is being sought for a further 12 months;
2. Language and cultural issues were also identified as potentially constraining factors. The cultural background and gender of the researcher was identified as a possible barrier in gaining access to CALD communities;
3. Research fatigue is an issue among communities in the 'Western Corridor'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that community members are disillusioned and unmotivated to participate in research projects. Their previous experience of 'being researched' has resulted in few identifiable outcomes for communities.

Given these limitations, it was important to ensure that community expectations of what the project could achieve within its initial 12 month timeframe were realistic. As such, the project has been introduced to communities as a 'first step' in developing effective long-term equity initiatives and strong relationships between UQ and CALD communities within the 'Western' corridor. The project is presented as part of an on-going program of outreach with CALD communities via the *UQ Link* program. Other specific responses to each of these identified limitations are discussed later in the paper.

Researching with communities

The overall approach of working collaboratively with local communities is considered critical in achieving stated research aims (Cuthill & Fien 2005). While the proposed research design identified two stages, it was subsequently found that initial work needed to focus specifically on gaining a thorough understanding of the status quo in the corridor. As a result, the first six months were used to build a strong foundation for the project. This was achieved by undertaking a preliminary scan to identify key communities and to explore higher education access issues. The scan also provided an opportunity to develop relationships and networks with CALD communities, and to determine levels of support among community leaders and groups for working in collaboration with UQ Boilerhouse on the project. Initial responses have been positive.

Processes to ensure effective communication and engagement across the communities of study have been identified and established. It is hoped this will ensure strategies are "owned" by communities, and thus have a greater likelihood of longer term sustainability. Of particular note are the recruitment of two community liaison officers, and the establishment of community reference groups comprised of influential community leaders who provide guidance, expertise and networking opportunities.

Preliminary findings

The preliminary scan involved ethnographic data collection, including recording of observations in a research diary. The fieldwork involved informal meetings with more than 70 stakeholders to identify the key CALD communities in the corridor, as well as any issues they experience relating to higher education access. Participants come from a range of local communities, as well as from TAFE, schools, and various levels of government. The scan has produced anecdotal evidence about issues, from which some similarities between groups have emerged. While it is difficult to distinguish trends from individual perceptions, important data has been collected.

The key communities in the 'Western' corridor include a range of Pacific Island communities and the Vietnamese. Smaller communities include Filipino, Lao and El Salvadorian. Sudanese and Middle Eastern communities have recently been moving into the eastern end of the corridor, but numbers remain small at this stage. The following preliminary findings are presented in thematic groups.

Broad themes

Three broad themes have emerged that relate to all CALD communities.

1. It is apparent across CALD communities that access is more of an issue for potential students from socially economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. An issue relating to mature age CALD students is lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and prior learning. Those arriving with professional qualifications indicated that they are put off by the complexity, time and cost of getting qualifications recognised. Pressure on new arrivals to find work to support family also means that returning to several years of study to re-qualify is not an option, and hence they tend to accept any work they can find. As a result, many first generation migrants with children reported that they have "given up" on their own education, even if they hold professional qualifications in their home country. Instead, great importance is placed on their children's education, which can result in considerable pressure on young people.
3. English language skills are a significant issue for potential CALD students, particularly for adults with responsibility for supporting their families. The time required to reach a level of English proficiency appropriate to return to tertiary level study, makes the process of re-qualification too long. While spoken English was reported to be less of a problem for younger students, literacy and comprehension were reported to be key factors in disengagement from school.

Introducing the Communities Involved

Pacific Island communities

Pacific Islanders in the 'Western' corridor are often newly arrived migrants, many having arrived via New Zealand. The precise number of migrants in the corridor is unclear as a result of this, but it is widely believed that the official statistics in the corridor vastly under represent the true number of migrants from the Pacific Islands. This can create issues in terms of eligibility for settlement services, including English as a Second Language assistance for young people at school, many of whom may speak a Pacific Island language at home.

Higher education access was identified as a key issue for PI communities in the corridor, with low levels of aspiration, expectation and understanding about higher education being reported. This applies to all age groups of potential students. A number of reasons were offered as explanation. Financial pressures on families, especially the recently arrived, are such that higher education is not an option, as many young people have to leave school to find work. Money is needed to support the extended family, both in Australia and overseas. Contributions to religious organizations may also add to financial pressures.

Low expectation and aspiration to attend university were widely reported, with many young people failing to give due consideration to further study. This is likely to be in part connected with the understanding from an early age of the need to find work once school has been completed. This expectation is strengthened by the apparent ability of parents to find jobs for children in their own places of work. Such work is usually unskilled, and may include jobs in factories, shops and fast food restaurants. In addition, the cost of higher education is seen as a significant inhibiting factor. This is particularly the case for those without Australian citizenship, who are ineligible for deferment of any HECS loans and therefore must pay when they commence their studies.

There is some indication that parents lack understanding of the Australian education system. Differences in the education system between country of origin and Australia were highlighted as a reason why many parents may fail to engage in their children's schooling. Parents with lower levels of English proficiency and education may also not be able to offer appropriate educational support.

Issues of attainment also impact on post school pathways. As noted above, poor literacy and comprehension is reportedly an issue which can result in disengagement from class, as well as lack of perceived relevance of the standard curriculum. In addition, an important and influential factor is peer pressure. This can impact on both aspiration and achievement. Widely reported interests of young PI people include both music and sport, and at the current time aspiration appears to focus more on pathways in these areas than continuing academic study.

Important for this project is the recognition that the issues facing PI communities are complex and multidimensional. Higher education opportunities cannot be considered in isolation from these other issues. It is evident that any effective response will need to engage a diverse range of stakeholders. Experience from the current project, suggest that initiatives such as the *Realising opportunity* project can play a lead role in facilitating a collaborative response to such issues.

Vietnamese community

Supporting findings in the literature, the preliminary scan reveals that tertiary access appears less problematic for young people in the Vietnamese community, who are proportionally over-represented in higher education. The scan revealed that in the corridor aspirations are reportedly high, both among young people and their parents, towards continuing their study at university. The key issue affecting Vietnamese young people is high expectations of their parents. A number of participants reported that many young people are forced by their parents to study subjects in which they have little or no interest, particularly professions such as law and medicine. This is in part due to concerns with status, which is of great importance in the Vietnamese community. Among Vietnamese parents, higher education for their children is seen as a key opportunity of life in Australia, and will do whatever is necessary to support their children go on to university.

In terms of access, a more significant issue for the Vietnamese community is access for potential mature age students, with very few adults reported to be returning to study, especially women.

Preliminary conclusions

This initial fieldwork has served a number of important purposes and will contribute towards the overall success of the project. It is apparent from the data that issues affecting PI communities in the corridor align well to the overall aims of the research project. At the current time, there appears to be relatively low understanding of the range of options open to young people from PI communities, as well as low aspiration and understanding about higher education. At the same time several barriers, including often severe financial disadvantage, affect the future pathways that young PI people may follow after school.

It is also clear that this is an issue of concern to many within the PI communities, and that there is support and interest in working with UQ on this issue. As a result, the Samoan and Tongan communities have been selected as the communities of study. Difficulties in accessing the PI communities relate to time and trust, and we will need to prove our intent and build our relationship, and to highlight the outcomes the community can hope to gain by involvement with the project.

In order to progress this work in a truly collaborative manner however, initial data suggested the need for a new engagement strategy. The foundation for this new strategy has been the recruitment of two Pacific Island Community Liaison Officers, whose role is to assist the research team in identifying and engaging with key community leaders, who it is hoped will support the project from their positions of influence within their community. The liaison officers also play a key role in disseminating project information widely across the communities via a range of medium including radio, meetings and forums.

Where to from here?

The preliminary work undertaken to date identifies this project as the first in SE Queensland to develop outreach activities working collaboratively 'with' local CALD communities. As such, the development of a direct relationship between UQ and these communities represents a new approach to increasing access opportunities for tertiary education for young people. This engaged approach identifies and takes into consideration previously hidden barriers. For example, with PI communities, a key factor reported to affect the aspirations of young people are their parents. This suggests, as a starting point, a need to focus on informing parents about the value of higher education. Currently, it has been reported that PI parents may be somewhat reluctant to engage with their children's schools. Clearly, this engaged approach, along with in-depth analysis of existing community structures and processes, is required to identify culturally appropriate means of increasing access opportunities for young people from CALD communities.

Building from the understanding gained through research to date, the second stage of this project will focus on the identification of strategies that can be used to support and encourage young people to consider higher education as an option when they leave school. While implementation of such strategies will require ongoing input and support from UQ, the primary aim will be to collaboratively develop culturally appropriate strategies that can be implemented and 'owned' by communities themselves. For example, within PI culture, the importance of the family and church are paramount. To effect genuine cultural change that values and supports tertiary education, it is anticipated that these spheres of influence will be important in achieving project aims.

Recruitment of two PI Community Liaison Officers has been instrumental in the process of developing strong relationships with the Tongan and Samoan communities. The officers' first task has been to undertake a comprehensive overview of the Tongan and Samoan communities in the corridor, including identification of all church and community leaders, and community organizations and schools with noteworthy populations of PI students. Leaders from each community have been involved in informal discussions with the community liaison officers, briefed on the research, and invited to participate in the project. Extensive efforts are being made to ensure all who wish to be involved have the opportunity to do so. The overview of the two communities will provide an informed basis for building understanding of and attitudinal change relating to higher education.

Once initial contacts have been made across each community, a process will be developed to facilitate the collaborative development of relevant strategies that can be implemented. This is where it is anticipated that UQ will play a key role in facilitation of relationships, as we will seek to work not only with the Samoan and Tongan communities, but with local schools, TAFE and relevant government agencies. This UQ Boilerhouse initiative coincides with a *Pacific Island Whole of Government strategy* that is currently being developed by Queensland Government, which aims to address the full range of issues affecting PI communities, including education.

Conclusion

This project aims to increase access to higher education for potential students from migrant and refugee backgrounds living in the 'Western' corridor. It is common for some of these people to experience multiple disadvantages, coming from both low SE background as well as a non-English speaking background. Work undertaken to date has demonstrated that within the corridor, PI communities are experiencing difficulties in relation to higher education access, stemming from low aspiration, understanding and expectation of the pathways available to them after completion of schooling. Other barriers compound this lack of aspiration, including severe financial pressures and disengagement from supportive learning environments.

UQ is working to address these issues using a collaborative process with the Samoan and Tongan communities. PI Community Liaison Officers employed by UQ are working to provide a solid foundation to a relationship which it is hoped will continue beyond the life of the project through *UQ Link*, the university's special entry program. The first challenge is to encourage church leaders and community elders to embrace the project, and work with the university to raise awareness among community members as to the opportunities that higher education can offer to their young people. The next is to establish a strong, collaborative process by which the university and community can identify strategies aimed at encouraging and supporting young people to consider higher education.

Responsibility for strategy implementation will lie primarily with the communities of study, although it is also anticipated that UQ, together with schools, TAFE and government agencies will all need to recognize and continue to support community based strategies. By facilitating collaboration among this diverse group of stakeholders, it is anticipated that this new model of 'engaged' outreach will have a strong likelihood, over the longer term, of giving more young people from PI communities the opportunity to access higher education.

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Home from away
Some thoughts on stemming the country-city brain-drain

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Keywords:

Regional/rural communities
Sustainability
Tertiary education

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Abstract:

A major challenge to the sustainability and development of rural and regional communities is the drift of young residents to the cities. In particular young people who leave to undertake tertiary education tend not to return to their communities of origin. On the other hand, some capable young people miss out on tertiary education opportunities precisely because it would involve leaving home. This paper presents the results of a survey of Area Consultative Committees in all states and territories of Australia which explored community need for professionals, access to university education, community support for young people going to university, and links between a community and graduates who have moved away.

The survey results indicate that there is a three-way information gap relating to community needs, university offerings, and local career opportunities for young people. Whilst employment of locals and community support for young people in higher education is viewed positively, such support is often regarded as too difficult, and there is an apparent dearth of communication networks that could attract graduates and young professionals back to their communities.

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Rural and regional communities and their professional needs

The crucial importance of professional services for the sustainability of rural and regional communities is a commonplace. On the one hand, there are services like health care and schooling without which a community would dwindle since residents leave and no new ones can be attracted. Following Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory in the management context (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyder, 1959; Herzberg, 1976) these services can be called *hygiene factors*. Their presence is taken for granted and generates a certain level of satisfaction but does not inspire particular commitment or excitement. Their absence, however, is noticeable, generates dissatisfaction and is a direct turn-off. It is therefore understandable that the most prolific and publicized initiatives at all levels of Government are aimed at addressing shortages of these services. On the other hand, there are those professions that add value to the commercial and cultural life of a community, such as industry, business, care, communication and culture specialists. Well educated professionals of this kind have the ability to develop a region's potential and to find creative solutions to problems. These services may be regarded as *motivation factors*. Their absence does not directly repel, but their presence creates encouragement and a sense of direction and commitment. In the regional community's context, these are the factors that sustain a community's viability, drive development and enhance the life of a community. They involve well educated individuals with breadth and depth of knowledge, but they do not represent the kind of need strongly supported by Government intervention. It is mostly up to communities to find ways to fill these needs.

Regional and rural communities find it difficult to attract and retain professionals. Attracting new people is more difficult than retaining familiar ones, a fact known to marketers who, in a competitive environment, advise to concentrate on maintaining loyal customers rather than on wooing new ones. This principle is one of the tenets of Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz and Schultz, 2004). So the emphasis here should be on "retain". But in order to enable communities to educate and retain their own professionals a number of conditions need to be met by the major stakeholders in this venture.

The stakeholders

The main stakeholders in the sustainability of professions in rural and regional communities are young residents with the potential to become professionals, tertiary education providers and the communities themselves, namely schools, employers, local government and parents.

1. Young people

Young people in rural and regional areas are as bright and full of aspirations as youngsters elsewhere. A recent study by Alloway et.al., *Factors impacting on student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia* (2004), shows that most year 11 and 12 students in regional Australia appreciate the importance of further education and are keen to pursue it. The study also highlights that students often regard education towards a professional career as a ticket to leave for better opportunities in the city. However, Alloway et.al. found that the desire to leave is not universal and may be linked to the *perception* that there are no career opportunities in the region and of course the fact that higher education is not available close by. The latter aspect is also evident in a study of issues of importance to young people in seven NSW country centres undertaken by the University of Wollongong and Queensland University of Technology (1999). High school and college students expressed their frustration at having to leave home for higher education and many saw themselves eventually in leading positions back home, if they succeeded in gaining the necessary education. But whatever the students' intentions, to leave for good or return as educated professionals, many do not achieve the first step to university because of the financial, social and emotional costs involved. Efforts to raise money may delay university entry until motivation has abated. Apprehension of having to be self reliant in an unfamiliar environment combined with parents' anxiety also prevent young people from realizing their potential. These barriers to higher education have been commented on in numerous reports, such as *Young People of Wide Bay Burnett* (Goodwin, 1998), *The Western Riverina Higher Education Needs Analysis* (Alston et al, 2001), or *Regional Business: A plan for Action* (DoTaRS, 2003).

2. Universities

Garlick and Pryor in their analysis of university and community engagement (2002) point out that universities are by and large poor communicators when it comes to explaining their value to their external communities. While this is seen in the context of wider university engagement, such as too little research *with* rather than *on* communities, it certainly also applies to the universities' teaching role. Traditional course offerings and ignorance of communities' educational needs reinforce student perception that a university degree is the means to get out of the region (Alloway et al, 2004). A narrow marketing approach that concentrates on getting students in through the doors but without concern about where they go afterwards aggravates the problem. Graduate destination surveys simply indicate whether students find employment, and whether it is in their chosen profession, and hence are a (blunt) instrument to measure the quality of a university's teaching or its prestige. They do not measure whether a university meets its region's education requirements. Overall, it appears that universities do not tailor degrees to community needs, or fail to explain the usefulness of their degrees in the community context. Garlick and Pryor (2002) point out that this even applies to regional campuses, but do not see this as a one-sided failing. Communities, too, need to take responsibility for explaining their needs to universities. Garlick and Pryor go one step further and call for an analysis of local higher education needs to be undertaken by the Department of Transport and Regional Services. However, such an investigation, though valuable, could turn into another top-down government driven initiative, while the key to solving community problems lies with community involvement.

3. Communities

In regional Australia, as in Australia generally, encouragement to go on to higher education depends mostly on socio-economic background, that is on family education history and family support. Alloway et.al. (2004) found that overall teachers are pessimistic about their students' higher education aspirations and that parents in general appear unconcerned about their children's further education, judging by the low interest shown by parents in the study. Such an environment is not conducive to young people getting a higher education in order to fill professional needs in their region. Rural and regional communities need to appreciate the value of higher education for the community's benefit, identify their professional needs and understand how these can be met by courses at specific higher education providers. The available literature is unclear on the extent of community involvement in this process.

There are examples of initiatives involving universities, communities and their young people that work successfully, such as the University of Ballarat-IBM Regional Software Solutions Centre (Victoria), the Nhill Employment Opportunities (Victoria), the Online Midwifery Courses (South Australia), as showcased in *Attracting & retaining skilled people in regional Australia: A practitioner's guide* (Standing Committee on Regional Development, 2004). The common factors in these initiatives are that specific groups of local students were targeted and some kind of partnership between community bodies and universities was formed to assist students in their education and/or provide work experience with access to continuing employment. The cooperation between communities and regional campuses of universities such as Murdoch, Curtin and Charles Sturt are further examples of successful partnerships. However, what is still needed is a broader insight into community views on educating and retaining their own professionals.

The RuStiC project (Rural Students in the Community)

This study aimed to gain insight into community perspectives on higher education for their young people for the community's benefit and views on the possible level of community assistance. It was supported by the voluntary organization RAPLink (Regional Action Partnership Link). RAPLink is an organization that links communities with information or resources they need for community development projects.

The target group

It was decided to target the Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) of Australia as the groups at the centre of a region's economic development. The 56 ACCs across Australia are non-profit, community based organizations that form a national network to serve rural, regional, remote and metropolitan communities. They are funded by the Australian Government under the Regional Partnerships program. Their voluntary membership comprises stakeholders in communities, local business and government who are actively involved with their regions' sustainability and development through finding "local solutions to local problems". Given their grassroots involvement in local business, industry, enterprise and employment, the ACCs appeared ideally placed to comment on professional needs for their communities, as well as community willingness and ability to support local young people in higher education to fill these needs.

The ACCs were also a group that could be relatively easily accessed with the assistance of RAPLink which issues a monthly newsletter. This newsletter was distributed to ACCs through the DoTaRS email network until 2005. Since several ACCs had benefited from the assistance of RAPLink a high level of interest could be assumed. The study was publicized by RAPLink under the project name RuStiC and attracted further attention from the Rural and Remote Interest Group (RRIG) of the Australian Psychological Association, who offered to distribute the planned questionnaire among their membership. Since counseling practitioners can be expected to have a good insight into a community's concerns this was a welcome addition to the survey population.

Preliminary research

Preliminary research involved trawling all ACC websites for references to higher education. Also, an introductory letter was sent out to gauge interest in the RuStiC project and elicit initial responses and comments.

The website search found that there were no references to university education pathways on any website. While there was evidence of great concern with youth employment and skills shortages, action was aimed at school-to-employment pathways for young people and skills training opportunities, such as TAFE. There were some major initiatives, such as a large, specifically youth oriented project undertaken by the Wide Bay Burnett ACC (1998 and 2003) and other forums that involved input from the youth of a region, such as in the Greater Green Triangle or the 2003 *Revitalising Gippsland Forum* that was facilitated through Monash University. However, there was no evidence of encouragement to university education as a way to build a professional career “at home”.

Responses to a letter that explained the RuStiC project’s aims to the ACCs and asked for initial comments and willingness to participate supported the impression gained from the website search. There was considerable interest in the project as an assessment of possibilities to boost professional presence in regional communities, but attitudes towards university education as a means to address the problem were overall skeptical. Predictably, cost and distance of higher education were cited as barriers. A somewhat fatalistic view that higher education was a one-way ticket to the city, therefore of no use to the regional community, was also prevalent. In some comments this apparent frustration even translated into a negative attitude towards university education per se.

The conclusion drawn from this preliminary research was that *youth employment* was treated very much as a *community concern*, but *higher education* towards a professional career was regarded as an *individual concern*. The basic question to be explored then crystallized as “How can higher education be made a community concern for the benefit of the community?”

The questionnaire

The aims of the questionnaire were to:

- find out about community needs for well educated professionals,
- gauge practical community support for their own young people to get such education,
- learn about continuing links between communities and people who had left for higher education.

There were four sections of questions relating to:

- the need for higher education in the ACC’s area
- ease or difficulty of access to university education in the area
- the kind of support that the community could give young people going to university
- maintenance of links to graduates to encourage their return.

The questionnaire was sent by email to the executive officers of 53 ACCs with active email addresses. The EOs were encouraged to discuss the questions with their membership to achieve wider input before completing the survey. The questionnaire was also forwarded to members of the RRIG through their head office.

A total of 40 responses was received, 29 (of 53) from ACCs and 11 responses from RRIG members. ACC responses were received from all states and territories: NSW and ACT (10), Qld (8), NT (1), WA (2), SA (2), Vic (5), Tas (1). Responses from RRIG members were received from all states except South Australia and Tasmania.

Questionnaire results

A. Questions about need for university education in the area

Respondents were asked to comment on shortages of professional services with the help of a prompt list, comment on the availability of professional advice on issues of concern (e.g. industry development or environmental issues) and comment on whether “being a local” would be of advantage for a professional practitioner.

Shortages of professional services are listed in Table 1 in order of frequency from most to fewest responses. The fact that medical and other health care services top the list simply confirms current and much publicized knowledge. It is more noteworthy that veterinary science and accounting ranked among the most poorly supplied and needed professions. Also, town planners, which had not been included in the prompt list, were mentioned extra by four respondents, indicating a real need.

A slight majority of respondents indicated that there were areas of concern that would benefit from professional input not currently available. Some said that assistance was available but difficult to access because of expense or because “too many Government agencies [are] doing things in an uncoordinated way”.

A small majority (27) indicated that “being a local” would be an advantage for professional practice. While many pointed to the benefits of being part of local networks and familiarity with local culture and conditions, a frequently given reason was that “outsiders don’t stay”.

No. of respondents	Profession
34	Medical
31	Mental Health
30	Veterinary science
27	Nursing; aged care
22	Accounting
20	Community education and development; engineering
19	Teachers: early childhood, primary; counseling
16	Teachers: secondary; agriculture/rural science
13	Legal practitioners; IT; nutritionists
12	Priests/pastors
11	Sports management
10	Commerce; economics; marketing/advertising; media production; graphic/industrial/interior design; forensic science
9	Banking/finance; management; public relations; tourism; hotel management; journalism; cultural heritage; sports coaching
8	Architecture; art; music
6	Creative writing
4	Town planners

Table 1. Shortage of Professional services

B. Questions about access to university education

Respondents were asked whether they had a university within commuting distance, whether this university provided sufficient information about its courses and whether these courses met the community's professional needs. Further questions asked whether and in what form information about out-of-area universities would be useful and whether there were local access possibilities into such universities, e.g. through TAFE.

A small majority (26) had a regional university within reach, but several pointed out that regular travel was expensive and therefore not possible for everyone. A similarly small majority stated that their regional university informed them adequately about its courses. Others commented that media advertising was inadequate in that it usually necessitated getting more detailed information from the university direct through mail, phone or internet contact. Only fourteen thought that courses met the needs of their communities.

Information about out-of-area universities and their courses in an easily accessible form would be welcomed by most. "Easily accessible" meant school visits by University representatives, rather than advertisements, brochures, or even Open Days because of the often considerable distances involved. Local access to out-of-area university study was rare; in only six locations were there possibilities to study, usually introductory subjects, through a local institution such as a TAFE or a high school. Some mention was made of online study possibilities, but answers were somewhat vague in this respect.

C. Questions about community support for young people going to university

These questions asked whether local business, industry or other bodies who stand to benefit from university educated young people would be able to provide support in the form of a financial contribution, paid work experience in a profession, unpaid, supervised work experience (internships), paid vacation work of any kind and/or employment at the completion of studies. It was also asked whether the community would give such support to students from another community in order to attract them as employees.

Answers were overall positive, but respondents also pointed out that financial support and meaningful work experience, paid or unpaid, could often not be provided by the kind of small business operation typical of their area. Some respondents cautioned that financial support would be wasted since once young people had left for university they would not return. Two positive answers (NT and WA) pointed to already existing schemes, which, however, seemed to involve skills training rather than higher education.

A small majority of respondents (25) said that professional employment could be offered to local graduates. However, this was often modified with the caveat that employers, especially small organizations, would prefer someone with work experience and that such experience would have to be gained in another location. The small size of local professional employers was mentioned by several respondents as a barrier to any kind of job offers: there was no scope to take on extra staff. One positive response said "This already happens where uni courses are well targeted to regional needs, e.g. University of Wollongong."

The final question asked whether existing support schemes, such as the Country Education Foundation, were promoted in the community. Only six respondents were aware of any such support schemes for rural students.

D. Questions about how a community can stay in touch with graduates to encourage their return.

These questions explored whether communities had formal or informal means, e.g. school alumni, to stay in touch with people who had left for study and a subsequent career. Such information channels would be useful to keep young professionals informed about career opportunities at a time when they might contemplate a return to “settle down”.

Only three respondents said that their community sent information about career opportunities to people who had moved away for tertiary education. There appear to be no local community based networks that could keep young professionals informed and connected. Some respondents commented on the desirability of such links and pointed to the possibility of dedicated websites for this purpose.

Additional comments

Further comments highlighted the financial and emotional cost for students and their families, which either prevented young people from pursuing higher education or left them feeling isolated and unsupported if it meant moving away from home.

“I attended a youth forum where youth said that they do not feel supported (financially or otherwise) to do university courses because it means moving away. These youths who will go away to study said they would not return to the rural area.”

“Young people who move away to go to university may be seen as disloyal.”

Other comments suggested that schools should play a more prominent role in informing students of local professional career possibilities. This presupposed that schools were given this information which, according to several respondents, did not happen in a consistent way. Specifically, respondents pointed to the need to encourage youngsters at an earlier age towards higher education and to the lack of professional role models in rural and regional areas.

“I think education matching career paths should be done as early as year eight and nine. ...especially the ones communities need to own and operate.”

Ignorance among the young of career possibilities in their own communities was seen as a disincentive to get further education. The mismatch between university study and the community's need was also commented on:

“A lot of country kids want to return to their community, but there simply aren't positions available for them *in the areas they have studied.*” (author's emphasis)

Severe basic skills shortages were another theme of additional comments. Views were expressed that such shortages needed to be addressed first before thinking of attracting or retaining more highly educated professionals.

Summary

Leaders in rural and regional business, commerce and industry confirm that professional needs reach far beyond the well known lack of medical and educational services and cover most aspects of an economically and culturally viable community. While higher education is recognized as the preparation for professional activity, its merit for rural and regional youth is not always evident to the community. Few community leaders think that universities (even regional ones) offer education that is relevant for their needs. This view may be influenced by the fact that information about the nature and usefulness of university courses is often inadequate or too difficult to obtain. On the other hand, this view may be a reflection of the failure of universities to consider regional community needs or the inability of communities to inform universities. In any case, it highlights a communication gap between universities and communities.

Notwithstanding this somewhat sceptical view of higher education for their own young people, there is widespread agreement that it would be beneficial for communities to have their own residents fill professional needs. The recurring expression that “outsiders don’t stay” suggests a negative reason, i.e. lack of trust between communities and newcomers, rather than a positive reason, i.e. presence of trust between communities and their own members. Causes for this phenomenon and its relevance would require further investigation.

A general willingness to assist their own young people in higher education is tempered by small business capacity to do so, but also by the belief that university education will lead young people away from the community rather than back to it in a professional role. Here, poor information about the relevance of a university education makes itself felt again. The limited capacity of small business that is typical of rural and regional communities also influences readiness to have employment available for new graduates as an incentive to stay. The need for “someone with experience” suggests that pathways for professionals to return to a region once they have gained such experience would be of great benefit. Little seems to be done at the moment to maintain links with young people who leave for higher education. On the contrary, there appears to be an attitude that these young people just want to further a selfish interest and show no commitment to their community. This places an additional strain on them and possibly makes them even less inclined to return.

The three-way information gap

Rural and regional communities need a higher professional presence in all areas to sustain their economic and cultural life. While they realise that attracting outsiders to fill their professional needs is wrought with difficulty, they cannot make full use of their own human resources because (a) they do not communicate their professional needs to schools and students, nor to graduates to attract them back and (b) they do not communicate their needs to universities to influence course offerings or have benefits of existing courses better explained.

Young people in rural and regional communities have aspirations and want to get on in life. They contemplate higher education towards a career and find that (a) there appear no opportunities for such a career in their region, (b) university study will prepare them for a career in the city, (c) higher education requires them to move away from home, (d) they are on their own while getting this education and (e) having gained some experience in a profession and perhaps thinking of settling down back in their region, find that the links have been severed.

Universities want to attract students but tend to adopt a narrow marketing approach with the aim of getting “bums on seats”. They are (a) unaware of which professions are needed in their surrounding communities and (b) don’t communicate effectively the potential usefulness of what they do offer to students and their communities.

This triangle of poor communication results in misunderstandings and even feeds prejudice among the main stakeholders in rural and regional Australia’s professional service provision. To enable communities to make better use of their own human resources the information requirements of students, communities and universities need to be met in a planned, consistent and comprehensive manner.

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**A Fairer West:
Developing a social change research partnership**

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A U C E A

Abstract

This paper describes and analyses an approach to developing a university research agenda that will contribute to social justice outcomes for a region in transition.

ICEPA at Victoria University (VU) is in the early stages of leading the establishment of a regional partnership of networks in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne under the banner *A Fairer West*. The partnership has a focus on social policy advocacy within the context of the Victorian and Australian government's community strengthening policy agendas. Once the partnership is fully operational, ICEPA associates and students will work *with* communities on research projects that have been identified *by* communities as regional priorities.

The paper provides an overview of *A Fairer West*, strategies implemented and progress to date. It considers the strengths and challenges of the model being developed and identifies key lessons along the way. An issue highlighted in the paper is the complexity of creating spaces for *community* participation in what could predominantly be a partnership of *interagency* networks.

Drawing on both university–community engagement and community development literature, the paper concludes with some preliminary comments on the contribution universities can make to regional social change strategies and, equally, the benefits to universities.

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Introduction

This paper describes and analyses an approach to developing a university research agenda that will contribute to social justice outcomes for the Western region of Melbourne.

The first section of the paper provides an overview of the community strengthening framework informing *A Fairer West* and suggests that this approach adds a heightened focus on the 'community' side of university-community engagement.

The second section provides an overview of *A Fairer West* as a case study. A short description of the University and regional context for *A Fairer West* is provided and is followed by a description of the processes and strategies used to develop this initiative. The role of, and opportunities for, the university are highlighted.

The third section reflects on some early learnings from the project to date: strengths; challenges; and, what we are learnings about a community-strengthening approach to university-community engagement. The paper concludes with some comments on future research.

Strengthening communities through university-community engagement

A community strengthening framework

In Victoria we have seen a renewed focus by the State Government on policy and practice that focuses on community. The Government's social policy statement *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage* (Victorian Government 2005) was developed within a community strengthening frame and is consistent with an international trend toward more community-focused solutions to complex social, economic and environmental problems. This context provides opportunities to consider ways of developing a more socially just civil society (Carson 2004; Geddes 2005; Weeks, Hoatson and Dixon 2003; Wiseman 2005) and, I contend, to sharpen the focus on communities in university-community engagement.

Following an extensive review of Australian and international literature, Considine suggests that community strengthening is:

Any sustained effort to increase the connectedness, active engagement and partnership among members of the community, community groups and organisations in order to enhance social, economic and environmental objectives. (Considine 2004, p. 5)

There are three interrelated drivers of support for community strengthening within governments in Australia:

- An increasingly strong conceptual framework and evidence linking social connectedness, social capital and civil society to improvements in economic productivity, social inclusion, public safety and public health (Adams and Hess 2001; Productivity Commission 2003; Smythe, Reddel and Jones 2005).
- The search for alternatives to centralised managerialist approaches to government. These include 'changing the way government works' and 'joined up' approaches, networked governance and increased emphasis on both partnership and local governance (Rhodes 1997; Considine 2003). In Victoria this has included an exploration of regional approaches to joined-up government.
- The search for policy and practices that offer increased opportunities for community engagement and a general recognition that engaged processes are more likely to result in more relevant services and organisational responses.

The importance of community level activity, social connectedness and collective action are not new ideas. Community development theory and practice from the late 1960s onwards promoted the importance of people's participation in civic life and drew attention to the unequal access people have to this realm⁴.

A community strengthening approach to university–community engagement

University–community engagement commonly:

- builds on the mission and history of a university
- connects a university's resources with the needs and aspirations of communities
- develops in co-operative ways, and
- achieves mutual benefit for the university and communities (Holland 2001; Maurrasse 2001; Maurrasse 2002).

The idea that university–community engagement can contribute to strengthening communities is not a new one (Maurrasse 2001; Savan 2004; Savan 2005). Indeed Langworthy notes that, generally, 'it is now acknowledged that universities can play a role in the development of civil society and in building sustainable communities' (Langworthy 2005, p. 3).

My view is that a community strengthening/community development framework is important to the work of university–community engagement because it brings a strong focus on the 'community' side of the equation. Five interrelated themes provide a more pointed focus for social change work.

Place and people within places: A community-strengthening approach is underpinned by an analysis of the impacts of the globalised economy and the view that these can be tackled by focusing on, and committing resources to, local places. This analysis is consistent with the ideas that underpin the upsurge of interest in the role of universities within their own neighbourhood/region. (Winter, Wiseman and Muirhead 2005; Maurrasse 2001; Watson 2003).

Addressing issues of disadvantage and exclusion

Part of the global/local context is increasing evidence about links between place and disadvantage (Vinson 1999). Much community-strengthening practice in Australia is focused on linking government resources to localities experiencing disadvantage and there are many examples now of universities tackling issues of disadvantage through their community engagement (Savan 2004; Sherman and Torbert 2000; Mulroy 2004 and Maurrasse 2001).

Working in partnership with communities

Community strengthening/community development literature has much to offer an understanding of working in partnership with communities. Within this context there are several issues that arise for universities.

How we define 'community' is most important to the process of partnership and the outcomes achieved through university–community engagement. A community-strengthening approach favours working directly with the communities affected by our efforts. Maurrasse (2001) suggests that for universities to fully reflect and respond to the interests of disadvantaged communities in partnerships they must engage with residents at a grassroots level. However, there are many examples in the university–community engagement literature where community means formal and large organisations, workers and business people.

⁴ There are many examples in Australia's past of public policy initiatives that have been underpinned by community development principles, for example, the Australian Assistance Plan (Coleman, 1973). With the rise of neo-liberalism, community development lost favour with governments in the late 1980s and into the 1990s but is finding increasing favour in the current environment.

Partnering with communities requires recognition that communities within a region will not all be the same and that even within a community there will be diverse membership. Strategies that reflect this diversity are needed (West 2004; Cavaye 2004).

The issue of power is important, particularly when engaging in locations experiencing poverty. Maurrasse (2002) suggests that a power imbalance will likely result in the benefits of community engagement being one-sided, in favour of the university. Indeed much of the university-community engagement literature focuses on measuring gains for universities and leaves out measuring community benefit. Significant gain to residents is critical to community engagement from a community strengthening/community development perspective.

Although there are many approaches to partnering with communities, a community-strengthening model implies that universities ought to engage in partnerships in collaborative and empowering ways (International Association for Public Participation 2000).

Sharing influence and resources

A collaborative and empowering partnership with communities necessarily means sharing influence and resources (Cavaye 2004; Mayo 1997). For universities, this means finding strategies for engaging with grassroots communities that includes sharing resources, decision-making and leadership with communities.

Building capacity and facilitating empowering processes

These are important for a community strengthening approach to university–community engagement for two reasons.

Firstly, community groups may not know how to work with a university (Maurrasse 2001).

Secondly, some communities or groups may not have the structures, processes, networks, or leaders to enable the development of partnerships and it is likely that the poorest and most disadvantaged communities will have reduced capacity to engage⁵.

In both of these situations, the first step to a university's engagement with communities may be capacity building focused on empowering and building community-based organisations (Skinner 1997). Purcell (2003) alerts us to the dangers of capacity-building work for the purposes of fulfilling a particular government program or agenda e.g. regeneration strategies. He suggests that instead it should be an opportunity for people to learn about themselves and their world and how to apply this knowledge to action.

A commitment to empowering processes implies that specific methodology might be required. Clearly, the adage of working '*with* not *for* communities' comes to mind. In the arena of research this translates into '*researching with* not *on* communities'. Applied research, action focused research, participatory action research and action inquiry are consistent with this commitment (Walsh et al 2000; Savan, 2004).

In summary, a community strengthening approach to university–community engagement requires an increased focus on the community side of the equation. By clearly defining communities with whom to engage, prioritising disadvantaged communities and bringing university resources to bear in empowering ways, universities can contribute to changed outcomes for communities.

⁵ Communities will also have strengths and assets that should not be overlooked.

The case study – *A Fairer West: partnership of networks*

The context at Victoria University for *A Fairer West*

Much of the literature on university–community engagement suggests that it critical to have a strong match between a university’s mission and its engagement work (Holland 2001; Maurrasse 2001). The following section provides a brief overview of Victoria University (VU), its mission and platform for community engagement work.

VU is one of only five ‘dual-sector’ universities in Australia. It was established in 1990 following the amalgamation of two Institutes in Melbourne’s western suburbs and later amalgamated with the Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE.

Seven of the University’s eleven campuses are based in the western suburbs, three are in the Melbourne CBD and one is in the outer northern suburb of Sunbury. In 2004, over 50,000 students enrolled at VU with an even split between TAFE and higher education students.

The student body comprises people from a diverse range of backgrounds including 40% from families whose first language is not English. Additionally, many students are the first ones from their families to attend tertiary education (Wiseman and White 2005).

The University has a long tradition of partnership and engagement and has a particularly strong commitment to regional engagement in Melbourne’s West, a feature that is specified in the Objects of the University:

....the development and provision of educational, cultural, professional, technical and vocational services to the community and in particular the fostering of post-secondary education for persons living or working in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. (Victoria University Act 1990)

The Victoria University Strategic Plan clearly locates community engagement as an important area of the University’s work:

The mission of Victoria University is to: transform the lives of individuals and develop the capacities of industry and communities within the western Melbourne region and beyond through the power of vocational and higher education. (Victoria University Strategic Plan 2004-2008)

In 2004, VU established the Institute for Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives (ICEPA) to, amongst other things, co-ordinate external engagement, participate in engaged work and provide research on university–community engagement. In 2006, leadership for the University’s external engagement plan was delegated to the newly formed Office for Industry and Community Engagement (ICE). ICEPA continues its role in research and applied community engagement and *A Fairer West* is led through ICEPA.

The regional context

The Western region has traditionally been the industrial heartland of Melbourne and the home of manufacturing industries, characterised by a high percentage of working class people with low levels of education and income. However, a recent report identified that the West is a region in transition 'to a more balanced and dynamic knowledge based economy'. (Wiseman and White, 2005 p.4)

One characteristic of this change has been an increasing gap between areas of high and low income and employment growth. As a result, the region has retained pockets of high levels of disadvantage.

The other important element of the regional context for *A Fairer West* is that the West has a long tradition of social justice and community development focused work and there are many examples of partnered approaches to tackling social issues. Much of the community service infrastructure in the region today, for example, resulted from the work of Western Region Council for Social Development, a critical partnership between local governments and others in the 1970s and 80s. However, many of the networks and co-operative working relationship in the region were eroded under the competition-based policies of the 1990s.

A Fairer West

A Fairer West is an evolving cross-sectoral partnership between key networks in Melbourne's West to provide leadership on a new social policy agenda for the region and to:

- facilitate dialogue within the region on priority social policy issues;
- provide avenues for advocacy on priority social policy issues;
- showcase good practice and share learnings;
- provide space for conversation across networks and sectors;
- provide support for emerging and grassroots activity; and
- promote 'good governance', and 'good practice' exemplars in social policy; development and implementation.

The establishment of *A Fairer West* is the foundational work required to ensure that ICEPA's future community strengthening research agenda is developed with, not for, communities.

The process

Following the establishment of ICEPA, staff sought ways to develop a University research agenda around community strengthening policy and practice in the western region and facilitated a gathering of a small number of community development leaders. At the meeting a conversation about the challenges and opportunities of the current social policy environment in Victoria began and possible collaborative projects were discussed.

The meeting agreed that prior to identifying regional priorities and projects; a broader conversation with others in the region about the challenges and opportunities of the new social policy environment was needed. There were no structures or processes in place in the region to enable this to occur so ICEPA agreed to lead the process.

ICEPA and a group of external partners organised an event to create a space for dialogue around social policy priorities. A forum, *A Fairer West: Challenges and Opportunities*, was held in October 2005 and was attended by over 120 people. Participants reflected the diversity of the West and included community representatives as well as service providers.

There was overwhelming support for the establishment of a regional social policy partnership. Interestingly, the partnership was conceptualised as being between the broader networks operating in the region rather than with the many individual organisations in the region.

The 'next steps' identified by the forum were to undertake a broader consultation with key networks in the region and a planning group, led by ICEPA, was established to oversee the consultation. The group includes representatives from the major human service networks in the region, but no community representatives.

Strategies to build 'A Fairer West'

The planning group oversees a team made up of the project co-ordinator (funded jointly by the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and the Department for Victorian Communities) and five final year social work students from VU. Together they are undertaking multiple strategies to build *A Fairer West*.

A database of networks in the region has been compiled and representatives from the networks will be interviewed.

Four seminars have been sponsored by ICEPA under the *2006 New Schools of Thought Seminar Series* and will explore themes related to the establishment of *A Fairer West*: partnerships between networks; social policy advocacy; partnership governance and working with joined up government.

The planning group recognised that one of the challenges for the project would be to include community. Consequently, ICEPA held a workshop to explore the issue of creating spaces for community participation in what could be a partnership dominated by interagency networks. The findings have informed the consultation process and a specific meeting of community-based networks will be held.

Strategies have been developed for engaging Indigenous Australian and CALD communities in the consultation and the regional forum for community based networks and groups will provide an opportunity to discuss what *A Fairer West* might mean for them.

Finally, ICEPA has undertaken an internal consultation with VU higher education and TAFE staff to brief ICEPA associates on the initiative and explore opportunities for connecting research, teaching and learning outcomes.

Although the planning group is directing the consultation process, the decisions about the future directions of *A Fairer West* will be made at a second regional forum in October 2006.

The role of Victoria University

To date, VU has been represented through the work of ICEPA. ICEPA's role has been to provide leadership and facilitation to build capacity in the region for ongoing policy advocacy, analysis and research.

Opportunities that A Fairer West provides Victoria University

Once *A Fairer West: Partnership of Networks* is fully established, VU will cease the leadership role and will assume the role of equal partner around the table. ICEPA will develop a partnership agreement with the governance body, which will document a role for ICEPA (including associates), specifically and the role of VU generally.

ICEPA will have the opportunity, in collaboration with *A Fairer West*, to identify specific projects and funding opportunities and monitor progress of projects and the collaboration process.

A partnership with *A Fairer West* will offer VU opportunities to:

- develop a research, teaching and learning program linked to community-initiated regional research priorities;
- develop a co-ordinated and practical response to community research priorities;
- facilitate further collaborative research across the University; and
- sponsor and facilitate the development of an ongoing collaborative learning and research agenda through sustained community engagement.

Specific contributions by ICEPA and associates may include:

- research projects (including interstate and international comparative studies);
- submissions;
- practitioner and researcher forums;
- conferences;
- seminars;
- publication of regional research;
- being a conduit of student placements, internships and class projects connected to *A Fairer West*; and
- curriculum development, workshops, training and more.

Lessons from ‘*A Fairer West*’

Strengths and Challenges

Although it is very early days, it is worth reflecting on the strengths and challenges of the approach so far, from the perspective of ICEPA as the leader of this initiative.

Strengths

ICEPA has received consistent feedback from key stakeholders on the value of VU taking a leadership role in *A Fairer West* processes. The University is considered ‘neutral territory’ and therefore an appropriate leader of a cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary approach. Additionally, ICEPA’s role in the region is to lead thinking that results in change. *A Fairer West* is consistent with that goal.

ICEPA has been successful in developing a responsive approach to an expressed need in the region. The initial plan was for ICEPA to develop a community-strengthening research agenda for Melbourne’s West, but it quickly became clear that there was a need to first build capacity for policy dialogue and collaboration. The strength of interest in the first regional forum and the consensus reached about what should happen next illustrate that ICEPA was right to slow the process down and make capacity building in the region the first priority.

The resources contributed by ICEPA have achieved joint benefits for ICEPA and the planning group. For example, the seminar series has achieved benefit for the planning group by contributing to the consultation process and at the same time has achieved objectives in ICEPA’s annual work plan.

ICEPA has successfully attracted the participation and interest of the major stakeholders in the region. *A Fairer West* has attracted interest within the community strengthening policy sector more broadly and is being looked to as a model that might be supported in other regions in Victoria.

Challenges

Ensuring that there are opportunities for real participation by community networks has been a challenge. Engagement beyond formal agencies and paid workers is crucial for an approach aimed at strengthening communities. The critical strategies here have been:

- inviting resident networks to present their issues at the original *A Fairer West* forum in 2005;
- defining 'networks' to include resident based groups;
- workshopping the issue of resident participation with western suburbs residents, community development activists and VU students; and
- including resident perspectives in the seminar presentations.

ICEPA has focused on ensuring that there is consistency between the likely research agenda of *A Fairer West*, once it is established, and the skills and interests of VU staff. Internal university relationship management is vital here. Strategies have included:

- inviting associates to all *A Fairer West* events;
- involving associates as active contributors to the seminar series;
- providing regular email updates to all stakeholders, including associates; and
- facilitating a meeting to consider opportunities for associates and a match between the regional policy agenda and the research strengths of associates.

Finally, one of the challenges at this stage in the process has been a tendency for some in the University to see this work as 'welfare' work and to not recognise the real research and learning benefits that will ensue once this foundational work is undertaken.

Lessons about a community-strengthening approach to university–community engagement

The following are preliminary comments based on reflections on the early stages of a university–community partnership.

An approach to university–community engagement that places 'community' at its heart may require long-term foundational work. In this case:

- ICEPA could not simply move straight into a regional level partnership on social policy research and analysis because there was no one group occupying this space to partner with; and
- Community level input into the regional strategy took special attention and resources.

It is likely that the foundational work of *A Fairer West* will contribute to building sustainable relationships.

Building processes and structures with opportunities and spaces for community focus is important capacity building work. In many ways, the real work in relation to 'community' for *A Fairer West* is yet to be done. A regional forum just for community-based networks will help but what about those communities that don't have associations or groups to represent them?

Regional level university–community engagement requires strong connections to local neighbourhoods and communities of interest within a region, a point highlighted by the participants at the 2005 forum and re-enforced time and again by the participants in *A Fairer West* planning group. There is both commonality and diversity across the region and both need to be reflected in the structures and strategies for university–community engagement.

Contributions a university can make to a regional social change strategy

At this stage the most significant contribution that ICEPA has made to the social change agenda in the western region has been leading the exploration and development of structures and processes that will enable and drive social policy change in the future. Without the efforts of ICEPA staff and resources, both monetary and in kind, it is hard to imagine that the same focus, energy and collaboration across sectors could be achieved.

It is too early to comment on university contributions from the perspective of the community benefits of *A Fairer West*. However the following questions are driving our enquiry into a role for local communities in a regional approach:

- How should a regional advocacy network relate to and engage at the local level with communities? And what do we mean by community?
- What is the real value for communities of having this partnership of networks?
- How can we make the practice of policy advocacy meaningful to people at a community level?
- What should the vehicles be for getting community issues onto the agenda of the network?
- Do community workers represent communities? Should they?

The benefits of a community strengthening approach to the University

At this early stage, the most important gain for VU has been the opportunity to build significant relationships with key stakeholders in the region. Providing leadership to *A Fairer West*, backed with resources and a commitment to engage at a deeper level with communities, has sent a message to the region that VU cares and that it believes that what happens in the region matters.

In addition, *A Fairer West* has provided:

- exciting new placement opportunities for students;
- opportunities for academics to present their research to practitioners and community groups; and
- opportunities for academics to extend their professional networks in the region.

Conclusion

This paper has built an argument around the value of a community strengthening approach to university–community engagement and has outlined *A Fairer West* as a case study to examine the merits of this approach. The development of *A Fairer West* is clearly in its early stages and yet already much has been learnt from the experience.

Future research to support the trialing of a community strengthening approach to university–community engagement includes developing measurements for the more ‘fuzzy’ area of community gain. Significant gain to residents is critical to community engagement from a community strengthening/community development perspective. Being able to measure the benefits achieved for communities by partnering with a university will add significant value to this important area of university–community engagement.

A second research opportunity is to take some of our local learnings into a global context with international comparisons of university–community engagement work embedded in a community strengthening approach.

ICEPA wishes to pursue research in both these important areas in partnership with other universities.

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Community engagement

Distributing leadership for initiating university-community engagement

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Community engagement
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A U C E A

Abstract:

Facilitating community engagement in education is promoted and emphasised as an investment strategy (Garlick 2000). However, the responsibility for facilitating university-community engagement rests upon university personnel to initiate collaborations with the community. This paper describes and analyses leadership processes for initiating community engagement with the new Queensland University of Technology campus at Caboolture. Data collection and analysis involved observation of practices, and coding interviews, minutes of meetings, and written correspondence with a wide range of participants (i.e., senior QUT staff, lecturers, preservice teachers, principals, school executives and teachers, and other community members). Results indicated that leadership processes involved: (1) articulating visionary directions, (2) communication for instigating change processes, (3) motivating potential key stakeholders, (4) promoting collaboration and team effort, and (5) distributing leadership. This study highlighted the impact of creating positive working environments for developing collaborative partnerships. However, new campuses need to shape university goals to suit individual contexts, which will require considerable input from key stakeholders. Initiating community engagement requires university personnel to connect key stakeholders, and the distribution of leadership will be essential in order to sustain university-community collaborations.

Engagement of communities with universities is an investment strategy (Garlick 2000), and collaboration between a university and its wider community has become central for developing a more just and civil society (Butcher, McFadden, & McMeniman 2003). This collaboration is fundamental for establishing social capital, which is “at the forefront of the attributes required by communities to generate viability in the global economy” (Garlick 2003, 2). Social capital refers to “certain social attributes of a community that provide it with ‘wealth’ over and above that residing in its human capital, natural resources, and physical and financial assets” (Kilpatrick 2003, 2). Kilpatrick claims there appears to be a relationship between the development of social capital and learning. Indeed, the literature emphasises the importance of developing learning communities, which aims at addressing its needs through partnerships in order to cultivate social capital (Kilpatrick, Barrett, & Jones 2003).

Learning communities may create social cohesion, capacity building and economic development (Kilpatrick et al. 2003). There are features that assist the development of learning communities. For example, the combination of geographical locations, common interests, and community needs may contribute to forming collaborative partnerships. Importantly, community engagement with universities can reinforce the values of education (Cope & Leatherwood 2001), which occurs most effectively when community “groups and institutions have united forces to promote systematic societal change and share (or jointly own) the ‘risks, responsibilities and rewards’” (Himmelman 1994, 28).

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Facilitating university-community leadership for education

Effective leadership is a key for implementing long-lasting change (Allen & Wing 2003; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning 2001). Whether in universities or schools, effective leadership can make a difference to the educational outcomes (e.g., Shields & Glatter 2003). However, today's leaders need to be more sophisticated in order to meet the challenges of a more complex society (Fullan 2001). Current educational leaders need to extend past the traditional views of leadership based on an individual's charisma (Allen & Wing 2003). As leadership is a creative endeavour it may be considered an art form (Grint 2003), particularly as there is no one way to lead, and catering for unexpected situations necessitates carefully crafted flexibility from leaders (Fidler & Atton 2004). Moreover, the instigation and development of community engagement with a university requires creative leadership, which is generally worked within a problem-based approach (see Cunningham & Cordeiro 2002).

Yet leadership cannot be haphazard, instead it needs to be purposeful and strategic to meet the challenges of initiating and developing university-community engagement (e.g., Preedy, Glatter, & Wise 2003). There are further characteristics and skills that may assist today's leaders engage their communities, which includes the ability to: articulate visionary directions, communication for instigating change processes, motivate potential key stakeholders, promote collaboration and team effort, and distribute leadership.

Leaders need to project a vision for initiating new practices. This vision must be based on collective values and beliefs so as to inspire, motivate and empower others to work toward achieving common goals (Allen & Wing 2003). Hence, the production and articulation of explicit shared goals require clear visions (Allen & Wing 2003). Not only should the goals be explicit but also establishing procedures for accomplishing the goals need to be outlined, which includes organising schedules and personnel to be involved in potential university-community collaborations (Wiewel & Lieber 1998, 6). Visionary directions that lead to action may aid in benchmarking community engagement in order to measure future progress (Letven, Osteimer, & Statham 2001).

Understanding processes for initiating university-community engagement involves understanding community values, needs, expectations, and ways to initiate leadership in order to facilitate such processes. These include leaders' abilities to share power and resources equitably with key stakeholders. Part of community expectations involves the inclusion of community concerns about the goals and outcomes of a community-university partnership (Ramaley 2001). Processes for initiating community engagement also need to consider that "partnerships are learning environments" (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher 2004, 9), therefore, change processes need to be communicated to all parties involved in the potential collaboration.

Effective leaders create conditions to motivate and encourage commitment of key stakeholders to work as a group. "University engagement is grounded in a growing body of scholarly research that demonstrates its effective impact on teaching, learning and community-based problem solving" (Brukardt et al. 2004, 3). The perspective of potential participants needs to be considered to "develop a unique and tailored strategy to recruit each prospective partner" (Rubin 2002, 45). Disagreements may arise from genuine concern for learning, which can become learning experiences for the collective (Fullan 2001, 41). Building relationships and trust can aid the motivation of key stakeholders, particularly if leaders are mindful of needs and purposes for establishing such relationships. "Collaboration is a planning approach that presupposes constructing relationships between parties, since planning, gathering resources, and implementing what has been planned are arrived at through joint effort" (Wiewel & Lieber 1998, 5).

Supportive working relationships can rouse confidence in colleagues to experiment with practices (Hargreaves et al. 2001) to create "new theories of community engagement coupled with practical examples" (Brukardt et al. 2004, 11). Effective collaboration may be facilitated

through professional dialogue, but leaders need to ensure sufficient time and resources are allocated for meaningful involvement (Hargreaves et al. 2001).

The leader “becomes a context setter, the designer of a learning experience—not an authority figure with solutions” (Fullan 2001 112). It appears that involving more community partners in leadership generates greater team cohesion (Pugalee, Frykolm, & Shaka 2001) provided there are mutually beneficial arrangements with commonly shared agendas. A shared agenda also shares the power and responsibility as well as the risks and rewards (Himmelmann 1994; Ramaley 2001). Furthermore, Ramaley claims that embracing an engagement agenda aims to strengthen democracy, encourage responsible citizenship and civic duty, and facilitate a commitment to education.

Effective leadership should foster leadership in others (Fullan 2001). For any organisation to be effective, strategic planning needs the commitment and ownership of all staff, not just senior managers (Preedy, Glatter, & Wise 2003). Effective leadership encourages interaction and management across key stakeholder groups (Pierce & Johnson 1997). Brukardt et al (2004) refer to distributing leadership as recruiting and supporting “new champions”. This type of leadership is termed “situated enabling” (Faulk & Mulford 2000 cited in Kilpatrick 2003), as it is situated in a community with particular needs, and “such leadership must enable the participation and interaction between the diversity of stakeholders” (Kilpatrick 2003, 5). Key stakeholders can provide meaningful information for planning and implementing innovations (Allen & Wing 2003; Davis & Ellison 2003; Rubin 2002); however initiatives can fail to involve sufficient stakeholders (Duke 2004), even though there is ample evidence to suggest that involving more stakeholders can have a wider influence on implementing innovations (Kember 2000).

Context for this study

This study describes and analyses leadership processes for enacting community engagement with a new university campus. In particular, a key part of this study involves investigating university-community interactions and analysing dialogue for facilitating engagement between the Faculty of Education and a rural community. Caboolture Campus is an outreach campus of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and commenced offering a Bachelor of Education program at the beginning of 2005. The QUT Blueprint (2003) emphasises engagement as a theme to guide strategic thinking, and implementing this direction requires “partnering with other organisations” to “open up opportunities” and “provide ways of sharing resources or programs” (QUT Blueprint 2003, 7). QUT statements and briefs provided directions to guide new campus staff. Yet, how does a university initiate community engagement? This paper aims to describe and analyse the processes that sought to initiate university-community engagement linked to a new campus.

Data collection methods and analysis

Data collection methods included interviews and dialogue with key university staff, minutes of Faculty of Education and school community meetings, observation of university-community participation in programs, university documents (e.g., policies), and written correspondence between key stakeholders (i.e., university staff, preservice teachers, and community participants). Data were gathered over a one-year period on processes for initiating university-community engagement with emphasis on: (1) articulation of visionary directions, (2) communication for instigating change processes, (3) motivating potential key stakeholders, (4) promotion of collaboration and team effort, and (5) distribution of leadership. Written documentation (i.e., minutes of meetings, policies, letters, and emails), observations of practices, and interviews were coded for commonalities (Hittleman & Simon 2002) within the above five themes. The following results and discussion will also be reported under these themes.

Results and discussion

Articulating visionary directions

University policies provided directions in order to guide the institution's functions and processes. Queensland University of Technology (QUT) articulated its plans for linking the university with local communities by encouraging field-based learning and professional development. The QUT Blueprint (2003) emphasised engagement as a theme to guide strategic thinking, and implementing this direction required "partnering with other organisations" to "open up opportunities" and "provide ways of sharing resources or programs" (QUT Blueprint 2003, 7). These statements and briefs provided visionary directions to guide new campus staff.

In order to articulate visionary directions, leaders aimed to understand the needs of institutions and potential participants. Organising meetings aided in gathering information to ascertain participants' needs, which provided valuable understandings for articulating educational directions. Academic leadership in the Faculty of Education included establishing a focus group for preservice teachers and a reference group for school leaders (e.g., principals, deputy principals, and teachers). Each group had three meetings during the year. Initial meetings indicated a mixture of excitement, anxiety and concerns about formulating group cohesion. Nevertheless, setting agendas in consultation with potential key stakeholders became a proactive medium for articulating visionary directions. These meetings focused on establishing university-community relationships for mutual benefit. For example, the community had strong interest in professional development on literacy in middle schooling and Indigenous studies, while the university had interests in developing their preservice teachers and accessing school resources for teaching purposes. These items were added to the agenda and were opened for discussion for which positive results of professional development plans, Indigenous involvement, and the use of school resources were proposed. One acting principal of a state school noted in an email, "This has been a valuable two-way learning exchange".

Presenting the university to the community allowed for university agendas to combine with community agendas. For example, 16 schools within the vicinity of the university conducted district meetings. Midway throughout the year, the university agenda of community engagement had reached these district meetings for which university campus leaders were invited to attend. This allowed for more open discussion on forming university-community relationships. Partnership needs were clearly articulated at this meeting, and a subsequent email from the Chair expressed interest in having literacy and science education seminars and workshops conducted by university personnel. The Chair also stated, "We would welcome as many student teachers as you could make available to work beside teachers in both extension and learning intervention groups". Crucial to the university agenda was the acceptance of preservice teachers into the middle-years school, as this campus focused on middle schooling. The Chair provided the Faculty of Education executive with contact details of the district schools so more personalised contact for organising middle-school arrangements could be created.

As a result of year-long university-community development, the new campus constructed its own policy under the QUT Blueprint (2003). The campus policy now aims to "foster a culture of partnership and engagement" by expanding "the number of community engagement activities with a focus on projects linked to the academic programs of the campus" (QUT 2005, 3). Most importantly, is the directive to "embed the campus within the QUT community" (QUT 2005, 3); however this policy needs to advance the process by suggesting ways to embed the campus with the community.

Communication for instigating change processes

Effective leadership requires an understanding of change processes (Fullan 2001). From the beginning, university staff was prepared to expect the unexpected and understood the complexities of community needs. Not surprisingly, developing new structures and frameworks were met with positive and negative responses from key stakeholders in both university and community settings. Miscommunications occurred. One executive had misread the venue for a meeting and as a consequence missed the meeting; however this was met with an endeavour to "try to do better next time".

Communication for instigating change processes requires an understanding of how to address community and university concerns. Significant concerns were expressed by two university staff members about expectations for their involvement in the new campus. They had reservations about the “extra workload” required of them to “instigate negotiated programs”, and had concerns about equity issues for the delivery of the same course across campuses. The vision for the new campus was a middle-school focus with increased preservice teacher involvement in schools. Nevertheless, a few preservice teachers also expressed concern about not receiving a more community-based program. These were students who, as one preservice teacher expressed, expected a “more practical-based program” and being “out in classrooms learning the information first hand”.

Open communication from the outset was essential, and providing positive and constructive feedback to stakeholders for their involvement in university engagement tended to encourage further participation. Many principals had varying viewpoints and there was considerable negotiation at the reference group meetings to find middle ground. There were some principals who did not want to be involved in the program. It appeared difficult for the university to connect government and non-government education sectors, which only occurred at three informal talks (breakfast, morning tea, and luncheon). Greater collaboration between these sectors in the wider community will need to be placed on future agendas to ensure community engagement is comprehensive, inclusive, and reaches maximum potential.

University executives (e.g., Vice Chancellor, deans, executive deans, course coordinators) were available to the campus community as a show of support and interest for initiating university-community collaborations. This supportive environment may have contributed to the development of positive relationships, as various community groups were present at times for such interactions.

In addition, university staff initiated media releases about university-community engagement, which aimed to promote the university’s presence and willingness to be involved. Change processes can be slow; however this environment was a new setting and as such became a sponge for initiating activities. It may be that stakeholders wanted to be on the ground level in order to have a firm say on educational directions. Indeed, changing practices may be more difficult than initiating new practices.

Motivating potential key stakeholders

The university took the initiative to inform potential key stakeholders of its intentions. Inviting stakeholders (including university and community executives) to meetings and informal gatherings aided in forming relationships and motivating them into action. To illustrate, invitations to school executives to attend an informal breakfast, morning tea, and light luncheon at early points in the year assisted all parties to become familiar with each other and allowed opportunities to present intentions. As a result of a breakfast talk, a deputy principal emailed “I look forward to working closer with you and your students, as I can see huge benefits for both parties”. It was interesting to note that the same deputy principal was “happy to be part of a discussion panel” for educating preservice teachers and noted informal meetings as a way to discuss issues, point in case, “maybe we could catch up for coffee”.

Further motivation included the formation of a focus group for preservice teachers and a reference group for community leaders. The focus group was emailed to participate in “informal chats” to discuss “positives and negatives of studying at the campus and how to improve the learning environment for the future”. Responses to this meeting highlighted community atmosphere and university staff as positives, however, suggestions for improvement included enhancing the library facilities and replacing any video lectures with live lectures. As a result of this discussion, measures were taken to develop library resources and action was sought to minimise video lectures.

The Faculty of Education request to have preservice teachers placed in local schools had motivated school executives to offer school placements. For example, one school principal wrote, “we are able to accommodate 6 preservice teachers”, another stated “we will take 4 students on any Friday”. Offers of providing professional development to the community further aided in motivating key stakeholders. A principal wrote, “It was great to see around your campus and hear about your future plans.”

I look forward to working with you in the next phase of our partnership". This meeting was reciprocated with positive comments on community engagement with the university, for example, a university academic coordinator wrote to the reference group,

These discussions were helpful in providing a framework as to how we can promote the relationships between the schools and the university. I am in the process of collating the data from your surveys and will stay in touch about further activities with the university.

Promoting collaboration and team effort

As the year progressed more collaboration between the community and the university became apparent. Principals cooperated with lecturers, community services (e.g., Anglicare and Smith Family) interacted with preservice teachers, and university executives networked with the full range of stakeholders. Teams were beginning to form after three informal gatherings (i.e., the breakfast, morning tea, and light luncheon), and subsequently became further evident during planned meetings. Part of promoting collaboration and team effort was the construction of shared agendas (see Thompson, Story, & Butler 2003), and these agendas became clearer as stakeholders presented their needs and concerns.

Establishing partnerships required clarity on roles and responsibilities. The first reference group meeting, which involved school executives and university staff agreed upon ensuring mutual respect, open communication, sharing of resources and teachers, facilitating opportunities for professional development, and developing benefits for all parties (i.e., preservice teachers, students, teachers, academics and the wider community).

One community staff member was appreciative of university executive for making these connections with schools and wrote "Thanks so much for establishing this relationship. I think this will be ongoing and fruitful for all".

Distributing leadership

Leadership distribution could be noted in the focus and reference group meetings, along with individual school executives who wanted university involvement for specific purposes. For example, one principal requested preservice teachers for a school innovation entitled "Learning Engagement Online", which focused on assisting children who experienced learning difficulties. This school provided training for these preservice teachers, which further indicated an educative partnership. Two other examples included a state school deputy principal who educated preservice teachers on the planning, implementation and review processes of her school's middle-year's program, and a principal who hosted preservice teachers' discussions on middle-school teaching and learning tasks.

Another principal led the way for further funding for his school by collaborating with the university on securing resources for the preparation of preservice teachers. He highlighted the mutual benefit to the community and university by stating anticipated outcomes. For instance, he wrote that as a result of this collaboration "teachers can increase their own knowledge thus benefiting their own professional development and encouraging lifelong learning". He also stated that accessing these additional resources may enhance preservice teachers "effectiveness within the practicum's which may have the potential to increase the quality of our future teachers". Most important was his vision to "develop our relations with our collaborative partners".

Executives at the new campus were commended by university leaders from the central campus and, in turn, course coordinators at the new campus were supported to undertake leadership roles and experiment with implementing university-community activities. This positive environment lead to distributing leadership roles to lecturers who then devised three innovations, namely:

(1) involvement of teachers, students, and parents in an ICT program entitled “The Fifth Dimension”, where students used clay and technology (claymation) to create stop-motion animation over eight two-hour sessions; (2) a cohort of preservice teachers involved in Health and Physical Education (H/PE) instructed middle-school students on a variety of PE skills over a six-week period; and (3) an inventive teaching sequence was used with 14 preservice teachers and two classes of middle-school students for understanding sustainable living issues such as sustaining frog habitats, chemical effects on water, renewable energy and electromagnetism. Such distribution of leadership broadened the scope of the university-community collaborations for the Faculty of Education and allowed more partners to enter the relationship. Feedback from lecturers, preservice teachers, teachers, and students indicated suggestions for improvements and sufficient positive responses for these programs to continue on a larger scale the following year.

Summary and conclusion

Institutions need to develop their own academic priorities with clear goals for achieving those priorities (Holland 1997). Articulating visionary directions for initiating university-community engagement provide fundamental frameworks for university personnel. Such visions consider the needs of the university and its community, and should be reflected in the university’s goals (Wolff & Maurana 2001). However, new campuses need to shape these goals to suit the individual contexts, which require considerable collaboration between key stakeholders.

Clearly, establishing trust between a university and its community was the basis for creating partnerships. Forming these relationships were met with positive and negative reactions as each party aimed to discover their roles and responsibilities, so there needed to be adequate time to tighten such partnerships (Kriesky & Cote 2003). Communication for instigating change processes involved continuous flexibility, compromise, and feedback in order to strengthen the partnerships (Wolff & Maurana 2001), and it also required partners to have a collective understanding of change processes and how to effectively implement initiatives.

University personnel needed to understand how to motivate potential key stakeholders in order to form partnerships. This study indicated that mutually beneficial arrangements such as sharing of resources and providing services can motivate both university staff and community stakeholders. Informal gatherings and formal meetings can further assist in establishing, developing, and consolidating collaborative partnerships. Informal gatherings where a university hosts for the community may prove to be highly valuable in making connections between public and private sectors.

A key factor for success is effective leadership (Fullan 2001). This study highlighted the impact of leaders creating positive working environments for developing collaborative partnerships, however, establishing such partnerships may prove easier than maintaining them over periods of time. Indeed, as the university extends itself further into the community through significant interactions and media coverage, more and more university involvement may be expected by the community. The difficulty will be staffing areas of need; hence distributing leadership will be essential. To cater for the range of potential university-community interactions will require further empowerment of community members in leadership roles. The university would need to facilitate these leadership roles through professional development with an aim to create autonomy and sustainability. Constraints that surround such proposals will require more meetings with the wider community.

It may be noted in this study that a shared agenda occurs through effective communication where key stakeholders consider the various viewpoints. Providing reasons for involvement in particular innovations and deliberating concerns and issues may shape collective educational focuses, and may also develop new modes of practices by experimenting with innovations (see Brukardt et al. 2004). Consultation on processes and projects must be open to critical discussion as this aims to gain trust for securing further university-community engagement.

It may be concluded that the initial facilitation of community engagement rests upon university personnel to connect key stakeholders. However, the continued process of initiating university-community engagement requires collaborative leadership, which involves articulating visionary directions, communication for instigating change processes, motivating potential key stakeholders, promoting collaboration and team effort, and distributing leadership. Importantly, distributing leadership will be required in order to sustain university-community collaborations.

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**Embeddedness, connectivity and collaboration:
Engaging communities of interest.**

Jan Strom - Southern Cross University

Keywords:

Embeddedness
Connectivity
Collaboration

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A U C E A

Abstract:

In 2000, Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) identified a number of key sectors that underpin the regional economy, including education, health and aged care. The resulting inter-relationships and collaboration between Southern Cross University, CHCC, the University of New South Wales and private and public health sector providers identified and supported opportunities that were mutually beneficial to each organisation and the community.

This paper will explore the application of three fundamental tools of engagement that supported this process: embeddedness, connectivity and collaboration. Garlick (2001) noted that collaboration between universities, government and a local or regional community provides opportunities for knowledge based economic development between universities and their communities. Gibbons (2005, p.6) supports this, noting that socially robust knowledge can be produced in a variety of settings, generally in the form of networks, where the membership remains open, flexible and may change over time, but whatever their form "they function as catalysts of collaboration".

Scott and Jackson (2005, p. 347p. 90) emphasis it is unlikely that true engagement can occur unless the embeddedness is undertaken from two concurrent and mutually inclusive perspectives, that is, players from within the University and those from outside working together. In this instance the active participation of an embedded individual facilitated the process. Garlick (2001) states for connectivity to prevail there needs to be a direct connection between University programs, and the articulated needs of the community. There also needs to be recognition from the University, from a 'whole-of-university' perspective, regarding the value of connecting with others in their region.

The collaboration between SCU, CHCC and others was open and flexible, and resulted in significant health and aged care sector developments. This lead to significant social and economic development outcomes for the Coffs Coast community in general, and Southern Cross University and the regional health sector in particular.

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Introduction

Non-metropolitan universities, with their diverse knowledge base, are well positioned to make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of their region. This has the added benefit of supporting the on-going sustainability of their institution. Narodoslowsky (2001, p. 233) asserts that

“sustainable development inherently takes a long-term view of the future of the region and requires a long-term attachment to the region on the side of the actors, all need to identify with the region and have a stake in the future of the regions”.

This ‘long-term attachment’ and ‘stake in the future’ provides an important opportunity, for both universities and the regions in which they are located, to enter into a new social contract. Initially this paper will deal with the concept of engagement from an embeddedness, connectivity and collaboration perspective, with a focus on universities in general. While later it will explore these three tools of engagement in relation to a university case study. But first the idea of a social contract will be addressed.

Gibbons (2005) defined a social contract as moving the idea of engagement away from the traditional ‘out-reach’ approach. This approach is typified by a one-way communication process, such as the university giving information to community; and simple linkages, like student internship programs. In addition to this there has been a tendency for ‘scholarship in isolation’ to prevail because, as Garlick (2001) observed that traditionally there has been no direct connection between the knowledge based programs taught by universities, its leadership and infrastructure, and the articulated priorities of the region it inhabits.

Consequently, research and teaching by universities has tended to be undertaken from the collegial or discipline perspective of the higher education sector, and in virtual isolation from the community in which the university was physically located.

In contrast to this model, the new social contract demands more of an ‘in-reach’ focus by the university, where the university actively focuses upon its constituent community. However, this new social contract cannot be a one-way orientation; rather it needs to be driven from both perspectives – within and without. From within, universities need to engage more effectively with their region. And from without, communities have much to gain from working in collaboration with the University for the mutual-benefit of their region.

There is a growing recognition from some universities and some regional leaders of the benefits of such engagement and Gibbons (2005) stresses the importance of them developing strategic relationships with key players in their regions. Garlick and Langworthy (unknown) state that at this time regional engagement activities in Australia are largely driven by the Universities, characterising more of a push than a pull strategy, and tending to be project based and discipline specific. They declare that such an approach demonstrates ‘partial engagement’, because a ‘whole-of-organisation’ or ‘whole-of-region’ approach is lacking.

Scott and Jackson (2005) emphasis the need for universities to clarify the extent of their intended ‘engagement’ and how it will be embedded into the University’s core activities. They assert that once the community engagement strategy is aligned with the university’s strategic plan it is vital to embed it at the faculty/school/centre level and to establish “mechanisms which integrate community engagement in a systematic and explicit way” (Scott & Jackson 2005, p. 2).

According to Longley (2005) the underlying principle of engagement is simple and a university will only be able to have a powerful impact through its engagement if it works with all the layers of the community towards the same strategic goals, be they social, cultural or economic. And in addition, “the community needs to work with, and support, its campuses in every way at every opportunity” (Longley 2005, p. 88).

Embeddedness

According to the Macquarie Dictionary (2005, p. 382), embed means “to fix firmly in a surrounding mass”. In the context of ‘engagement’ embeddedness simply means ‘to be part of’. In other words, universities need to become an intrinsic part of their regional community by participating in and contributing to an assortment of strategic, leadership, cross-industry and supportive roles. Furthermore, ‘being part of’ can be achieved through various personal and/or organisational interactions and relationships, as well as via formal and informal networks.

Granovetter, (1985) noted that in 1776, economist and philosopher Adam Smith acknowledged the concept of embeddedness, but only from a social perspective. From a transactional viewpoint, Smith determined that humans have a natural tendency to ‘truck, barter and exchange one thing for another’ and that was the extent of influence their social relationship had upon the transaction. Granovetter also observed that some 20th century economists see social relations and (economic) transactions as being mutually exclusive activities, determining that individuals make their decisions based purely on rational calculations.

Challenging these transactional, non-relationship oriented views, Granovetter (1985, p. 487) argues that peoples actions “are embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relationships”. He asserted that embeddedness has always had, and will continue to have, an impact upon relationships, including economic relationships, albeit to varying degrees depending upon the nature of the transaction, exchange or relationship.

Welch and Wilkinson (2004, p. 216) concur, describing embeddedness as the actions and interactions of various ‘actors’. They state that such networks

“are systems of interconnected exchange relationships among (business) actors and cannot be understood or separated from the relationships that surround them, both internal and external”.

In addition, Welch and Wilkinson (2004) note that social relationships that are embedded across disciplinary and organisational boundaries can strengthen regional autonomy and remove the myopia that may result from organisations working in isolation. Universities need to demonstrate their willingness to serve their communities by embedding themselves in social networks and participating in various kinds of network organisations that involves repeated long-term interactions, and is “characterised by co-operation and mutual trust” (Gibbons 2005, p. 13). This embedding, or being part of, activity enables those involved to gain knowledge about the other ‘networkers’ reliability and trustworthiness.

Connectivity

The Macquarie Dictionary (2005, pp. 250-1), defines connect as “to bind or fasten together; join or unite; link” and connectivity as “the characteristic of, or suitability for being connected” and from a university engagement perspective this could mean to ‘develop linkages’ with others. Such linkages could be personal or professional, and would assist the university to engender genuine respect and trust. Connectivity may also include a shared history, recognition of mutual points of reference and interdependence.

The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Foundation see a strong link between emotional connection and the commitment, beliefs, history and similar experiences that people have shared, and will share. They suggest that such connectivity creates opportunities and can result in higher levels of inter-personal or inter-organisational participation. ASAE also note that connectivity is most evident where the bonds between members are powerful enough to function outside of formal meetings, and stress the importance of knowing fellow members as people, from both a personal and profession perspective.

The degree that interpersonal ties translate into organisational connectivity depends upon the inter-organisational 'coupling' and whether the organisations are loosely or tightly linked or coupled. "Coupling refers to inter-organisational interdependence, the level of mutual commitment between partners, and intensity of alliances ties" (Lang 2004, p. 90). Tightly-coupled organisations communicate frequently, monitor their relationship and meet regularly to formalise their reporting. For example a technology park board that has equal representation from the university, industry and government, and works together to achieve a shared vision, mission, and objectives.

In contrast, loosely-coupled organisations are typified by constrained communication and limited interaction. Lang (2004) suggests that research contracts typify a loosely-coupled relationship and as such the emergence of an engagement culture for the higher education sector is a significant cultural change. However, it is important to see the value that loosely-coupled activities such as research, student internships and student projects provide. They provide a low risk way of allowing partners to 'size each other up', as staff and specific community, business and industry representatives develop trust and common understandings.

Levels of trust usually follow pre-existing relationships that are developed over long periods of time, and are vital component to any healthy and productive relationship. Genuine trust is based on the belief that the people share common goals and values and will not act in self-interest or at another's expense. In contrast to this a calculated trust can prevail when relationships are more at arms length, and in these circumstances co-operation is often driven by self interest. (Granovetter 1985; Lang 2004; Welch & Wilkinson 2004).

Paradoxically trust is less likely to be achieved when it is explicit; it needs to be the result of such things as

"shared experience, the opportunity for authentic interaction, persistent identity, reciprocal disclosure, testable expectations, and experience to suggest that the 'test' will be passed" (ASAE Foundation 2001, p. 8).

It is apparent that the development of trust does not just happen; it requires a great investment of time and energy in an effort to build up shared expectations and understandings to enable the creation of social capital that "represents resources that reside in function-specific social relationships in which individuals are embedded" (Lang 2004, p. 91).

Social capital is therefore linked to individuals and may be linked to an organisation via the individual and can also be a resource that is embedded in social networks. Social capital has been defined as a collective asset that is shared by members of a defined group,

"with clear boundaries, obligations of exchange, and mutual recognition; taking repeated exchanges to reinforce mutual recognition and boundaries and to affirm and reaffirm ... each members claim to the capital".
(Lin 2001, p. 22).

While acknowledging that social capital has an enormous role to play in regional engagement activities, regional universities should also look to build on new opportunities and regional strengths by understanding and capturing the intellectual capital of the region through its internal and external stakeholder communities, in order to "minimise the weaknesses and the threats to the region" (Maggs 1999, p. 278).

Such connectivity and relationship development can also provide for the production of socially robust knowledge that has relevance and application beyond the higher education sector. As a consequence this can provide the community, or more specifically 'community-of-interest' networks, with the opportunity to shape research and program development, and create what Gibbons (2005) defines as contextualization.

Networks can be formal, such as regional development boards; or informal, where membership generally remains open and flexible changing over time as the need develops. Initially there may be something that acts as a magnet to hold participants together, but regardless of the primary motivation or form they take, networks function as “catalysts of collaboration” (Gibbons 2005, p. 6). This complexity in inter-organisational relationships highlights the connectivity between all the parts of society that shape the whole. In other words it is a move away from a focus upon 'the 'single cell' in isolation to a recognition of the 'whole beast'.

While embeddedness in networks can be irregular and penetrate to varying degrees; it is generally more achievable where people work with others (either inside or outside of the organisation) with whom they already have established trusted interpersonal relationships (Chimhanzi 2004; Granovetter 1985).

Thus embeddedness and connectivity have a synchronistic relationship and Garlick (2001, p.38) states that from a university perspective engagement is a mixture of embeddedness and connectedness that is “built around knowledge and information sharing for mutual benefit”.

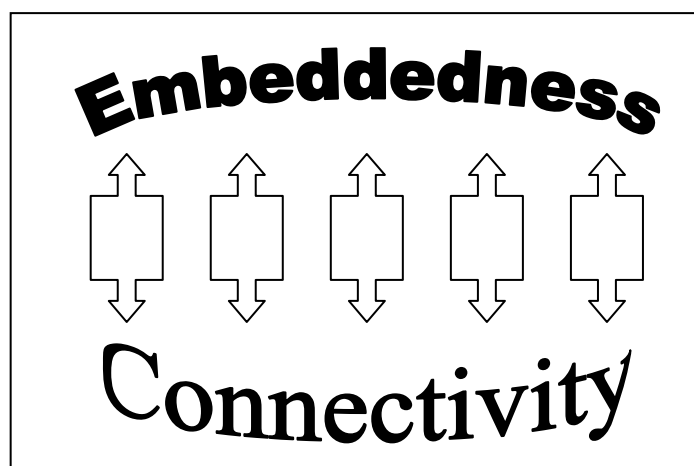


Diagram 1.

The synchronistic relationship between embeddedness and connectivity

Collaboration

According to the Macquarie Dictionary collaborate means “to work with one another, to cooperate” (2005, p. 231). Looking at this from an engagement viewpoint it can be defined as ‘working together’ and needs to encompass a whole-of-university approach. In order to be effective good collaborative practices must be embraced across the university and involve governance, teaching, research and community regional engagement activities. It is also important to include university staff, academic and administrative; as well as current and graduate students. Ideally this collaborative notion of ‘working together’ would also have a strategic ‘whole-of-region’ perspective that would also encourage and support a whole-of-government and a whole-of-community approach as well.

Collaboration is all encompassing and the strength of the relationship depends upon the participants sense that they are “collaborating and working together towards a common set of goals” (ASAE Foundation 2001, p. 7). The need for collaboration, both formal and informal, will grow as communities face greater uncertainty and change, and Lang (2004, p. 94) suggests its success will depend upon “the extent to which the collaboration is embedded in multiple, overlapping, on-going relationships”.

Shadbolt and Kay identify four areas which typify university-industry interaction and relationship development, being: teaching and learning; research and development; business development; and community, industry and regional development. They emphasize that interactive collaboration between these four areas will “transform Australia's industry-based economy into a knowledge-based economy” (Shadbolt & Kay 2005, p. 168).

The growth of closer relationships and collaboration is not restricted to the higher education sector, but is also developing in the business and government sectors resulting in a number of alliances and partnerships (Gummesson 1994). Vetoutsou, Saren & Tzokas (2002) assert that the development of a relationship marketing orientation in the business sector has taken marketing from a transactional approach, by acknowledging that developing closer relationships is an important part of the marketing process. Such relationships can result in the undertaking of collaborative projects.

Consequently, relationship development is just as relevant to the higher education sector as universities look to build more 'meaningful' relationships with their communities. The success of any community engagement or relationship marketing activity is contingent upon how the university, business or organisation collaborates with and relates to its 'customers'.

Regardless of the sector, collaboration cannot occur without encompassing "the democratic principles of participation, consultation and accountability" (Shadbolt & Kay 2005, p. 169).

And finally, as universities (organisations and governments) continue to refine themselves in the 21st century, the relationships between them will also require continual refinement. The synchronistic relationship between embeddedness and connectivity and the potential (social, cultural and economic) flow-on effects that collaboration can produce will mean that these engagement tools will continue to be of great value to regions and universities alike.

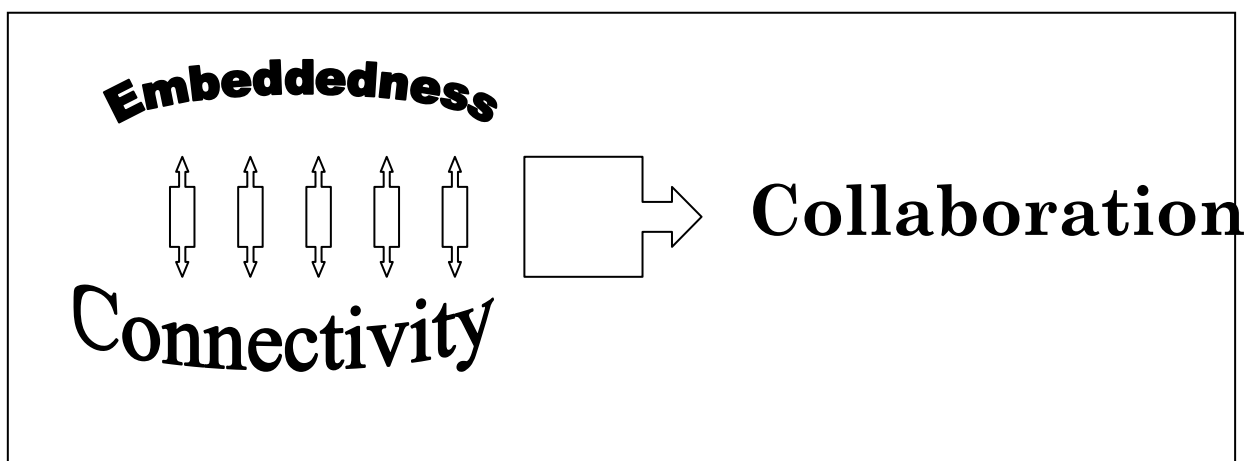


Diagram 2.

Flow-on from embeddedness and connectivity to collaboration

Case Study

The following case study clearly demonstrates the synchronistic relationship between embeddedness and connectivity; and the collaborative approach that has provided significant benefits to the Coffs Coast region, the community and Southern Cross University (SCU).

As Garlick (2001) and Gibbons (2005) stated a social contract allows and encourages the highest level of engagement from the university, both strategically and from a whole-of-university perspective. It needs to provide: leadership, infrastructure, collaboration and multi-disciplinary research and teaching that meet the regionally identified priorities, while being consistent with SCU priorities. In this particular case study the regional needs were identified outside of SCU, but the inter-organisational collaboration and achievements involved significant input, contribution and support by SCU.

In February 2000 the Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) undertook a strategic planning process that identified several key sectors that underpin the local regional economy including: education, health and aged care. Elliot, Sandeman & Winchester (2005) suggest that achieving benefits for the people of the region can be a strong motivator for connecting people and ideas, which was certainly the instance in this case.

In order to facilitate the social and economic development of the Coffs Coast, the author, who at that time was an 'embedded' person; being both a Councillor and a Southern Cross University (SCU) employee (Marketing and Community Relations officer); encouraged fellow Councillors and senior staff from CHCC to meet with the SCU executive in 2001-02. This initiative supports Lang's (2004) belief that embedded relationships, such as this, are of great value as they allow reciprocity to prevail as people tend to influence those with whom they have direct contact and are in turn, they are influenced by them.

However Shadbolt and Kay (2005) warn there can also be a fragility to such collaborative relationships as they are often based upon the personal or professional contacts of the individual rather than at an organisational level. As a consequence a primary focus of the meetings between CHCC and SCU was to develop the organisational relationships whilst identifying and supporting opportunities that were of mutual benefit to each organisation and the greater community. The result of these meetings was the realisation of a number of significant health and aged services initiatives in Coffs Harbour.

Despite the initial intention, the inter-organisational relationships have not flourished since 2001/02. Garlick (2001) contends that genuine connectivity needs to be embedded into the core business and organisational processes and this was not done on a whole-of-university basis at that time. As a consequence the relationship is currently being re-ignited and formalised through the adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding between SCU and CHCC and other engagement strategies. It is interesting to note however that a number of connections, largely based upon personal and professional relationships, continue to thrive and the details are highlighted herewith.

Prior to the 2001/02 meetings there had been little in the way of direct and strategic relationship development between 'town and gown' since the University had commenced operations at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus (CHEC) in 1995. It is important to note that the CHCC and SCU share an important historic link. In the early 1990's the land upon which the campus is constructed, was gifted to the University by Council on behalf of the community. From CHCC's perspective the intent behind the land gift, was the construction of a University campus. However, political imperative interceded and in 1995 the CHEC - the first tri-sectoral campus in Australia - was opened and since then has been home to campuses of SCU, the North Coast Institute of TAFE (NCIT) and the Coffs Harbour Senior College (CHSC).

During 2001 and 2002, CHCC through its Health Care initiative and the Future of Ageing project, was collaborating with Mid North Coast Area Health, Coffs Harbour Health Campus, Ramsay Health (Baringa Private Hospital), and the Mid North Coast General Practitioners. A series of facilitated workshops identified three specific health sector needs: a shortage of doctors, both general practitioner and specialist; the need for local nursing training; and the need for research with a particular focus on a better understanding Aged Services needs and requirements. These needs were the focus of intense discussion between CHCC and SCU and a number of opportunities of 'mutual' and community benefit were identified.

In 2002 steps were taken to address the doctor shortage in the medium to long term when SCU supported the establishment of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Rural Medical School in Coffs Harbour. SCU provided office and other space for Associate Professor, Dr Jim Curran, prior to the construction of the specialist medical training facility. This facility was opened in March 2005 and is adjacent to the Coffs Harbour Health Campus and constructed on land provided by CHCC.

The nurse shortage in both public and private hospitals, as identified by the Health Care initiative was addressed in part in 2003, when SCU commenced delivery of its undergraduate Nursing program at its Coffs Harbour campus. SCU has had a nursing program available at the Lismore campus for many years.

The Coffs Harbour nursing program also features a strong collaboration with the NCIT and the CHSC , with the CHEC being the first campus in Australia to deliver nursing, aged care nursing and pathway training and education programs from year 11 to PhD level.

In addition to the Health Care Initiative, CHCC also auspiced the Future of Ageing (FoA) project from 2000 until 2004. The FoA project is a network comprising health, aged care industry, aged services providers, government – local, state and federal – private and community sector representatives. The FoA identified many areas of need including: aboriginal aged care and services, affordable housing, transport and research needs. During the meetings between CHCC and SCU in 2001/02 these needs, particularly the research needs, were discussed at length and as a consequence the Aged Services Learning and Research Collaboration (ASLaRC) was established.

ASLaRC includes an on-going relationship with the UNSW and Associate Professor, Dr Jim Curran oversaw the steering committee until the Academic Chair, Professor Colleen Cartwright commenced early in 2005. Dr Curren still sits on the advisory board on behalf of UNSW. Since her commencement Professor Cartwright has embarked upon extensive regional community engagement activities and has undertaken a number of research projects, including one on Affordable Housing.

The Affordable Housing research was officially launched in April 2006 and undertaken on behalf of the NSW Department of Housing and the Enterprise and Training Company (ETC) of Coffs Harbour Ltd. The impact of embeddedness, connectivity and collaboration continues as the author is also the Chair of ETC. In addition to the aforementioned research commission ETC commenced auspicing the FOA project in 2005 after CHCC decided it did not wish to continue at the end of 2004.

This case study is a clear example of engagement activities that allowed current knowledge to be built upon and resulted in social and economic development that is dynamic, innovative and problem solving in its orientation. "Extensive networks of collaboration help bring together spread out points of excellence when symbiotic arrangements are formed with organisations with complementary resources" (Lang 2004, p. 93). Such social capital can not be forced, but builds upon the ethos of the group who are committed to reaping the benefits of the 'group membership'.

The lessons learned

While there have been some very significant successes to come out of this engagement process there are also areas that need to be developed to ensure continuity of this important relationship into the future. It is more than likely that these lessons have applicability across the higher education sector.

1. Linkages:
The linkages between SCU and CHCC need to be on a whole-of-university, whole-of-council, whole-of-community basis.
2. Declaration:
A formal declaration of this link via an MOU needs to be established as soon as possible.
3. Organisational embedding:
Both SCU and CHCC need to embed an engagement imperative into their strategic plans and then establish specific policies and procedures to ensure embeddedness, and thus connectivity and the opportunity for collaboration, across their respective organisations.
4. Promote benefits:
Both SCU and CHCC need to 'promote' the resulting benefits of the 'collaborative partnership' thus far within the community. Such knowledge and understanding cannot be assumed.
5. Inter & intra-relationship management:
The 'relationship' has to be managed and nurtured and as such: feedback mechanisms and inter and intra-organisational workshops and training sessions need to be provided to strengthen the ties within and between the two organisations.
6. Demonstrate 'bona fides':
As a high priority SCU needs to demonstrate its 'bona fides' by involving itself in a variety of local boards, committees and strategic planning activities from a 'community' rather than from a 'business' perspective.

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**PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON
KORANNA REVITALISATION**

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Keywords:
Indigenous peoples
Participatory research
Revitalisation

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A U C E A

1. Introduction

The Khoi-San are the original inhabitants (indigenous or first peoples) of southern Africa. The Koranna were one of the Khoi tribes that already lived in the vicinity of present-day Stellenbosch before the arrival of the first white settlers in 1652. Although uncertainty surrounds their origin, it has been determined that they had an own culture, language, identity and 'racial basis' (Engelbrecht 1936:83-194; Schoeman 1985:25-26; and Tobias 1955:263). However, centuries of colonisation threatened their nomadic existence of cattle-farming and hunting, while two destructive wars (1868-69 and 1878-79) against colonial oppressors left them leaderless. Inter-marriage, evangelisation, capitalisation and westernisation played a further role in destroying their tribal structures, cohesion and leadership. By 1932 the Koranna allegedly no longer existed (Maingard 1932:103; Trail sa:23; and Strauss 1979:ii).

During the apartheid regime no specific mention was made of the Koranna in the **Population Registration Act**, 1950 (No. 30 of 1950) - a clear indication that their existence remained unacknowledged by the apartheid government. Although various authors (Bekker 1993:24-28; De Beer 1998:38; Kriel 1998:23; and Slabbert 1999:61-62) have alleged that the post-apartheid system is generally disinclined towards the idea of group identity, the present political dispensation, as a matter of fact, grants constitutional accommodation and recognition to traditional communities and their leadership, including the Khoi-San (**Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act**, 2003 [No. 41 of 2003]). The relevant legislation, together with government's land reform and redistribution policy, has provided a powerful stimulus in respect of the revival of traditional Khoi-San leadership and identity. National and regional organisations that are geared towards gaining political recognition and linguistic and cultural revival have come into being all over the country. This is also true for the Koranna, who were thought to be extinct.

As is often the case when political reconstructive attempts are undertaken, reciprocal accusations of own gain, enrichment and power-hunger passed between opposing factions. This also happened when two different groups identifying themselves as Taaibosch Koranna¹ made appointments with the researcher on the same day, with each group being unaware that the other had done the same. Both Mr Jaftha Davids and Mr Chris Taaibosch, with their delegations of supporters, requested that research should be conducted on the history, genealogy, and more especially, the question of the leadership of the Taaibosch family of the Free State. For practical reasons, the latter issue is the only one that will be addressed in this paper. The concerned parties expressed their need to create 'something' which could be upheld as proof of the 'truth', or as a justification of their allegations regarding leadership positions. They saw the university (i.e. the author) as an unbiased instrument that would be able to produce objective, scientific evidence that would settle the dispute once and for all without any doubt. Because the expectations were so high, it was necessary to explain the nature of research in the Humanities to those concerned. It had to be pointed out to the delegations that such research cannot be considered to be absolutely value-free or neutral, and that their intentions, whether explicit or implicit, would certainly influence the outcome of the research.

Given the problematic nature of the requested research and the relationship between the two opposing factions, it was decided, on acceding to the request, that the research ethics should firstly be discussed and clarified. In this regard, an inclusive, democratic approach was adopted, based on the following agreement: The opposing parties would share equal partnership in the collection of data, especially with regard to the identifying of documents, literature and informants, as well as in the verification or refutation of information, individual suppositions, conflicting interpretations and deductions. They would also accept mutual responsibility for the final product, which included a negotiated structure and objectives for the research report. The role of the researcher, in turn, included that of attending to the question of intellectual ownership and ensuring the recognition of the indigenous sources of knowledge, as well as professional behaviour and attitude (equality in research roles and the empowerment of all the parties involved). It would also be his responsibility to place the proposed research techniques on the table.

The importance of focus group discussions was strongly emphasised by the concerned parties, who requested that separate meetings should be held concerning disputed matters. The researcher acted as facilitator during the group discussions.

The context within which the research problem developed and the factors that contributed to this, as well as the dynamics thereof, along with the practical results yielded by the research, will be dealt with in the following section. Although the nature of the contents is basically that of descriptive ethnography, the underlying aim in this regard is to offer insights into the knowledge-production process.

2. Disputed leadership

Being perfectly content to be regarded as a so-called 'Coloured' (since Coloureds enjoyed more privileges than Blacks in the 'old' South Africa), Jaftha Davids established himself as a successful building contractor in Bloemfontein. Life was good and politics did not really matter to him. Later, however, as a result of the democratic transition in South Africa, he became aware of the growing national Khoi-San cultural and identity affirmation. For the first time in his nearly fifty years, he acknowledged his Koranna descent and began to redefine his identity. During 2001, Davids and others received a message from a Prof. Jattie Bredenkamp (University of the Western Cape), asking whether the recipients of the message would be interested in representing the Free State Koranna at a Khoi-San conference to be held at Oudtshoorn. Together with other delegates, Davids attended the aforesaid conference in Oudtshoorn (29 March to 1 April 2001), during which the National Khoi-San Consultative Conference of South Africa (NKOC) was established. Back in Bloemfontein and inspired by the results of the conference, Davids initiated a process of mobilising followers on ethnical and cultural grounds. Firstly, he induced members of the Taaibosch family to recognise him as their traditional leader on the basis of his (supposed) genealogical seniority. Davids based his claim to leadership on matrilineal descent. Although he is only the eighth child of Marie Magdalena and Jacob Davids, he enjoys the support of his older, living brother and two sisters. His mother, in turn, was the oldest child of Isaac and Ellen Taaibosch. Davids used a reference from Engelbrecht's publication on Koranna ethnography (1936:191-192) to justify his allegation that his mother was Isaac Taaibosch's rightful heir. The relevant reference used by Davids reads as follows: 'Male children had preference over female in the sense that if the family consisted of several daughters and but one son the latter, even if he was the youngest child, would still succeed his father as head and also be his chief heir'. Despite this clear stipulation, Davids argued that because there were not one, but two sons in the case of his mother's parental family, she as the oldest child was the rightful heir.

Secondly, because he was related to the Taaibosch family only through his mother, and therefore did not bear the Taaibosch surname, Davids decided to change his surname to Taaibos-Davids, in a bid to make himself more acceptable to the family. Accordingly, he applied for a new identity document. He was convinced that the family surname was to be written as 'Taaibos' (and not the original 'Taaibosch'), basing his view on the fact that his mother's surname, as indicated on her birth certificate and identity document, was Taaibos.

Taaibos-Davids's leadership was not undisputed, which led to much discord and disunity. Members of the Taaibosch family, especially Chris Taaibosch, Taaibos-Davids's nephew, voiced their disagreement regarding Taaibos-Davids's leadership. Chris Taaibosch vehemently argued that genealogical succession traditionally takes place from the father to the oldest son, and that therefore Taaibos-Davids could not be regarded as the leader of the Free State's Taaibosch family. Chris claimed that his father (Johannes) is the oldest living son, and thus the rightful heir. In turn, Chris is the oldest son of his father, and should therefore be his successor.

3. Research results

From the research data it became evident, firstly, that the section quoted by Taaibos-Davids from Engelbrecht (1936:191-192) in order to confirm his leadership claim deals with the inheritance of property and the estate of a deceased, and not with the succession of chieftainship. Regarding the succession of chieftainship, Schapera (1965:328) declares that it was never transferred to a daughter, while Engelbrecht (1936:90) states that in a case where a chief passes away without a son, the chieftainship is carried over to his brother and the brother's sons. This information was conveyed to the two relevant parties and Taaibos-Davids admitted to having been misguided. He thus abandoned the claim he had wrongly based on the ethnographic material provided by Engelbrecht.

Secondly, according to the genealogical data compiled, not one of the sons of the original Koranna leader in the Free State, Gert Taaibosch, remained in the province. They therefore could not succeed their father. The leadership was thus transferred to the lineage of Gert's younger brother, Johannes. Following Thomas and Hans, Isaac was the third oldest son of Johannes. It was pointed out to the relevant family members that it was not possible for Isaac's son Johannes (Chris's father) to be the successor, as alleged by Chris. In the first instance, descent is to be considered in terms of the lineage of Thomas, and thereafter, that of Hans. Chris responded by saying that the households of Thomas and Hans had produced no living descendants. This information was presented to Taaibos-Davids, who denied it strongly. He arranged a meeting with Thomas's descendants (1 April 2004) and provided them with an exposition of the descendancy situation. Those present at the meeting expressed their faith in Taaibos-Davids, as well as their appreciation of the work he had done. A sworn statement was prepared, in which their origins, as well as their support for Taaibos-Davids's leadership, were confirmed. Taaibos-Davids thus succeeded in obtaining the democratic mandate of the genealogically most senior Taaibosch descendant to assume the position of leader.

In the third place, the section of the Taaibosch family that rejected the leadership of Taaibos-Davids, also rejected his view concerning the manner in which they are to be described in writing. The researcher attended to this matter more closely, and discussed it with Taaibos-Davids. The latter was informed that no substantial proof had been found in support of his insistence that the typical Afrikaans spelling of 'Taaibos' must be recognised. All of the historical sources that had been consulted made use of the original Dutch form, i.e. 'Taaibosch'. It is unlikely that the Dutch authorities in the Cape at that time would have written the surname in Afrikaans, as the language did not yet exist. For the above-mentioned reasons, Taaibos-Davids decided to change his surname once again, this time to Taaibosch-Davids.

Fourthly, it became evident from the research that Taaibosch-Davids is related to the Koranna Chief Pieter Davids on his father's side of the family. Pieter Davids was married to the daughter of the Griqua Chief, Barend Barendse, and they lived together at Danielskuil (Barnard 1965:338). After Barendse was murdered, Pieter Davids assumed the chieftainship (Germond 1967:165) and, together with his followers, moved out into Lishuane (Barnard 1965:338). He was the son of Hendrik Davids, who, in turn, was the son of Samuel Davids. Samuel Davids's second son was Daniël Davids, the father of Jacob Davids, the father of Jaftha Taaibosch-Davids. Taaibosch-Davids's claim to genealogical seniority can thus be based on both his paternal and maternal descent.

4. Discussion

In this case study the focus has been on participatory research as a means to contribute to Koranna revival in the Free State by addressing the issue of disputed leadership. The role of specific individuals has been considered more closely, without any attempt to clarify the reasons for their respective involvement. Although some of the disputed issues were resolved, the involved parties have not buried the hatchet, nor have they admitted defeat or lost their inclination towards argumentativeness. Consequently, the following question needs to be asked: Was it worthwhile to conduct the research?

I would like to believe that the answer is “yes” - not so much in terms of bringing about peace or clarification, but rather in terms of the unintended outcomes of the research. Firstly, the Koranna people became aware of the enormous task involved in Koranna self-representation. Taaibosch-Davids, for example, acknowledged the value of research and requested further research on issues that are important for Koranna cultural reconstruction, such as traditional religion and the development of a political structure. Research in respect of the latter has been carried out (see Appendix 1) and is in the process of implementation, while the research on the religion is still being conducted.

Secondly, the Koranna community in general became involved as an active partner in the creation, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge about themselves. Apart from the fact that this learning partnership between the researcher and the Koranna represented a purposeful and specific epistemological point of departure, it was also important, for a different reason, to give the Koranna a say in respect of matters concerning themselves. According to Marks (1972:55) and Strauss (1979:v), the history of the Koranna people has mostly been written by whites. Regarding these writers, Strauss (1979:v) feels that: ‘(T)heir ethnocentric and “anti-Hottentot” bias is evident. They looked upon the Koranna as an uncivilized, morally degenerated and lazy people with an innate desire to steal cattle’. Coertze (1983:111) endorses this view, while contributions by authors such as Buys (1889:65), Coertze & Coertze (1996:157), Kies (1972:32), Marais (1968:94) and Pretorius (1963:36) confirm the negative characterisation of the Koranna.

In the third place, the greatest benefit that accrued to the formerly white, Afrikaaner University as a result of this research, was the fact that the research contributed towards obtaining credibility for the university, in the eyes of the national Khoi-San community, as a formal partner in matters relating to the Khoi-San. The following examples serve as illustrations in this regard:

- The Secretariat of the NKCC has been accommodated within the Department of Anthropology since 2003.
- A partnership was entered into between the UFS and the Griqua people, in terms of which development projects, such as the development of a Griqua cultural museum and the provision of reading-books for Griqua learners, are enjoying attention.
- A Khoi-San Culture and Memory Research Project has also been established at the Department of Anthropology. The fundamental objective hereof is to focus on the cultural and memory transformation and erasure that have taken place amongst the Khoi-San.

While this presentation has focused primarily on the Taaibosch Koranna of the Free State, the perspectives on participatory research that have been presented here have wider scientific relevance. Two important aspects should be emphasised in this regard. Firstly, although the fundamental objective was to develop knowledge for the local Koranna community to use, the UFS also benefited from the research. Secondly, the researcher did not dominate the process – as a matter of fact, the manner of conducting research was imbued with a synergetic meaning by the Koranna community.

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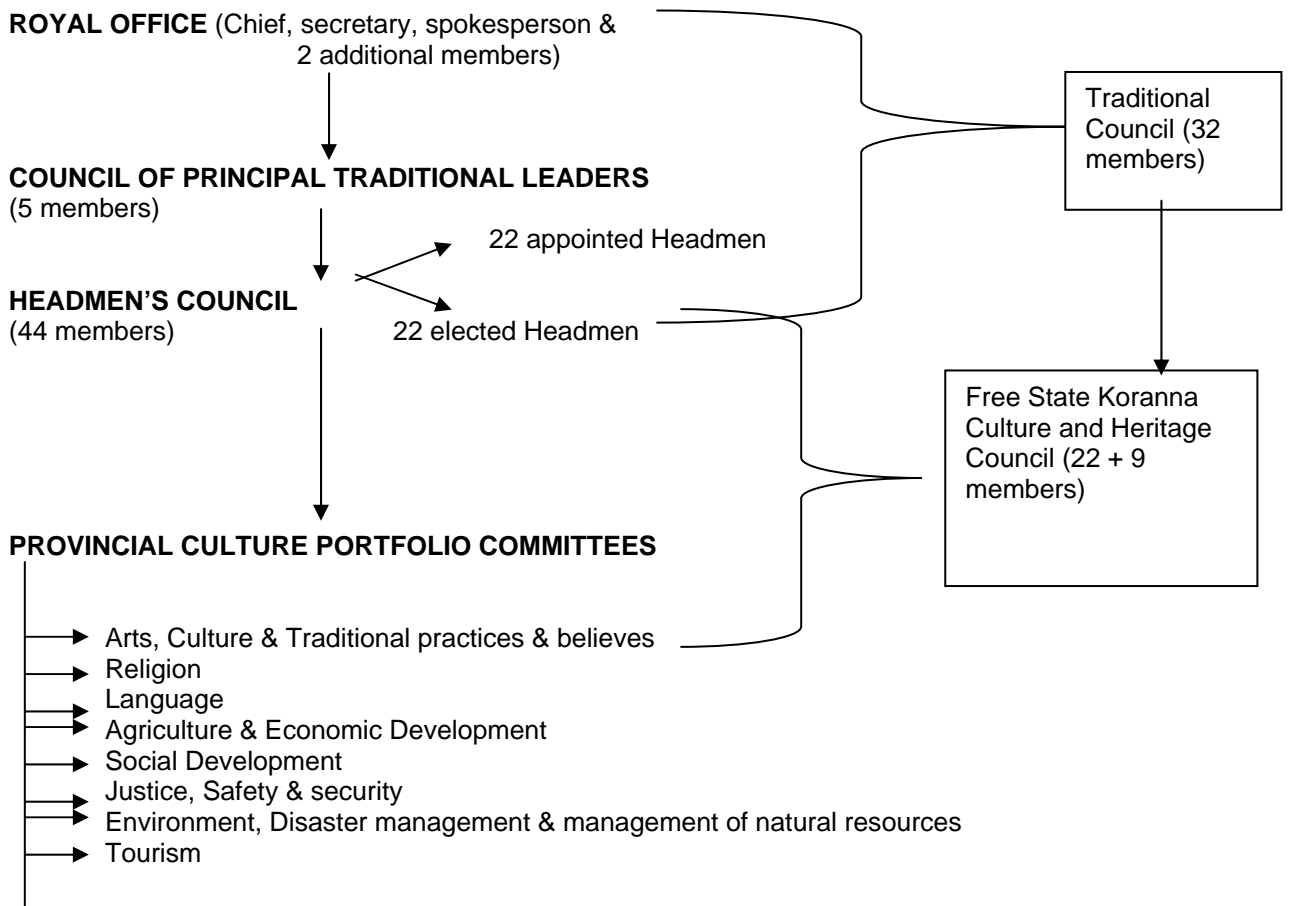
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APPENDIX 1: STRUCTURE OF THE TAAIBOSCH-DAVIDS KORANNA-HOUSE



Partners in Health - Paper and Practice

Stuart Auckland - University of Tasmania

Keywords:

Health partnership processes
Good practice
Strategic directions into practice
Engagement learning's

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A U C E A

Abstract:

'Partners in Health' is an agreement between the University of Tasmania, Faculty of Health Science and the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS), to improve health services to the Tasmanian community. This paper reviews the translation of these strategic directions into practice, using the DHHS Aged, Rural and Community Health Program (ARCH) and University Department of Rural Health Tasmania (UDRH) partnership as a case example. The engagement is considered from a number of perspectives: the uniqueness and complexity associated with ARCH/ UDRH Tas engagement, with its communication and planning processes; how as partners they jointly engage the broader community in health initiatives; and the alignment with the key messages of Partners in Health. These aspects are reviewed in light of good practice principles drawn from literature on University Community Engagement (UCE), regional development, partnerships, community development and policy implementation. This provides the opportunity to examine how the strategic directions of the agreement filter through the organisation into practice and reporting, as well as the achievements and opportunities for improvement. The paper identifies strategies which can be replicated, and engagement learnings for the broader field of UCE.

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Introduction

The Partners in Health (PiH) agreement has been described as a partnership model to provide leadership and management in the development of collaborative health initiatives between the Faculty of Health Science (FHS) within the University of Tasmania (UTAS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). PiH provides a policy framework through which the organisations engage with each other. As an example of University community Engagement (UCE) it facilitates resource sharing towards mutual and broader community benefit, and can be reviewed in the light of good practice identified in UCE, governance, policy, regional and community development literature. The extent to which the PiH agreement impacts on the processes and outcomes of engagement is influenced by a range of factors which can be best examined considering the impact of PiH at an operational level. The University Department of Rural Health, Tasmania (UDRH) and Aged Rural and Community Health (ARCH) operational sections within the FHS and DHHS have established a partnership to build on existing collaborative foundations. Underpinning the partnership, is a shared vision, commitment, trust and friendship and the instigation of collective action at a operational level rather than a response to the existence of overarching centralised institutional agreement such a PiH. The paper acknowledges the indirect influence PiH has on the development and maintenance of the UDRH-ARCH partnership but also focuses on the importance of fostering greater interdependency between vertical (top down) governance models such as PiH and more synergistic horizontal engagement processes such as that evident in UDRH-ARCH partnership. Sustainability of the UDRH-ARCH partnership over the longer term is questioned in the absence of stronger linkages with broader organisational collaborations such as evident in the PiH model.

UCE and good practice

Within University Community Engagement (UCE) literature many perspectives and definitions of UCE have emerged internationally, covering concepts such as scholarship of engagement, community development, citizenship, service and public good and as a process or mechanism (Goddard, 2000, Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2001, Australian University Community Engagement Alliance, 2003, Charles, 2003, Penman and Ellis, 2003, Sandmann, 2003, Delaforce, 2004, Sunderland et al., 2004, Australian University Community Engagement Alliance, 2005, Winter and Wiseman, 2005, Winter et al., 2005). In Australia, the term UCE is used to group a broad range of activities that in some way connect the university with a community (Winter et al., 2005). Understanding community has been deliberated in many fields for many years (Brawley, 1994, Burroughs and Eby, 1998, Burkett, 2001, Casswell, 2001, Desjardins et al., 2002, Sunderland et al., 2004, Dibden and Cheshire, 2005) and it is equally broadly understood in UCE literature (Sunderland et al., 2004, University of Tasmania, 2005, Winter and Wiseman, 2005, Winter et al., 2005). Universities appear to engage with a multiplicity of community including internal and external of the university, both place and interest based, where a linking aspect engenders a sense of connectedness. Variations in defining UCE reflect the experience of the activities between universities and communities, with common descriptions including the development of partnerships which share resources and infrastructure to develop, implement and run projects, programs and research initiatives all incorporating mutual benefit.

Similar processes are evident in community development literature which tends to be participatory focused, acknowledging the importance of 'bottom-up' approaches where the drive comes from the community, and the significance of not just outcome, but also the experience as an end in itself (Brawley, 1994, Cheers and Hall, 1994, Casswell, 2001, Cavaye, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Penman and Ellis, 2003, Hayward et al., 2004, Dibden and Cheshire, 2005, Montero, 2005). Additionally, there is a growing body of work regarding the importance of effective governance in improving social policy and in turn social health and wellbeing and that building more effective social policy partnerships, is essentially about building good governance.

Research indicates that improvement in the processes and institutions used in important decisions will bring better results (Edgar and Chandler, 2005).

But the emerging UCE literature encourages us to see UCE as more than community development, service or consultation (Sunderland et al., 2004, Australian University Community Engagement Alliance, 2005) focusing on an equal partnership and two way interaction (Holland, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Australian University Community Engagement Alliance, 2005). This is similar to a horizontal model of governance which tends to be more egalitarian in its process and membership and to rely on social relationships to generate collective action. (Keast et al., 2005) Taking this further Sunderland et al (2004) consider engagement to be founded in two parties having an equally shared interest likened to friendship, rather than being about the university purposely acting to connect with the community as is often the case. The challenge exists to embrace community not as a thing or object, but as a complexity of processes of which the university is a part (Burkett, 2001, Sunderland et al., 2004). Within these understandings, the qualities of the partnership and its processes are emerging as defining factors for UCE.

A number of qualities arise in UCE literature as being characteristic of UCE which reflects the growing understanding of UCE. UCE is about partnerships and inherently governance, and often involves regional or community development, thus it is not surprising that these themes are also present in literature from these fields. From the literature reviewed, these themes include: focus on process and outcomes, flexibility, resources and time, mutual benefit, leadership, creativity, clear vision, trust, communication, sustained relationship strategies or jointly planned exit, well written usable agreements, evaluation and celebration of successes and milestones.

Quality of process

UCE, partnership, governance, community and regional development literature acknowledge the importance of the quality of the entire process from planning through implementation and outcomes. Significant in this is the quality of the relationships as central to the process (Cavaye, 2001, Forde, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Garlick and Pryor, 2002b, Sorensen et al., 2002, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Graham et al., 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005).

Flexibility

Flexibility is a theme referring to many aspects of engagement, but particularly flexibility of the organisational structures in both the university and community to be able to respond to each others needs and constraints, to aid social entrepreneurship and to adapt to the constant learning throughout the engagement (Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Graham et al., 2003, Mcconachie and Simpson, 2003, Penman and Ellis, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004).

Resources and time

The literature identifies the importance of being aware and realistic about the resources each partner brings to the engagement (Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Penman and Ellis, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Armstrong et al., 2005, Murphy and Thomas, 2005, Platt et al., 2005, Winter and Wiseman, 2005, Winter et al., 2005) to build on strengths and assets (Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Winter et al., 2005) and the significance of an organisational commitment to the partnership also acknowledged through sufficient resources, including time, by both the community and university (Garlick and Pryor, 2002a). Resources may include funding structures (Sorensen et al., 2002), staff skilled in working collaboratively beyond the university framework (Kilpatrick et al., 2004), strong leadership (Lewis et al., 2005), preparedness to take risks (Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Kilpatrick et al., 2004), the need for organisation/community readiness (Forde, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Winter et al., 2005) or high social capital (Holland, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Armstrong et al., 2005, Australian University Community Engagement Alliance, 2005, Burgin et al., 2005, Ensor, 2005, Murphy and Thomas, 2005, Platt et al., 2005, University of Tasmania, 2005, Winter and Wiseman, 2005, Winter et al., 2005) and a culture of collaborative practice.

Building collaborative structures are time consuming, so sufficient time is an additionally important resource allowing for long time frames and staff time salaried for engagement (University of Tasmania, 2005, Winter et al., 2005).

Mutual benefit

A central and defining theme for UCE in the literature is the understanding that engagement needs to be mutual and reciprocal in that it benefits each in the partnership in both process and outcome of the engagement (Forde, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Armstrong et al., 2005, Winter et al., 2005). Benefits are understood to include social, economic, cultural or environmental (Murphy and Thomas, 2005). This can only occur where there is trust, open communication and time for participation, consultation and accountability (Auckland and Brookes, 2005, Platt et al., 2005), as well as a commitment to mutual benefit (Brawley, 1994, Cavaye, 2001, Cheers and O'toole, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Trout et al., 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Armstrong et al., 2005, Dibden and Cheshire, 2005, Nissen et al., 2005, Winter et al., 2005) and the ability to respond to changing needs (Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003).

Leadership

In regional and community development and UCE, strong leadership has been identified as a key factor in providing the drive to enthuse, motivate, network and energise towards a common vision, helping to clarify purpose and build trust (Florida, 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Auckland and Brookes, 2005). Problems have been noted with engagements based on single leaders when these leaders leave their leadership role (formal or informal) (Joint Work Group, 2004). The idea of creative regions (Cheers et al., 2002) may help to support continuing leadership, where new leadership is then a chance to review and continue (Brawley, 1994, Kitahara, 1996, Burkett, 2001, Florida, 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a) rather than lost momentum. The challenge is to mesh 'top-down' leadership and 'bottom-up' participation and leadership (Sunderland et al., 2004).

Creativity

It is acknowledged that creativity and initiative within a community is a central aspect of engagement and development activities and thus needs to be fostered and nurtured (Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Platt et al., 2005, Winter et al., 2005). Indeed, community has long been considered as a creative process in itself of which universities are integral (Cavaye, 2001, Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Sorensen et al., 2002, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Armstrong et al., 2005, Burgin et al., 2005, Murphy and Thomas, 2005, Platt et al., 2005, Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005).

Clear vision

Successful engagements have direction; a clear vision with a shared purpose and expectations that are results oriented (Holland, 2001, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Graham et al., 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Murphy and Thomas, 2005)

Trust

As an aspect of the quality of the engagement relationship, trust is frequently cited as foundational to good engagements (Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Joint Work Group, 2004, Auckland and Brookes, 2005, Murphy and Thomas, 2005). This is seen to develop over time, through transparent communication (Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Garlick and Pryor, 2002b, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Graham et al., 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004).

Communication

Effective communication and information sharing is another foundational characteristic, enabling other aspects of good UCE such as a joint knowledge of each others resources, capacities and needs, developing a clear and shared vision with goals and objectives (Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Joint Work Group, 2004, Auckland and Brookes, 2005, Murphy and Thomas, 2005). It is important that all participants have a legitimate voice (Graham et al., 2003).

Sustained or exit planned

Good engagement is seen to involve sustained or regular processes (Forde, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004) or, where this is not possible, exit strategies which are clearly understood and planned by all parties at the outset (Forde, 2001, Holland, 2001, Cheers et al., 2002, Garlick and Pryor, 2002a, Garlick and Pryor, 2002b, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004, Platt et al., 2005).

Well written agreements

Written agreements have been found only to be useful when they reflect accurately the goals, objectives, commitments and resources being shared, and are designed to be reviewed regularly to provide direction or for amendment by all stakeholders, as part of evaluation processes (Holland, 2001, Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2003, Joint Work Group, 2004)

Evaluation

A continuous commitment to evaluating the engagement and the measures to be used is important, and best established collaboratively early in the relationship. This includes not only outcomes, but the process, methods and partnership itself (University Department of Rural Health Tasmania, 2006).

Celebration of successes and milestones

Identifying opportunities for early successes, and celebrating these along the way, helps to maintain or rejuvenate momentum and commitments to a process which frequently evolves slowly (Le Grew, 2004, University of Tasmania, 2004)

Partners in Health

All these qualities are important in the context of collaborative activities such as Partners in Health and the UDRH-ARCH partnership. DHHS and the UTAS Faculty of Health Science developed PiH as a strategic collaboration at an organisational policy level demonstrating their commitment to working together to maintain and develop a health workforce and to contribute to the health and wellbeing of the people of Tasmania. This collaboration is supported by a Statement of Intent, in which both parties have agreed to collaborate on a range of strategies relating to education, training and quality service delivery.

This includes working together on practical changes including developing education and research resources to support the development of an effective workforce and improved models of integrated health care system. This statement is then actioned through the PiH Strategic Plan which identifies a number of initiatives, such as conjoint appointments and education and workforce planning projects, which is lead by the Partners In Health Management Committee.(Partners in Health, 2006)

Based on the United Nations Development Program good governance principles (Graham et al., 2003), PiH provides a strong governance foundation for the two organisations to work from in improving health in Tasmania. The participation of both organisations in this partnership has provided *legitimacy* to the strategic alliance. The aim and associated formal processes of the partnership is to identify appropriate strategies to enhance efforts in education and training with a view to improving health of Tasmanians supports *fairness*. The associated documents and processes including the Statement of Intent provide *direction* and the strategic plan drives *performance* and *accountability* to the partnership.

The shared interest in the health of the Tasmanian community as espoused within the PiH agreement, with potential benefits for all concerned is also evident in the UDRH-ARCH partnership which embraces community through the shared interests of both health and rural. This translates to a geographic community as this partnership then engages with rural communities in Tasmania.

UDRH and ARCH

The UDRH is part of the FHS at the University of Tasmania. The UDRH is committed to improving access to health care resources and contributing to improved health outcomes for people in rural and remote areas of Tasmania (Auckland and Brookes, 2005, Partners in Health, 2006). These aims are achieved through collaborative activities with rural communities, health practitioners, educational bodies and Australian, State and Local Governments. These collaborative activities deliver a more coordinated and integrated approach to rural education, research and clinical service delivery for Tasmania.

ARCH is a program within the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services and is responsible for the management of the Department's community, rural and aged care services across Tasmania. ARCH manages sites across the state including Community Health Centres, District Hospitals (including aged and acute care), Multi-Purpose Centres and Multi Purpose Services. In managing these sites and services, ARCH has a focus on four key components: primary health care, integrated services, community participation, safety and quality.

Effective and genuine policy partnerships help build good governance by enhancing participatory democracy, reducing exclusion and fragmentation, and giving all stakeholders a positive role. This reveals the complex social dynamics that provide the context for development, thereby promoting better planning and implementation and can improve the cost effectiveness of social development by bringing key stakeholders together as resources and active owners of the intervention. The UDRH-ARCH partnership may be seen in this light, as whilst still in its developmental stage, it is providing an opportunity for key stakeholders to improve their working relationship on key priorities, thereby enhancing the capacity and quality of interventions and also demonstrating and, in the future, potentially influencing the higher level governance arrangements between the two agencies.

At all tiers, there are clear differences and similarities in the organisations' roles; DHHS to manage health services and FHS to undertake research and provide education and yet both have a role in improving health outcomes for Tasmanians with a focus on:

- Recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified health professional staff
- Training and education to ensure quality health care
- Working with the community to increase their involvement and skills in participating in and managing their own health, and
- Undertaking research into best practice models of and practices in health care.

Partners in Health was established to support this effort. UDRH and ARCH operationalise the organisational focus in the community. Whilst each organisation has their own processes and strategies for achieving their agendas and targets, the very nature of the aims, means that each organisation is a 'community of interest' to the other in achieving these aims. It is therefore important that similar work efforts are collaborative not only to ensure that resources are efficiently and effectively utilised but also so that there is a coordinated approach to working with the broader community to ensure the overall outcome of improving health.

In this way, PiH and the UDRH-ARCH engagement are examples of equal partnership at multiple levels; UCE which is built on shared interests at both an organisational and a sectional level and more than purely a university endeavour to connect with the community.

The Engagement Context

There are a number of factors (enablers) that contributed to the formation of the UDRH-ARCH partnership. A significant factor was the internal restructure of UDRH which resulted in the establishment and resourcing of a Rural Community Engagement (RCE) Program Area, driven largely by the emergence of the UTAS EDGE agenda. The EDGE agenda refers to four cornerstones for building a strong and vibrant institution: **Excellence, Distinctiveness, Growth and Engagement** (Health, 2001). The **Engagement** component reflects the desire for UTAS to engage with its communities and become a sought-after local, national and international partner across all fields of endeavour (Sunderland et al., 2004). This also coincided with changes within rural health such as a greater emphasis on primary health care and the development of community based models of integrated health care service which raised the profile and importance of community engagement in health service delivery.

Historically, UDRH and ARCH have collaborated on a number of initiatives. These collaborations were opportunistic, and limited to the life of individual projects. In many cases the scope of the collaboration was dictated by a third party, usually an external funding agency. This ad-hoc approach at times created issues relating to break down in Departmental and University communication protocols, lacked reference to good community engagement practices. At an operational level there were factors that provided the impetus to establish a more structured and pro active engagement process between the two organisational sectors. These included a shared understanding that each partner holds knowledge that may be of value to the other and an acknowledgement that commonalities relating to their respective goals and visions are greater than their differences. There was a readiness in both UDRH and ARCH and a belief that engagement would bring mutual benefit. This process, driven 'bottom-up' by the shared interests of the two sections continues to reflect the definition of UCE with qualities akin a friendship as proposed by Sunderland et al (2004).

The UDRH-ARCH partnership has evolved such that it is not underpinned by a formal partnership agreement but makes reference to the broader PiH agreement in defining common interests between the two sections. The lack of a formal association with the PiH agreement by the partnership allows engagement opportunities in areas of comparative advantage beyond the defined scope of PiH. The PiH Strategic Plan states that "each partner will manage their own internal decision making processes and progress initiatives within their agency (section)". In this way, PiH as UCE provides a flexible framework, enabling further engagements within its realm to work creatively, adapting and responding to the changing needs and opportunities of their specific interests.

Current experience

Early 2005 a process was instigated by ARCH and UDRH to improve communication and collaborative effort between the two organisations. This collaborative effort was loosely described as a partnership. There were obvious benefits from pooling effort and skills.

The primary objectives of the collaboration were based on relationship building in which trust, reciprocity and mutual benefit were fundamental. Focusing on relationship building created a positive environment for interaction. A secondary objective was the development of a collaborative structure to enhance the strategic planning and communication processes within the context of a partnership arrangement. These qualities of the engagement while foundational to good UCE, occurred from the desires and felt needs of those engaging. There was an implication that the partnership would be underpinned by a set of core values as reflected in the PiH agreement; these include shared responsibility, commitment, mutual learning, and integrated planning. Again, this was driven by the desires of those engaging, without direct reference to PiH. The intent was not to focus on issues relating to disparity in organising capacity and resources or bureaucratic processes.

These values were not documented or overtly clarified, rather a shared understanding built through ongoing communication and drawn from the work practises of those involved.

A meeting between UDRH and ARCH was held in April 2005. The process involved key managers from each organisational section coming together for a planning session, where information was shared about current and proposed initiatives. Priority themes were identified and working groups were established to progress the themes with key staff volunteering to drive each priority theme. Working groups undertook a commitment to develop activities around the agreed themes. The four priority themes include:

- Rural workforce retention and recruitment
- Service design/models of care
- Research and Information, and
- Community development/engagement.

With the introduction of the community development/engagement working group three levels and types of UCE are evident; the initial collaboration initiated equally and then a focused effort by this engagement to further engage the broader community, or legitimise by the policy level PiH. The community development/engagement working group identified a number of priority areas for collaboration including:

- Engaging communities in the development of integrated health service models;
- Provision of support and training for community based advisory committees
- Joint publications within the theme of community development
- Collaborating in community events to raise the profile of rural health
- Development of joint funding submissions to undertake research/project work in community development

These have provided a clear vision towards some results oriented expectations inline with, but not in response to good UCE practice principles.

Communication protocols were established to support the work of the partnership which included establishment of liaison positions with a representative from each organisational section acting as first point of contact for collaborative activities. The liaison positions act as a central referral point for issues relating to the operation and performance of the partnership and assist in the flow of information about the identified priorities and the general business of the partners. This focus on communication processes is in line with the good practise foundations identified in engagement literature.

In its first year of operation the partnership has facilitated the development of a community participation project on the west coast of Tasmania, initiated academic papers on the identified priority themes co authored by staff from partnering sections and participation of representatives on the strategic planning committees of the respective partnering sections. At each meeting the achievements to date are acknowledged, helping to provide focus and direction. Preparing this paper has also been an opportunity for reflection, evaluation and acknowledgement of successes.

The UDRH-ARCH partnership is the only UCE of its kind within the health sector, in that it is a friendship model of engagement. The partnership has been established despite differences in the political and cultural environments. The complex nature of the partnership stems from the fact that both UDRH and ARCH have different roles and objectives but a similar shared vision that being rural health. ARCH has a service delivery focus and UDRH education and research. Working together has provided an opportunity to look at how these different roles and objectives can complement each other towards the greater focus on rural health. There are a number of factors that add to the complexity of the partnership including:

- Competing demands and pressures to meet internal goals and objectives.
- Changing and increasing expectations and demands from 'customers' that need to be met, usually within existing resources
- Competing and increasing demands from other stakeholder organisations and communities for services and products from the respective sections

A key challenge for the partnership is to determine how, given the complex environment in which both sections work, the partnership can continue to grow and strengthen the relationship in a sustainable way. This might be through formalising some processes, increasing opportunities to build the relationship and evaluating, celebrating and promoting key achievements within the respective sections and to other communities of interest, such as the PiH management committee.

The partnership is aligned to the broader PiH leadership and management model to bring together decision makers within the respective sections. Whilst the partnership draws on concepts from PiH agreement it operates outside the PiH top-down governance structure. The partnership has created its own governance structure being horizontal and non hierarchical. The horizontal governance structure limits the capacity of the partnership to influence rural health policy at an organisational level. However, involvement in the partnership process by the respective heads of the partner sections creates opportunities to review or refocus collaborative initiatives. For the UCE to work successfully, these organisational and sectional complexities are understood and accounted for in the planning and communications within the partnership.

This enhanced working relationship has resulted in improvements in engagement with the broader community. This is not necessarily on a 'large scale' yet, but there are a number of tangible examples of how working better together is improving how we work with the broader community.

Previously there was an awareness of the work that each section was doing, but there were no clear communication lines. This meant that there was no strategic view of how the efforts of each section may be complementing or impacting on the other. For example, UDRH may be working on a specific project directly with one rural facility and yet it may have been useful to be working with another facility due to readiness for the project, and other demands on the facility. Another example is ARCH working on the development of a community participation framework and having limited awareness of the work being undertaken with community advisory groups by UDRH in relation to skill development.

However due to the improved relationship there have been changes in communication and participation in various initiatives for each section. For example, the identification of liaison officers for each section has meant that the sections work together to identify potential areas for further collaboration such as representation from ARCH on research committees for UDRH projects and the opportunity to utilise UDRH resources and skills in the development of the resource and training package associated with the community participation framework. The UDRH-ARCH engagement provides an opportunity for a more coordinated approach to working with the broader community, such that we are not duplicating effort or leaving gaps where work could be done, both of which can lead to frustration from the shared client base.

The work of both PiH and UDRH-ARCH align in a number of ways. PiH sets the broad strategic direction within the organisations. The UDRH-ARCH partnership whilst not developed in response to PiH, is in fact actioning or demonstrating the intent of the whole of organisation partnership at an operational level. Like PiH, UDRH-ARCH partnership reflects benefits and opportunities through working more closely together at an operational level is in align with the philosophy and priorities underpinning the PiH agreement. This demonstrates that PiH is very much a relevant strategic partnership with relevant priorities for improving rural health. The process by which that alignment was identified highlights some interesting learnings as discussed below.

Learnings and Replicable Strategies

The links between PiH and the work of UDRH-ARCH occurred more by good luck than by good management. Staff at UDRH and ARCH knew of the existence of PiH through their involvement in projects created under the auspices of PiH. It is however a matter for conjecture as to the extent to which PiH has impacted on the efficacy and quality of the engagement process for UDRH-ARCH. As an example of the issues associated with meshing top-down and bottom-up leadership, on one hand the PiH provides a strategic 'whole-of-organisation' alliance and strategic direction for working together, this includes principles, key areas of focus and specific projects.

Therefore there was an opportunity for UDRH and ARCH to utilise this as a 'launching pad' for developing a closer working relationship and to facilitate the identification of priorities for the two programs to work on. On the other hand, alternatively, it could be seen that having PiH as a lead document for developing the UDRH-ARCH partnership may have potentially placed artificial parameters around creativity in developing priorities.

The egalitarian foundation of the UDRH-ARCH partnership is an example of a horizontal governance model relying on the social relationships within and between each operational section to generate collective action, similarly reflecting a friendship model of UCE. The existence of a "whole of organisation" collaborations such as PiH help to legitimise partnerships at an operational level through the creation of a culture of collaboration within organisations. In addition, the PiH strategy provides an overall high-level endorsement for the two sections to work together, just by its very existence, but did not necessarily influence the development of the focus of the partnership. In this way, both top-down, and bottom up processes have facilitated this UCE.

The creation of linkages with organisational collaborative initiatives such as PiH is beneficial not only for the development of partnerships but also as a means of 'checking' partnership activities to identify alignment and avoid duplication. Should conflict in alignment occur then it should be regarded as an opportunity for discussion between the respective partnering sections and the broader organisations about priorities. This adds to the 'living' nature and continued evolution of PiH as a strategic collaboration, and maintains the flexible and creative qualities of the UCE. Aligning the partnership with PiH may also assist in maintaining the collaboration in a time of budget constraints, thus utilising top-down structures to support grass root activity.

In considering the role strategic documents such as PiH have in guiding relationship building or in driving partnerships, it is evident that agreements such as PiH create a sense of awareness about the culture and political environment of partnering sections which assist in determining the level of "readiness" or "preparedness" for effective engagement. The PiH agreement can act as a "role model" for collaboration at a sectional or local level in helping to identify appropriate structure, governance and scope of activities and how the engagement effort or partnership could be maintained.

The next phase of the partnership development process is to establish stronger linkages with PiH and in particular explore linkages between the partnership priorities and the principles/commitments in PiH.

As supported in UCE literature, at a sectional level it must be acknowledged that building relationships or exchanging ideas or viewpoints is an acceptable basis for engaging with partner as this helps create opportunities to build an appropriate governance structure for the partnership. Relationship building is an ongoing process, requiring a significant investment in time before tangible benefits can be reaped from effort invested. Leadership has played an important role in enhancing and sustaining the partnership. Support and interest in the partnership amongst general and academic staff within both sections suggests that the sustainability of the partnership is not dependant on the presence of a single individual. It is important that the partnership objectives and strategies are manageable to ensure some success and sustainability in terms of outcomes/outputs whilst being realistic in regards to the cultural and political environment of the workplace. To date, evaluation processes of the UDRH-ARCH partnership have been informal through reflective practice integral to ongoing communications. Meetings are an example of the opportunities taken to reflect on the effectiveness and worth of the activities. The joint writing of this paper also provided new angles for reflection.

Conclusion

The UDRH-ARCH partnership case study highlights the importance of good UCE practice irrespective of the distinguishing feature of the governance model. The partnership reflects a sectional rather than a whole of organisation approach, this approach did not appear to compromise good UCE practice which was incidental rather than planned. This is not surprising given the existence of a culture of engagement both with the leadership and operation of the respective sections. The success of the sectional engagement thus far has been founded in this culture along with the reciprocal interests including the desire for broader community benefit. This has resulted in a 'friendship' based UCE and horizontal governance structure maintain through the continued building of relationships. In turn the UCE has begun to evidence a flow-on impact for the broader community through improved planning communication and service delivery processes.

In its current form the UDRH-ARCH partnership is limited in its capacity to contribute to, or benefit from, the further development of the PiH collaboration. Opportunities exist to capitalise on the operation of the UDRH-ARCH partnership to promote its work to the higher level committee to ensure that the partnership reflects the work of the PiH agreement as a living initiative. This could be achieved through better utilisation of opportunities and benefits presented by closer collaboration, a broader recognition and application of community engagement knowledge and skills available at the two tiers of operation within both organisations. Within the existing cultural and political environments the UDRH-ARCH partnership can continue play a major role of instigating change at the margins of current program and research undertaken by the respective sections. Forging stronger links with PiH may strengthen the sustainability of the UDRH-ARCH partnership through greater influence at a policy level.

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Poona Futures: students respond to a community cry for help

Keywords:
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Abstract:

Poona village is located on the idyllic coast of Great Sandy Strait that separates the mainland from World Heritage listed Fraser Island. The strait is one of Australia's 68 listed Ramsar sites as a wetland system of international significance. Weekenders make up about half the current population of around 200. The attraction is fishing and the natural environment. There is no industry, no reticulated water, no municipal sewerage treatment and no expectation of any change in these attributes in the future. Sandy soils over an extensive and high watertable drain directly to highly valued Melaleuca wetlands which empty into the strait. Residential subdivisions approved in the early 90s, now partially constructed, will expand the population to around 1600 and spread the urban fabric to the edge of these wetlands. The very environment and subtropical lifestyle, which is the reason for Poona's existence and attracting people to move there as new land becomes available, is under threat.

Postgraduate landscape architecture and urban design students responded to a cry for help from the Poona community and explored possible futures that sought to manage the impacts of urban growth on the environmental and lifestyle values of the place. An enthusiastic engagement over three months provided a highly effective learning experience for students, community, developer and local government alike. It has resulted in a commitment by the developer to seek environmentally sensitive outcomes for the remainder of the development process and lead to local government and community resolve to embed sustainable practices into future management of Poona Point's social and environmental values. The paper will reflect on the teaching and learning strategies that shaped the engagement between students, community, local government and developer.

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Introduction

The *Poona Futures* project began with a discussion between a retired doctor, John Price and a former Head of School, Prof. John Hockings, both of whom are part time residents of Poona and friends of long standing. The discussion hinged around the potential of a student project to explore ways and means to assist the local community to manage the impacts of impending urban growth and resulting environmental and social pressures. The village of Poona is located on the idyllic coast of Great Sandy Strait that separates the mainland from World Heritage listed Fraser Island (Figure 1). The strait is one of Australia's 68 listed Ramsar sites as a wetland system of international significance. Weekenders make up about half the current population of around 200. The attraction is fishing and the natural environment (Figures 2 and 3). There is no industry, no reticulated water, no municipal sewerage treatment and no expectation of any change in these attributes in the future. Sandy soils over an extensive and high watertable drain directly to highly valued Melaleuca wetlands which empty into the strait and extensive sea grass beds which are part of the essential habitat of the endangered Dugong.

In the early 1990s a major developer sought rezoning approval from Maryborough City Council for extensive residential subdivisions to cover most of the remaining freehold land on the Poona Point. Under John Price's leadership, objections lodged by residents resulted in a significant reduction in residential lots proposed and the setting aside of some of the freehold land as dedicated open space for parkland and environmental purposes. After gaining rezoning approval the land was sold to the current developer. The project, now partially constructed will expand the population to around 1600 and spread the urban fabric to the edge of the Melaleuca wetlands. The very environment, which is the reason for Poona's existence, is under threat as is the subtropical coastal lifestyle which is attracting people to move there as the new land becomes available.

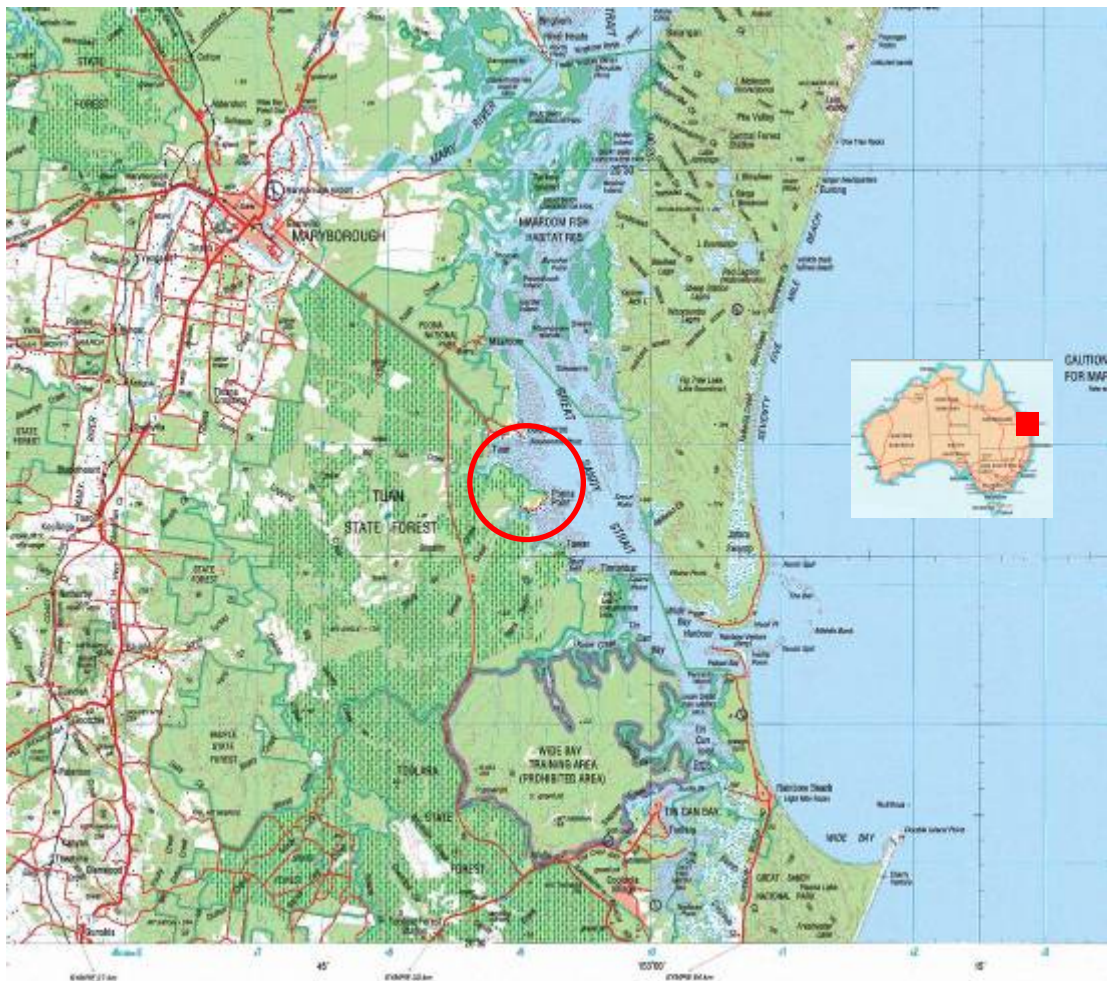


Figure 1 – Locality Map



Prof.



Figure 2 – Prof. Hockings

Figure 3 – Great Sandy Strait

Hockings identified the landscape architecture program at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) as having the capacity to lead a collaborative student project and engage with the Poona Ratepayers Association. This capacity is a result of a regular series of design studios structured on direct community engagement in diverse real world contexts dating back into the mid 1990s. The project was first broached in the latter half of 2004, shaped into a cohesive program in the first half of 2005 and run in the second Semester of that year. The broad brief to final year landscape architecture and urban design students was to engage with the Poona community to explore possible futures for the village that sought to manage the impacts of urban growth on the environmental and lifestyle values of the place. The issues addressed in the project included:

- application of water sensitive urban design principles to all remaining subdivision development;
- retrofitting linear wetlands between existing urban stormwater discharges and the Melaleuca wetlands to remove pollutants;
- integrating a framework for a cohesive village centre to grow with population; and
- developing management strategies to protect or rehabilitate the public domain and environmental values of the eroding foreshore reserve.

The project has resulted in a commitment by the developer to seek environmentally sensitive outcomes for the remainder of the development process. It has also resulted in local government and community resolve to cooperatively embed sustainable management practices into future management of Poona Point's social and environmental values. Its successful outcomes have resulted from an outstanding commitment by the students involved, an enthusiastic community "client" and the guidance given by my accumulated experience of negotiating and structuring both the projects and the processes by which the students are encouraged to learn through direct engagement with communities. The primary focus of this paper is to reflect on the teaching and learning strategies that shaped the engagement between students, community, local government and developer and identify the key aspects of the student work and their engagement in the *Poona Futures* project that contributed to its success.

Studio pedagogy

The core approach of most design studio teaching is that of problem-based learning. It places a priority on student centred learning, both individually and as collaborators in teams and through alternating reflection in-action and on-action. All students are required to keep a Reflective Journal throughout the studio to encourage their development as reflective practitioners (*Schon*

1987). The Journal is reflected in those parts of the assessment criteria that deal with process as distinct from outcomes (Woods *et al* 2000).

The overall design of the problem-based learning environment follows closely on what Woods *et al* (2000) call the McMaster Problem Solving Strategy – engage, define the stated problem, explore, plan, do it and look back. A global objective is to develop the following graduate capabilities in our students:

- advanced understanding of social, economic and environmental issues in contemporary urban settings and integrating site planning skills in urban contexts;
- advanced applications of critical, creative and analytical thinking, problem identification and solving in design;
- professional graphic, written and oral communication skills; advanced research strategies, data/information retrieval and evaluation strategies to real world problems;
- advanced group collaboration and independent input skills to develop effective change outcomes; and
- active contribution to issues of social, economic, environmental and ethical responsibility in the urban context.

The organisational concept for these studios, predicated on effective community engagement, is that of *creative associations* (Armstrong 1999) which encourages exploration of new relationships between universities and communities. This exploration requires recognition of the differing forms of knowledge (theoretical, formal, informal, practical, local and tacit) and the ways in which communities can use their cultural capital and these different forms of knowledge to accommodate change. There is increasing recognition of the role of universities to engage in community networks and their potential to enhance new knowledge creation through the integration of *discovery, integration, application and teaching* (Boyer 1990) in real world contexts. The importance of innovation and learning in contributing to the economic, social and cultural foundation of local communities is also recognised.

Communities and universities working collaboratively can produce wide-ranging and unexpected benefits. Universities have a key role in supporting local creativity and enterprises and help embed learning in the wider community (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Importantly, the studio provides a space within which students and community participants are able to explore ideas in a creative, open and inquiring manner without committing the participants to implementing the outcomes.

Project selection

The criterion for selection of any of these studio projects is its ability to address the learning objectives of the unit which are designed to synthesise prior learning at a professional level of study. These objectives are to:

- encourage detailed understanding of the potential and challenges for achieving change in the existing urban form over time through the creative cooperation of the public and private sectors;
- provide a valid comparison among planning and design solutions for a range of approaches to achieving a given goal;
- ensure application and consolidation of investigative, analytical and site planning skills learned previously;
- improve design skills and communication techniques at a strategic scale; and
- develop skills in the resolution of landscape design and detailing closely related to its site context.

These learning objectives are supported by design objectives to:

- recognise the role and dynamics of the study site and its community in its historical and contemporary context;
- recognise the local and contextual cultural landscape and community values;
- respect all relevant historical links and references; and

- achieve a viable, functional and aesthetically valid landscape form and character for the precinct which integrates it into its larger context.

Project focus

The *Poona Futures* project, like its many predecessors over more than ten years, has a core emphasis on the complex theories of urban design as a means of dealing with change management and community values and expectations. The studios are based on the proposition that urban design which seeks to focus on place and is an integral part of place making can intersect with what might be broadly termed learning communities as a component of local economic development and the idea of sustainable communities. This affords a rich “space” or place to explore contemporary responses to global change. We do this as both trends, urban design/place making and community, seem to be converging. It is proposed that this theoretical space offers opportunities for communities to develop innovative design solutions for sustainable livelihoods in the context of local distinctiveness and local capacity; a space to speculate on place making. All projects have a strong requirement for students to embed Indigenous perspectives wherever possible and to respect the cultural values of the place by suggesting ways of dealing with change.

Structure of the Studio and the engagement process

The thirteen week studios are typically structured into three phases:

- initial group work (3 to 4 students per group) in the first four or five weeks to establish the community engagement, undertake site appraisal and develop a theoretical framework to intellectually underpin an expanded project brief and subsequent design exploration;
- continued group work for the next three weeks to develop a spatial strategic vision and policy/design guidelines for the whole project; and
- individual work in the final weeks where negotiated aspects of the group strategic framework are developed into detailed design proposals capable of implementation.

A key learning component of the initial phase is the initial engagement with the community followed by development of a Theoretical Framework and Project Brief.

Orchestrating the initial engagement with the community requires good lead times. This provides me with the time to visit the site and talk with key stakeholders to set up an operational plan. It also maximises the benefit of the first meeting between students and community by ensuring as many stakeholders as possible are present and that there is opportunity for the students to meet with them again in a variety of settings.

In the case of Poona the initial meeting between students and community took place at Poona. Studio staff and the students spent an extended weekend on location at the end of the second week of Semester. The first week was devoted to giving the students an initial project briefing, forming their working groups and giving them the space to absorb the plethora of information and data provided as part of the unit materials and prepare for the site visit.



Figure 4 – Students meet with Poona stakeholders in the Community Hall

Arriving mid afternoon on Friday after a four hour bus trip, the first activity was a public forum in the Community Hall where the students met with community members, local and state government representatives, the developer and key members of his senior staff. Facilitated by John Price and myself, this often animated discussion established a broad framework of the expectations of the various sectors represented (Figure 4).

Friday night at Poona is a regular open social night with barbecue and a licensed bar in the Community Hall. The students joined in this activity with typical enthusiasm and took community engagement to another level. They were also able to meet with significant numbers of the weekender population and thus widen their understanding of community perspectives. The Ratepayers Association had also sponsored a second social evening on the Saturday evening and advertised this to locals well in advance. This event continued the effective engagement process and the students departed Poona next day with an impressive “extended family” of contacts to work with. All day Saturday and Sunday morning were devoted to familiarisation with Poona and its surrounding environs.

The next phase of engagement was much more informal. Despite a three hour drive each way, all students regularly returned to Poona to flesh out their own understanding and maintain community dialogue. One group of four students liaised with the Ratepayers Association to develop a comprehensive preferences survey which they undertook over a single weekend. A total of 53 surveys were returned and this represents a significant sample of the existing population. The data returned provided valuable insights for both student and the Poona Community leaders.

The Semester then concluded with an exhibition of all of the student work on location in the Community Hall. This was staged over Friday afternoon and Saturday morning to once again embrace the Friday night social. An estimated 100 people closely examined the work over the two days. The audience included:

- the developer who spent a full half day going through all of the work;
- elected and staff representatives from the Maryborough City Council, including the Mayor;
- the regional officer of the state government’s Environmental Protection Agency;
- an elected representative from an adjoining Shire Council; and
- a wide cross section of the general Poona community.

So enthusiastic was the reception that after academic assessments were completed all of the student work was returned to Poona for an extended rotating exhibition. This process is still ongoing.

Limited release of intellectual property rights.

An important factor in making this kind of community engagement effective is a standard process of limited release of Intellectual Property that forms part of all of these “real world” projects. At the commencement of the project the students and the community group sign off on the following agreement:

I, _____ (full name) hereby agree to allow the Poona Ratepayers Association to use my planning and design work undertaken on the Poona Project in Semester 2, 2005 for purposes of ongoing community consultation and forward planning for the community provided that I am fully acknowledged as author of the work in any such use. This agreement does not include the direct implementation of my work as a constructed work unless written notification of intent to so do is given to me and a separate agreement is reached with me as to the terms on which such implementation is to be undertaken.

The importance of this provision cannot be overstated. By the time our students get to this stage of their studies they are almost all working in professional offices. There have been several occasions where student work has lead to direct implementation and the authors have been able to bring this work into their workplace, an important contribution to their professional development.

Developing the Project Brief

The development of a Project Brief supported by a focused theoretical framework is facilitated by a series of weekly structured studio exercises, supported by selected and general bibliographies designed to collectively engage students in the diversity of theory that might be drawn upon to underpin design. The *Poona Futures* project involved three such exercises. The first exercise asked the question, “*What is this town? Is it ... ?*” and allocated one of three thematic lenses to each group through which to explore the question. The lenses were: (1. *an economic enterprise based on its setting*; (2. *a symbiotic relationship between its people and its setting*; and (3. *a natural environment as part of its setting*. The objective of this exercise, which I have used in two previous studios which required an effective community engagement, is to expose the students to a creative environment in which to undertake the site and community appraisal in contrast to the dour mechanics of conventional site inventory and analysis. This also encourages them to think more laterally about the site’s potentials and challenges as an integrated social and natural environment. The use of bias via the lenses widens the potential investigative fields and the pool of potential ideas to draw from. Feedback from students over its three iterations indicates the strategy is very effective in achieving its objective.

The second exercise asked the students to consider the potential of the *Hannover Principles* (Donough 1992) to provide a set of protocols applicable to setting a sustainability agenda for Poona. The *Hannover Principles* were conceived to underpin an international design competition for Expo 2000 World Fair in Hannover, Germany. An important outcome from this was the clear recognition by most students that these protocols, although sound, were dated and that concepts of sustainable development had moved on. All of the work revealed a high degree of critical thought in proposing a more contemporary interpretation of the required protocols.

The third exercise required the synthesis of the collective outputs from the first two exercises into a conceptual Project Brief and Theoretical Framework to be adopted by each group.

Each exercise was presented in class with a required emphasis on graphic communication of ideas. The work was peer evaluated on a standardised 1 to 5 rating against three criteria addressing research, application and communication plus two open ended questions asking students to identify the best aspect of each presentation and what aspect could have been improved. The students valued this process as formative feedback. The total product became a shared open access on-line class resource for the remainder of the semester.

The studio products

The Strategic Plans produced by each group in the first half of the semester were required to set a long term vision for the future of Poona supported by clearly articulated objectives, implementation policies and design guidelines. Specific issues to be addressed included:

- forward planning for the progressive development of a town centre to support the growing population;
- subdivision design and construction that followed best practice in water sensitive urban design;
- stormwater runoff management through constructed wetlands in parkland to protect the Melaleuca wetlands from urban pollution;
- landscape planting guidelines that reinforced the character and biological values of the local flora and managed urban weed infestation;
- maximisation of walking paths and bikeway access to reduce car dependence in moving around Poona;
- increased launching and parking infrastructure capacity for trailer boats; and
- management guidelines for restoring a very degraded public domain along the foreshore.

The students were encouraged to discuss their ideas with the local people as often as possible as the work progressed. This recognises that an open atmosphere of working together towards a common goal is arguably the most important factor in successful community engagement for the simple reason that it encourages ownership of the outcomes.

The final phase of individual work had an entirely different purpose. Each student selected a specific element of the group Strategic Plan. These elements broadly reflected the specific site issues listed above. The task was to resolve the design of the selected element to the stage where it could be actually built by applying the guidelines set down by the Strategic Plan. This stage had two primary learning objectives:

- it required the students to respect the group decisions thus reinforcing the values of effective teamwork; and
- it provided the local community with a visual demonstration of a range of possible outcomes to consider and debate thus empowering them to take charge of their own futures from an informed position.

Outcomes achieved

A month prior to the final exhibition the developer met with me in my office to privately review the Stage 1 Master Plans produced by the nine student groups. By that time I had completed the group assessments and was in a position to walk him through the best of the work and discuss its implications for the remaining un-constructed components of the development. The material was able to demonstrate that it offered higher economic returns on his investment as well as better environmental outcomes. This meeting closed with the developer's undertaking to instruct his consultants to re-examine how the remaining subdivisions might be constructed in the light of the student work. This undertaking was reiterated to the students at the exhibition and included an undertaking to take appropriate measures to retrofit stormwater drainage infrastructure already in place to provide additional protection to the wetlands.

There was also a very positive reaction from the attending members of local government. The following text is an email dated 1 November 2005 to John Price from the local Maryborough City Councillor and relayed to me:

John, I just wanted to say that I was blown away by all that work. It certainly taught some of us a thing or two. Pity the other councillors couldn't see fit to come along - but their loss. I was impressed by the sustainable house and the swales - and as Wayne Sweeney said last night at our briefing meeting, what was being done by the students was a total change to our current practice. He was impressed as well. I do look forward to their plans being made available for us to get a better look. I have often said that we should have different plans for different areas and this may be a start. Barb also said tonight that we are obviously missing out on a great source and I think that she has in her mind that we must continue some dialogue with your contacts maybe for future projects. Anyway, I can only say thank you for starting this process and having the strength and power to push on, it is going to be a great lesson for some of us.

Regards

*Margaret Wroe
Councillor*

The jury is still out in terms of the longer term impact of the *Poona Futures* project as it is still too recent. However, the indications are that this may well be one of the most successful studios we have run in this genre in terms of both student and community learning. A lot of the success has to do with the enthusiasm and passion with which both students and community engaged both formally and informally throughout the semester. The passion was undoubtedly engendered by the nature of the place itself and the enthusiasm, which ultimately embraced the developer as well, stemmed from a wide community acceptance of the contribution the students could make to empowering it to influence future lifestyle. Just as importantly, acceptance by the students that local knowledge, including that of the developer, had a lot to contribute to their design explorations and growth as future professionals contributed its own momentum. Together, they creatively demonstrate why we engage in community engagement as an effective teaching vehicle (*Ramaley 2001*).

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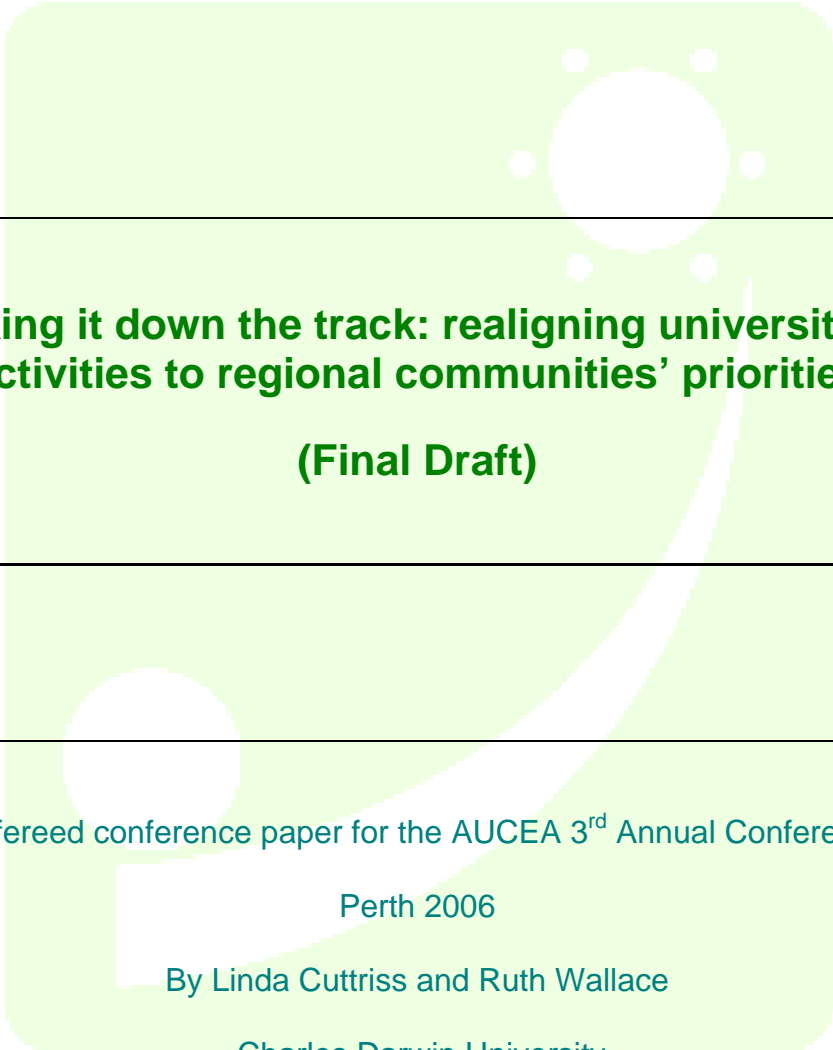
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**Taking it down the track: realigning universities'
activities to regional communities' priorities**

(Final Draft)

A refereed conference paper for the AUCEA 3rd Annual Conference,

Perth 2006

By Linda Cuttriss and Ruth Wallace

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Abstract

Engagement of regional universities in activities that are aligned to the needs and aspirations of communities has relied on individuals' connections, expertise and roles in the community. The result has been significant innovation and embedded practice for limited periods unrelated to the communities' futures. The focus on individual has also highlighted issues related to sustainability as the impact of individuals' leaving is experienced by the local community. In practice, learner-centred education has also directed educationalists' attention toward the individual and away from the individual's roles and identities in their community. To inform our analysis, this paper draws on an extensive literature review, relevant experience in regional campuses and emerging findings from a current study that emphasises the value of approaches that utilise a community-centred approach to the learner; one essentially connects the learner and community in a way that informs the learner's identities and role.

Developing approaches that re-align universities' focus to regional communities' priorities is essentially linked to understanding the individual, group or campus in terms of the communities that generate and sustain their identities. So long as individuals remain the focus, engagement is bound to remain dependant on an unsustainable resource base. A broader resource base has structures, processes and other people operating within a university-wide framework. We explore strategies to develop sustainable approaches to community engagement and embed these approaches in not only the rhetoric but the practice of a university at the regional and campus levels. These approaches focus on engagement at a regional level and invite individuals to participate and inform a broader systemic approach.

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Introduction

Purposeful and mutually beneficial engagement with communities enables universities to contribute more effectively to the economic vitality and social well being of their regions. Regional universities' engagement with their communities has generally relied on relationships developed between individual lecturers and community members through personal involvement in community groups, activities and events, often in their leisure time. Such relationships are thus between individuals rather than between the university and the community. This paper explores strategies to re-align universities' activities to regional community priorities through a more sustainable approach that embeds community engagement in the practice of a university at the regional and campus levels.

To inform the authors' analysis, this paper draws on an extensive literature review, relevant experience in regional campuses and emerging findings from a current study that emphasises the value of approaches that utilise a community-centered approach to the learner. The authors propose a reflexive, interactive model for embedding community engagement that invites individuals to participate and inform a broader systemic approach to engagement that includes structures, processes, staff and other resources that operate within a university-wide framework. The approach aims to produce an institutional framework that supports and is supported by the university's internal and external communities.

Significance

The growing emphasis on the importance of mutually beneficial relationships between universities and communities is evident in the academic literature, government reports, the emergence of the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) and the increasing number of community engagement conferences in Australia and around the world. Most universities in Australia now have an organisational unit focussing on community or regional engagement.

Universities contribute to the economic, social and cultural fabric of local communities and significantly add to the human and social capital of a region. They have a key role in generating the innovation and learning that underpins the knowledge-based economy and contribute to new ideas in the community that can lead to solutions to economic, social or environmental problems (Commonwealth of Australia 2003).

Falk and Golding (1999) found people living outside metropolitan areas have limited access to educational options in order to pursue their aspirations. People in regional areas have fewer opportunities to engage in rewarding meaningful work in the local area and less access to a diverse range of relevant vocational education and training than urban people. They indicate that these issues are compounded by lower literacy levels, reduced access to economic resources and less interaction with learning communities that support people in regional areas. Many regional students' success through formal education is reliant on their ability to access supportive learning communities outside educational institutions. Falk et al (1999) note the value of building relationships and learning support networks in regional communities and the importance of social activity through interpersonal relationships, group learning, trust and credibility in facilitating communication flow to achieve outcomes locally.

It follows then that teaching, learning and research that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities, business, industry and government can more effectively contribute to the social, cultural, economic and sustainable development of a region. Dual sector universities that provide vocational education and training as well as higher education are well placed to respond to a broad set of regional education, training and research needs. Engagement of regional universities in activities that are aligned to the needs and aspirations of communities has relied on individuals' connections, expertise and roles in the community. The result has been significant innovation and embedded practice for limited periods that is often unrelated to the communities' futures.

The focus on individual has also highlighted issues related to sustainability of the relationship between the educational institution and the community as the impact of individuals' leaving is experienced by the local community.

In practice, learner-centered education has also directed educationalists' attention toward the individual and away from the individual's roles and identities in their community. Through a community-centered approach to the learner one essentially connects the learner and community in a way that informs the learner's identities and role (Wallace 2006). Developing approaches that re-align universities' focus to regional communities' priorities is essentially linked to understanding the individual, group or campus in terms of the communities that generate and sustain their identities. So long as individuals remain the focus, engagement is bound to remain dependant on an unsustainable resource base. The teaching, learning or research activity may even cease if a key individual in either the community or the university leaves. A broader resource base has structures, processes and other people operating within a university-wide framework. A connection between the university and the community has the potential to understand the broader needs of the regional community and is able to develop networks and approaches that facilitate effective community engagement and outcomes.

Strategies for sustainable approaches to community engagement are needed to embed community engagement in not only the rhetoric but the practice of a university at the regional and campus levels. These approaches focus on engagement at a regional level and invite individuals to participate and inform a broader systemic approach.

Theoretical framework

Community Engagement

Universities have traditionally been perceived as 'ivory towers' where universities engage with society "at arms length". Information has travelled in one direction – from university to society (Gibbons 2005). There has always been a level of interaction between academia and society but there is now a significant shift towards universities as more responsive institutions with greater balance between teaching, research and engagement activities where outcomes are required to be responsive to emerging issues (Langworthy n.d.). Community engagement has been defined by the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA 2005) as 'a two-way relationship in which the university forms partnerships with the community that yield mutually beneficial outcomes'. This interactive engagement between universities and communities can increase the economic competitiveness and social well-being of regions while enhancing student learning.

The advent of the global knowledge-based economy has been a catalyst for a more purposeful engagement between universities and their regions. Knowledge is now the driver of productivity and economic growth (OECD 1996). Universities provide "pathways by which people and organisations come together to exchange ideas, solve problems or form partnerships - to recognise, value and lever their area's assets for mutual gain (Garlick 2000, pp. 10 -11)". Joint production of knowledge by society and science, gives rise to socially robust knowledge; knowledge that is relevant, reliable and beneficial to society (Gibbons 2005) and the quality of the interaction between research organisations and users is the key to effective outcomes (Scott-Kemmis 2005).

As places of learning, universities have a pivotal role in building the human and social capital that underpins community vitality and social well-being. Learning produces demonstrable changes in individuals' knowledge, skills and values; changes to outcomes achievable by groups and teams; changes at work, in communities, regions and subsequently at the societal level (Falk and Balatti 2004). Such changes are more likely to occur when learning links people to their communities and beyond, develops interpersonal trust and self-confidence and encourages informed decision-making based on commonly identified values (Falk 2000). As the (2002) Ministerial Discussion Paper, *Higher Education at the Crossroads*, asserted, "Higher education institutions need to be responsive to the social, economic and cultural needs of the communities in which they are located and foster a more active engagement with these communities [and that].....

Engagement needs to become an integral part of what the regional university does, not an adjunct to its existing functions" (Nelson 2002, p.23). Garlick's study of university-community engagement in Australia in *Engaging Communities and Regions* found that, "the relative engagement among the 16 campuses and 15 regions was a factor both of structure and operational influences at a university and regional level" (Garlick 2000, p. 105).

Embedding community engagement in a university requires a set of formal statements of commitment to engagement as part of core business. This is underpinned by a course structure that links with regional priorities, staff contracts that acknowledge engagement activities, faculty arrangements that facilitate interdisciplinary operations and budgetary allocations, mechanisms for consultation, monitoring, feedback and conflict resolution as well as accessible contact points for the community (Commonwealth of Australia 2003).

Individual Learner Centred Education

Education has moved the focus from teacher centred education to an individual learner centred approach. The focus in education on student learner centred learning has been developed to recognise the knowledge that students bring to educational contexts, the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning, creating and managing learning situations rather than being a knowledge source or controlling the learning situation. The learner has responsibility for his or her learning, and is essentially involved in learning through active participation in an environment that encourages growth and development and self awareness as a learner (Brandes and Ginnes 1986; Burge 1988; Burge and Howard 1990 Gibbs 1995, Jarvis 2004:165, McLean 1987).

The notion of learner centred education has been interpreted in many different ways (O'Neill and McMahon 2005) by educational theorists, institutions and practitioners. This has led to approaches that reflect a limited view of student centred education being implemented. Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003:322) found that although many institutions claim to be implementing a student centred approach, they are, in fact, not. As Simon (1999:42) notes educational institutions may find the development and implementation of a student centred learning pedagogy that only focuses on the individual learner and meeting their exact educational requirements an impossibility.

As Brandes (2005) asserts, his interpretation of learner centred education includes teachers as partners in learning. Of importance here is the recognition that learning is influenced heavily not only by the individual's resources and needs but the community in which they operate. Wenger (2004:2) describes communities of practice as social structures brought together by a commitment or interest in shared practice or knowledge base to interact regularly and develop their understandings, skills and knowledge. Together they engage in activities to understand and negotiate meaning. Wenger (1998) describes learning as social and experienced as part of social contexts. Learning experiences, then, exist as people utilize their relationships to engage in meaningful experiences where they negotiate their shared understandings of the world.

Communities of practice are about content – about learning as a living experience of negotiating meaning – not about form. In this sense, they cannot be legislated into existence or defined by decree. They can be recognized, supported, encouraged and nurtured, but they are not reified designable units (Wenger 1998:229).

The communities of practice that surround learners can have significant impacts on their perceptions and involvement in formal learning; this is particularly evident in regional communities. This is supported by a number of recent studies that explored the strong impact students, families, professional and local communities had on their engagement or lack of engagement in learning (Wallace and Mair 2005, Wallace and Turnbull 2005). Preliminary findings of a PhD study found the impact of community attitudes and values could influence students to avoid study, even when this had negative impacts of their financial and career prospects (Wallace 2006). An effective education institution's approach to education will necessarily engage with the communities that inform and relate to learners as students and members of their regional communities.

Vignettes

These issues are explored in two vignettes that describe common experiences for regional universities and communities. The vignettes are based on scenarios repeatedly observed in regional campuses of tertiary institutions across Australia; no individual or campus is intended to be specifically represented.

Vignette 1

The Bush University has a regional campus in Middletown, based in a comparatively large regional centre. The university offers a range of courses related to the course profile and teaching staff available. There is a high turnover of teaching, managerial and administrative staff, the majority of whom are on year long contracts and their length of stay in the town is dependent on a partner's employment or children's education. Local engagement is related to the individual staff members' local connections and involvement in local community events. Individual lecturers who have established connections through different community groups and events are seen to represent the university at different committees or events and are asked to advise community members about study or problems with courses while they are off campus and out of work hours. A lecturer with a high level of engagement in the local community is involved in industry groups or meetings relevant to their teaching area. They take advice from meetings and informal discussion and will try and reflect the community's ideas or preferences in their course delivery. There is little scope for a lecturer to make these changes systematic or implemented across the work culture and practice of the campus. The capacity of a lecturer to establish effective engagement with the community and implement the outcomes of this engagement is dependent on their own abilities. This work is often undertaken outside work hours, unrecognised in workloads or university processes and therefore not supported by professional development. When the lecturer leaves the university or the town, the changes and connections leave with them. There is often little time for hand over as new staff are difficult to locate in the community or attract to the town and their timeframes do not coincide. In this way the institutional memory is lost and the new teacher begins by committing considerable time to being engaged in the local community and ascertaining local views about the course.

Vignette 2

A regional campus of Walleville is the regional campus of an urban based university and offers courses in flexible delivery mode to students in a range of communities across the state and a few interstate. This forms the majority of the course delivery for a group of courses. As in Middletown, there is a high level of turnover of staff and course provision is determined in the urban centre. There are few local community members who have sufficient expertise, qualifications or interest to be employed as coordinating lecturing staff, occasionally as casual staff. Lecturing staff visit the majority of the state communities in which students are based once a year, interstate students, and their communities, are only visited if their location coincides with another activity such as a conference. Lecturers make their connections to communities through current and past students and, to a limited extent, through employers through work placements for students. University engagement in local communities is based on individual connections between staff and community members and written submissions when solicited. Planning is based on previous outcomes and not connected to other regional planning on a local or state level. Consultation with a range of diverse and dispersed centres is expensive and complex as it may incorporate communities with widely varied priorities. This may include pastoral, mining, Indigenous and armed forces communities of different sizes.

General comments

In both these cases, all decisions about course structure, design and choice are made by the central university in a major urban centre. There is little knowledge of the needs or capabilities of the regional centres' community or industry and they depend on previous outcomes to make plans. Consultation with regional community members is brief, based on the 'fly in fly out' model, where urban staff organise a meeting, arrive, meet with community members in a large group and then leave, all within a 24 hour period. There is no effort or time to establish reciprocal understandings to underpin strategic planning and support community engagement.

The university describes the forum as meeting their community consultation requirements and continue to plan their service delivery in the regional centre as before. Local staff will adapt the service delivery within the guidelines set by the major centre to reflect their understanding of the issues in their course area. The forward planning of the regional community is not integrated in an ongoing way into the planning for the regional centre. Community members are frustrated by repeating their position, preferences and plans to a succession of senior management and prefer to work with staff with whom they have established relationships over time.

Methodology

The process to develop an engaged approach to learning and educational institutions is informed by a reflective process that includes stakeholders as partners. Developing professional learning partnerships that engage practitioners in transformative learning incorporates the active management of knowledge. Knowledge management (Wenger 1994) is more than communication flows, interpersonal connections, document repositories and institutional and cultural norms about the value of knowledge. Of crucial importance is the active involvement of practitioners in the process, they own the knowledge and understand its implementation, what should be recorded formally, and in which forms are appropriate. Wenger's (1994) fundamental principles of knowledge management reflect these goals:

- Practitioners are the best people to manage the knowledge used in their activities;
- Communities of practice involve people who are committed to a shared topics and interact on a regular basis to learn about improving their practice;
- Communities of practice are best skilled at managing their knowledge;
- Communities of practice need to work with those external to their group as no community can completely manage another's learning nor fully manage their own.

The process draws on participative and reflexive traditions in research methodology. Higgs et al (2004:98) has developed a process to make sense of observations and ideas through a 'number of interactive, spiraling, reflexive, cognitive and communicative processes and actions (which) can usefully contribute to knowledge development'. The process starts with formulating an idea and then drafting an understanding of the concept or event. The evidence base for the knowledge is generated through evaluation and critiquing resulting in a sense of conviction or validation of the knowledge. The concept is then released for public critique so that it can be accepted and developed through interaction with the broader professional community (p. 97). The notions of developing ideas through reflexive practice is also used by Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) who describe participatory action research as optimally undertaken in collaboration with co-participants and that the stages described may not occur in the distinct stages as described. It is a social process that studies, frames and reconstructs social practices through self reflection. The notion of reflexivity in regional and university contexts is explored through the approach outlined below.

A Model for Embedding Regional Community Engagement

Sustaining learning partnerships with communities over the long term requires an institutional framework with structures, processes and resources that can capture, support, strengthen and reward engagement between academics, students and the wider community. The process of developing a community engagement framework is underpinned by a commitment to community engagement in the strategic directions of the university and is supported by dedicated staff and resources to coordinate and guide its development and implementation.

A reflexive approach provides a method of re-aligning a university's structures, processes and resources to embed engagement in a way that reflects the university's strengths and that values its staff and their knowledge of the communities with which they interact.

In the proposed reflexive model, the university engages in an interactive, internal consultation process to develop an understanding of what community engagement means, establish a baseline of existing information, policies and processes relevant to community engagement in the university and identify gaps and any required new structures, processes and resources to fill those gaps. The external community is engaged after the internal community has had the opportunity to reflect and develop practical options. The process involves a series of cyclic consultation phases where the outputs from each phase inform subsequent phases. The process is coordinated by a community engagement coordinator, supported by a variety of communication materials and methods and produces an emerging network of engaged staff.

There are four phases in the process commencing with the *Foundation Phase* which invites academics to participate in an email survey with questions that revolve around a preferred definition of community engagement, a database for capturing engagement activities and a monitoring and evaluation method. Emphasis is upon identifying existing structures and processes to avoid duplication of planning, reporting, evaluation and other processes. An academic from each School in the teaching and learning and research areas is engaged to "champion" the process among their colleagues by facilitating the information flow through their knowledge of individual staff, the structure of the School and the nature of the discipline. In addition to gathering and documenting the results of the survey, the coordinator conducts face-to-face small group sessions with the champions to begin the dialogue and tease out detail that may not be evident in the survey responses.

Phase two, the *Managers Phase*, invites Heads of School, Deans and Directors of the corporate units of the university to contribute their knowledge and suggestions in face-to-face meetings with the coordinator. They are provided with a summary of the results of the Foundation Phase and answer the same questions from their viewpoint as middle/upper middle managers of the institution. The results therefore include the managers' responses in the context of their own roles and functions with the added perspective of the academic staff.

Phase three, the *Framework Design Phase* involves synthesizing the feedback from the first two phases and developing options for a community engagement framework that embeds community engagement into the core business of the university. The options are informed by the consultation feedback and developed in the context of the university's strategic and operational plans, high level government policy and regional strategic plans and could include:

- Documentation of community engagement through a data collection and storage method that integrates existing reporting processes;
- Community engagement as an integral part of course structure, content, review, accreditation and reaccreditation processes;
- Community engagement skills included in graduate attributes;
- Arrangements that facilitate interdisciplinary activities and budgetary allocations;
- Recognition of community engagement in staff competencies, staff contracts, workloads, performance reviews and promotion;
- Incorporating community engagement in staff induction and professional development;

- Internal and external communications that facilitate community engagement;
- Monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms including guidelines and protocols and conflict resolution;
- Clear and accessible contact points for the community such as a community engagement coordinator, course advisory groups, industry engagement groups and regional reference groups;
- A Community Engagement (or similar) organisational unit;
- Formal recognition and celebration of partnerships.

The Framework Design Phase is developed through facilitated workshops or think-tanks that involve information technology academics and/or consultants, university statisticians, administrative staff that manage existing university databases, the engagement 'champions' and key academics and managers who have been identified from the previous phases as providing specific insight, expertise and or commitment to embedding community engagement in the university.

Phase four, the Feedback Phase cycles the options developed in the Framework Design Phase back to the staff, students and the wider community through public forums at each campus of the university. In addition, alternative opportunities to comment are provided through various means such as written submissions, email, telephone and/or a web-based forum. The community engagement "champions" encourage staff in their School to participate with their community partners in this phase and stakeholder groups are invited.

Finally, the *Embedding Phase* synthesises all of the results into the final options with an accompanying set of salient points from the Feedback Phase. The final options are submitted to the university executive for their final decision and instructions for implementation.

A critical aspect of the consultation is ongoing communication to raise awareness about community engagement, highlight the need for a community engagement framework and inform university staff and the community of the consultation process and how they can participate. Communication materials can include flyers, discussion papers, literature reviews and snapshots of existing community engagement activities at the university. Regular articles showcasing existing community engagement activities and updates on the consultation process are posted in a prominent position on the university website.

Communication also includes informal presentations and discussion sessions by the community engagement coordinator at Faculty or School meetings and with other relevant groups in the university such as the communications team, academic support, research groups and the professional development team. These sessions are included on the agenda of existing meetings as part of normal business. One-on-one update sessions with key members of the executive are conducted over the course of the consultation process to keep them informed and engaged in the process. An on-line community engagement forum can promote dialogue and become the foundation of an ever-expanding community engagement network.

Discussion

The key principles underpinning the proposed model of embedding community engagement are continued engagement and commitment of senior management, recognition of current and past engagement activity, alignment with strategic plans, policy, structures and processes, interactive and inclusive consultation, ongoing communication, accounting for the realities of regional life and allowing the process sufficient time.

It is essential that the process is supported by key senior staff to ensure they have a vested interest in its success and are aware of the development of ideas and negotiated commitments or priorities. This is achieved by ensuring that a role is established in the university to manage the community engagement process with significant brokerage and engagement experience and knowledge. This person coordinates the process and is able to communicate the progress and key ideas to key parties. This would include regular informal one-on-one discussions

throughout the process, including with members of the executive, Deans, Heads of School as well as key administrative staff.

It is expected that individual staff and regional community members have long term and reciprocal engagement commitments and histories. Recognition of current and past activity builds support among staff by valuing the work people have done and incorporating existing partnerships. A comprehensive audit of existing activities is highly desirable to provide baseline information for the engagement framework and for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Universities are already engaging in various ways with government, business, industry and community organisations through teaching and learning, research and community events. Data on engagement activities is captured in existing databases, newsletters, publications and on university web pages. There are existing Faculty or School plans, course accreditation, reaccreditation and review processes, research reporting and evaluation processes, staff performance review processes and external advisory groups. There are existing ethics procedures for research and there may be protocols for working with communities.

The process of developing the engagement framework identifies and aligns engagement activities with the university's strategic plan, structures and processes. The engagement activities of individual members of staff are thus documented, supported and recognised as fundamental to the university's operations. The engagement framework also provides for alignment with regional policy and planning contexts to ensure that engagement activities value-add to the university, the region and its communities.

Developing an institutional framework that is relevant, achievable and that has the support of academics as well as management requires involving staff in the process from the outset. A reflexive, interactive approach can provide a sense of ownership of the process and an understanding of the final outcome. The nature of the consultation creates an expanding network of engagement 'champions', a 'community of practice' developed through the process of understanding and negotiating through interaction and reflection.

Engaging university staff and community partners as stakeholders in the process may contribute to culture change that helps to embed the practice of engagement at the institutional level. By participating in a reflexive interactive consultation process, lecturers experience a practical application of learner centred education which they can then apply as a teaching method.

Ongoing communication that includes regular showcasing of current engagement activities on the university website can demystify community engagement, raise awareness through practical examples of different types of engagement and profile its importance to the university and community. It is a way of publicly recognising and valuing staff engagement activities, identifying potential mentors for other staff and helps build support and cultivate allies. A variety of communication methods including emails, one-on-one meetings, small group presentations, forums and seminars helps to engage different people according to their circumstances.

The process necessarily involves flexible consultation that is responsive to the stakeholder's ability to participate. It is likely that people will take different lengths of time to become engaged, so the process develops the best, rather than the first approach to community engagement. Adding the consultation to the agenda of an existing meeting can avoid making additional demands of staff and community members' time and may help to embed engagement as part of normal business rather than being seen as a separate activity.

It is also likely that staff turnover, other commitments and natural conditions can impact on the timeline. Seasonal factors such as wet season inaccessibility, cyclones and cultural imperatives such as "sorry business" limit the capacity of communities and regional campuses to engage at certain times. Primary producers have workload spikes that may exclude them from participating during busy periods. Incorporating the realities of regional life into the consultation process is an important aspect of building partnerships based on mutual respect. The learning that is developed throughout these phases builds an understanding of new ways of communicating and these are embedded in the institutional structures and culture of the university through its community engagement.

Conclusion

The engagement framework is developed through methods and approaches that engage academics in the process and foster ownership of the outcome. The reflexive consultation creates a community of practice within the university who can practice a similar approach in their teaching, learning and research with external communities. The framework enables academic staff to develop current and future relationships within a coordinated framework that provides clear processes and support mechanisms.

The process brings together the university's strategic directions, its planning, reporting, evaluation and communication processes and its existing engagement activities. The resulting framework thus links all of the university's core business areas in the context of its relationships with business, industry, government and communities. The process embeds community engagement by providing a framework with structures, processes and practices that are fundamental to the university's operations and that facilitate and support the development of sustainable partnerships through which the university can be responsive to regional communities' priorities for the benefit of the university, its students and the region.

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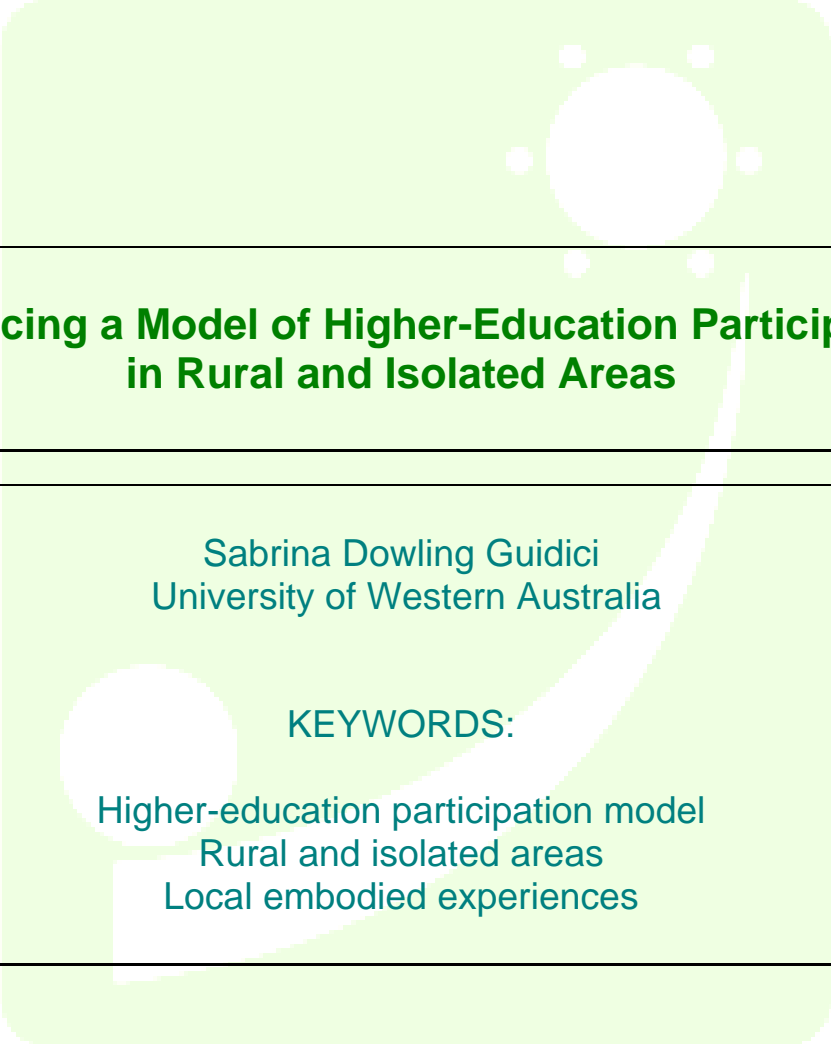
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Introducing a Model of Higher-Education Participation in Rural and Isolated Areas

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KEYWORDS:

Higher-education participation model
Rural and isolated areas
Local embodied experiences

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A U C E A

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a direction for a new conceptualisation and model of the influences on higher-education participation for people living in rural and isolated areas with little or no university presence. The model presents higher education as a result of a dynamic relationship between individual and external contexts and outlines the processes of higher-education entry, retention and completion. The model is presented as a framework for understanding the micro-macro links between the individual, institutional and societal factors in the broader living systems which constitute the context within which higher-education participation and community engagement occurs. The elements of the model are based on factors in a person's past and present situations and circumstances related to their individual attributes. The importance of the model lies in its attempt to capture the complexity of those factors and for creating a context for understanding, in which data analysis and policy development can be completed. It is argued that greater attention can be paid to their continuing participation, retention and dropout rates. Alternative ideas for broadening the assumptions of policy makers and practitioners are indicated. These are based on developing the local support mechanisms to bridge the gap between the individual and institutional factors affecting participation and community engagement. The paper concludes with the point that higher-education policy and practices in rural and isolated areas would benefit from including the informed and embodied experiences of local people.

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Introduction

People from rural and isolated areas in Australia are the most disadvantaged group in terms of higher-education participation and efforts for university-community engagement. Trend analysis of higher education indicates that the participation situation is becoming worse (DETYA, 1999, James et al, 2004) and inequities for disadvantaged groups remain entrenched with little indication of change (Coates & Krause, 2005). An additional problem for rural and isolated-area students enrolled in distance higher-education is that they are less likely to complete their studies and have the highest rates of non-completion (DEST, 2003, James et al, 2004).

Before proceeding, it is important to locate this paper as existing within the gap between the longer-standing debates on higher-education participation and the newer dialogues on university and community engagement. Whilst most of the research into the engagement between universities and *regional* communities has been patchy (Garlick, 2003), the literature on participation is rich and full of both theoretical understandings and practical experiences.

A nexus between higher-education participation and community engagement has been indicated by previous researchers (Stevenson et al, 2000). In examining the difference in participation rates between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, the report by Stevenson et al. (2000) states that much of the difference in participation appears influenced by “the way regional communities relate to the education system” (p17). More contemporary researchers in participation continue to urge the need for further investigation of the micro-macro links between individual circumstances and societal influences (Kwong, Mok & Kwong, 1997).

Improving higher-education participation in rural and isolated areas requires a different understanding of participation theory as these places lack higher-education institutions and the locational benefits they attract. Making up for the deficit of higher-education institutions indicates the need to adopt local structures and expectations (Lyons, Smuts & Stephens, 2001). In this paper, the case is made to adopt a significantly different approach (Coates & Krause, 2005) to increasing higher-education participation based on a more sophisticated and contextualised model that focuses on the interface between an individual's conditions and institutional conditions including the influence of societal conditions.

Methodology

Higher-education participation studies for about 30 years were more commonly explored utilising quantitative studies (consider Power et al., 1986; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Alston et al., 2001). Only in later years have qualitative studies been undertaken as more researchers acknowledged the need to consider a wider range of participation factors (Brookfield, 1992; Blair & McPake, 1995; Field, 1999). Added to these considerations were the practical problems encountered by participation researchers. Measurement of rural and isolated-student participation is problematic (Coates & Krause, 2005), and Teese and Watson (2001) found limited usefulness in national data collections to monitor post-compulsory participation. In addition, my observations from the two years I administered enrolment admissions for a course at the University of Western Australia revealed that either staff or students do not always accurately record the home address field. My own student records continued to show an incorrect address for an entire year despite two written requests to change it.

Data collection consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews of 27 individuals located in two remote-area towns in Western Australia. These towns are greater than 500 kilometres from the nearest university campus. In-depth interviews are useful when a researcher wishes to study past events (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and offers participants the ability to offer their meanings of experiences in both their earlier life and present circumstances (Kvale, 1996). The interview data was augmented by relevant literature focused on the factors affecting higher-education participation. The data was further supplemented by significant participant observation and reflection: since 2000, I have been involved in remote-area university studies as both a student and as a course-controller for an online post-graduate degree specific to rural and remote-area students.

Overall, the goal of this study was to offer the interview participants the opportunity to express what they identified as being reasons why they aspired or did not aspire to higher education, and why they are able or not able to pursue it if that was their goal. They were also invited to offer their knowledge of the existing infrastructure and programs that would help in higher-education studies; and to offer their insights as to what would be useful to establish in order to further higher education in their town. While each participant spoke from their own life circumstances and current experiences, their core observations clustered into distinct patterns of need.

In selecting participants I sought to include educational diversity and an awareness of educational needs in their local town. As such, participants were selected from the two most senior public-service organisations in these towns, which included in their organisational responsibilities, the planning and lobbying for education infrastructure. They were from either one of the two municipal councils (the Shires of Exmouth and Carnarvon) or the Regional Development Commission (Gascoyne Development Commission).

The participants had a range of educational experiences ranging from incomplete matriculation due to truancy, TAFE certificates, Bachelor to Masters degrees. Five were currently enrolled in distance higher-education. 14 were employed in regional development and 13 were employed in local government.

The next section briefly summarises the key literature which informed the conceptualisation of a participation model that evolved from this study. I then turn to the interview statements to draw out the common themes that emerged.

Understanding Higher-Education Participation: Theoretical Frameworks

Participation continues to be one of the most researched areas in post-compulsory education (Blunt & Yang, 2002) with the range of factors included in predictive models increasing. No models have been found however that addresses how higher-education participation works when there is no university located in an area. In attending to this shortfall, I attempted this preliminary study in order to develop an understanding of what factors are necessary to include in any further conceptualisation of higher-education participation in rural and isolated areas. The main conceptualisations of higher-education participation that have influenced this study have been the research of Boshier (1973), Power et al. (1986), Blair & McPake (1995) and Tinklin (2000).

Boshier (1973) originally hypothesised a six-factor model of motivational orientations in adult education. His work remained influential and was the basis of further empirical studies and theories (Blunt & Yang, 2002). Interestingly, despite Boshier's work having been widely cited, one of his concluding statements has been overlooked as he also pointed to the need for further research into a multifactorial model that included variables beyond those pertaining to the individual, stating: "Reasons for non-participation and dropout do not reside exclusively within the participant. The onus for matching participants and educational environments rests with administrators organising educational experiences." p.279

Power and colleagues developed a comprehensive participation model resulting from their longitudinal study of South Australian school-leavers (Power et al., 1986). Their work informed this study significantly but required further development as their focus did not include prospective adult learners therefore excluding the effects of employment and financial conditions. Their model also lacks considerations of retention and completion. All these factors have been identified by researchers using various disciplinary perspectives to further understandings on participation (Yang, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2000).

Indeed, research into motivational typologies, life stages, psychological characteristics are critical in designing and planning for higher-education participation but they provide only partial explanations of the phenomenon (Blair & McPake, 1995). Any conceptualisation that focuses upon single or limited variable factors, disregard the reality that the influences on participation decisions are many and complex (Blair & McPake, 1995; Yang, 1998) and not always a result of logical, linear decision-making, but the result of the interplay of multiple dynamics. So, from the literature, these 'multiple dynamics' can be summarised as involving three interrelated dimensions: individual, institutional and societal conditions. These are represented in Figure 1.

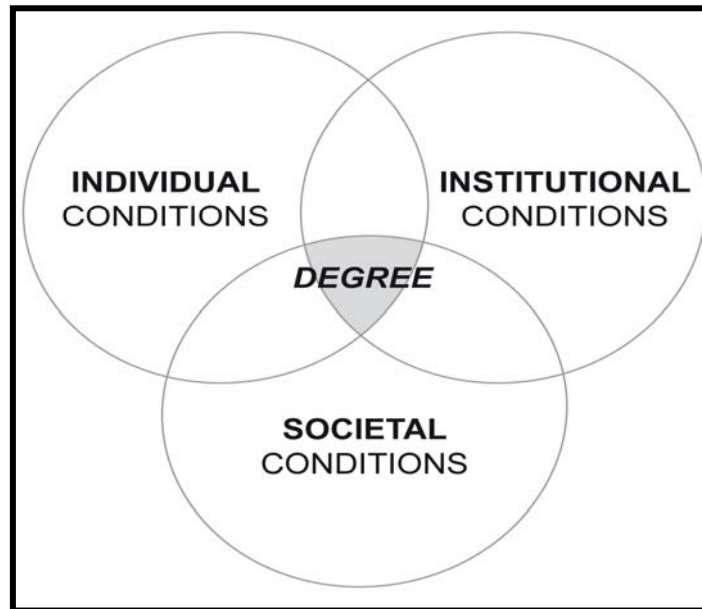


Figure 1. The three dimensions of participation necessary to complete higher education.

A positive interplay of variables in each of these dimensions results in certification of completed studies; for example a degree.

A Comprehensive Model for Rural and Isolated Areas

The implication for theory is the need for empirical investigations that specify the classes of variables within these three dimensions, that are successful in predicting higher-education participation and can provide the necessary linkage between the theory and practice (Brookfield, 1992; Livneh & Livney, 1999). A formal theoretical model best serves by addressing all the aspects of the phenomenon (Brookfield, 1992), including the personal conditions and institutional conditions (Blair & McPake, 1995). These conditions and their interplay then need to be investigated together with societal conditions where the influences of social relationships and values are included (Field, 1999). The model evolved through this research introduces a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the likely predictors of higher-education engagement resulting in higher rates of participation in rural and isolated areas.

In supporting the assertion that higher-education participation is the consequence of the three-way interplay of a person's personal circumstances, higher-education institutional policies and practices, and societal conditions; the thesis of this study highlights the need to tease out directions in which to address those factors likely to affect both higher-education demand and supply. This model, illustrated in Figure 2, allows for each dimension to be unpacked and explored more meaningfully within the context of rural and isolated areas with no higher-education institutional presence.

It is important to note that much of the literature focuses on variables affecting individual student participation, not the broader issues of engagement between the student and higher-education institutions and their local communities where the most immediate influence of societal conditions is mediated. In the balance of this paper, I report on the outcomes of my exploratory research study which begins to explore these issues. The following interview quotes help to illustrate some of the factors that point to concepts identified within the literature. It lies however, beyond the scope of this paper to examine and test each factor. Rather, the focus is on the way the interview participants express the problems of accessing, or remaining in, higher education whilst living in their remote-area town. Although I examine the participation variables within the context of the three dimensions identified in the literature – individual, institutional and societal conditions – these are not exhaustive. The emphasis is to highlight the need to attract attention from policy makers and higher-education practitioners, to the most likely directions for advancing both theory and practice in rural and isolated areas

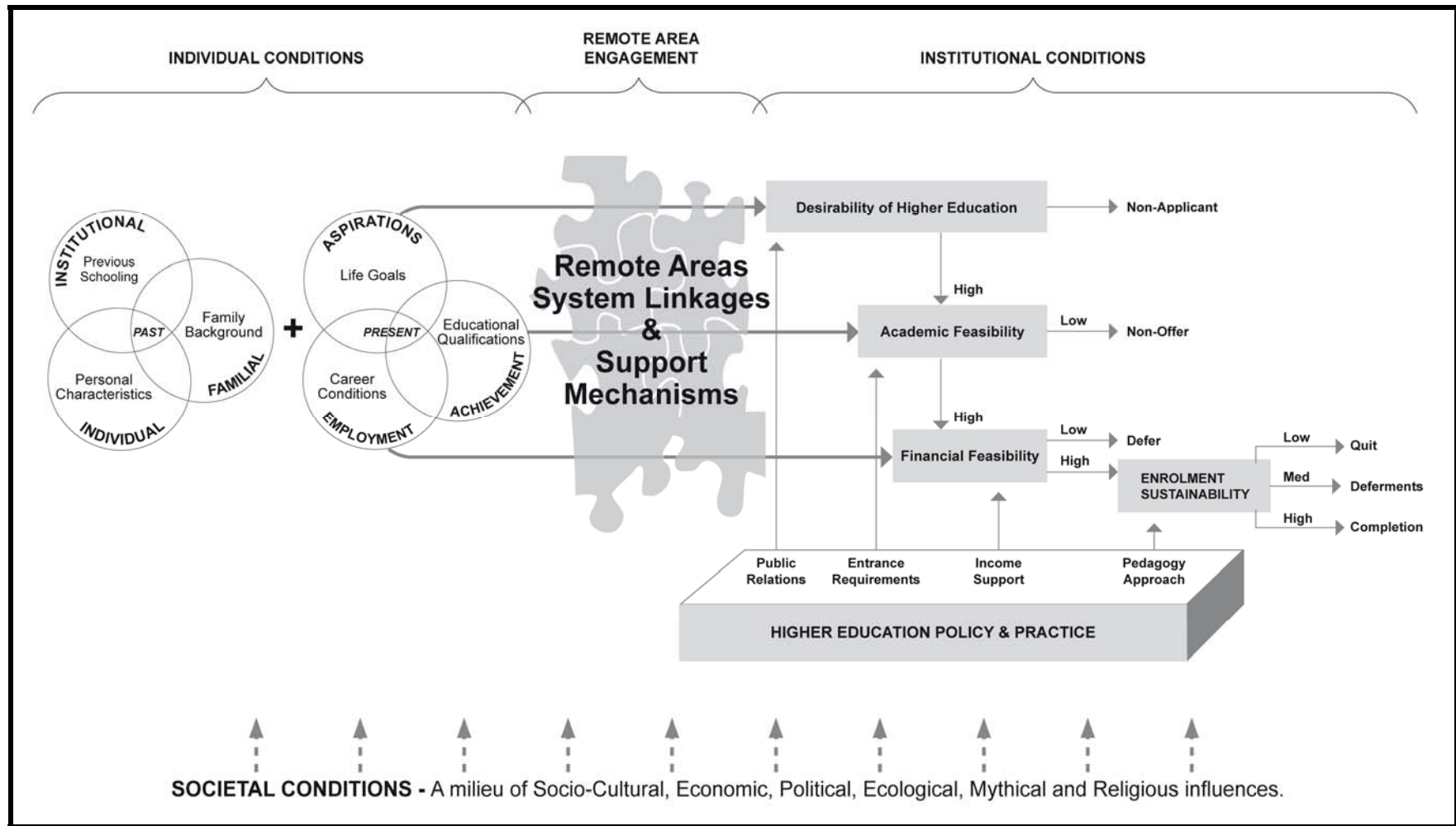


Figure 2. A higher-education participation model conceptualising directions for remote-area engagement

Listening to Local Voices: Key Directions for Remote-Area Engagement

Being attentive to the different local voices allows the opportunity to reveal existing higher-education participants and also existing types of expectations about what is needed. This closely aligns with the assertions of Garlick (2000, 2003), which point to modifying government and higher-education institution policies to improve the engagement between *existing* participants and their local communities.

As I listened to the individual accounts of lived experiences and actual higher—educational situations in their towns and surrounding areas, several themes emerged. These included relationships with other students, faculty and community; long-distance pedagogy, finances and access to course information. Refocusing these into broader conceptual understandings resulted in them being classified into the three participation dimensions of: individual, institution and societal conditions. The text data-analysis yielded information on factors as diverse as family, culture, employment, schooling history, enrolment policies, aspirations and mentoring. This is not an exhaustive list of factors identified but serves to give an initial indication of issues raised. They are reported in the next three sub-sections.

Individual Conditions

Understanding individual characteristics provided the basis for early theoretical models explaining participation in higher education (e.g. Houle, 1961; Boshier, 1973). Including individual conditions has persisted to contemporary models (Blair & McPake, 1995).

Cultural norms mediated through the family are significant influences but their effects decrease over time. Some interview participants have waited till they were more independent of their family before pursuing and completing their degrees:

"My mum's comment was 'Oh, we've got a uni student in the family!' And I've had no support from her ... she doesn't see any benefit in having it ... I think it's hard when you don't have your family support." Tara

"A son with a trade certificate to then go on to do a diploma in something totally unrelated was – 'What's going on here?' and then do a degree was quite a shock." Dennis

A cultural factor of note that emerged from the interviews was the role of family attachment. This was emphasised by one interview participant:

"I didn't want to leave Carnarvon. Like I didn't want to leave my home ... I want to have family support around me." Leanne

Another reflected on the struggle he had observed with people he knew of Aboriginal or Vietnamese descent:

"A classic example is the Vietnamese and Aboriginal community, giving them opportunities to study locally. Keeping strong the family networks without making them go further afield which is so critical for them." Simon

Lower educational aspirations appear a feature of rural areas particularly those with poorer socio-economic profiles (Marion et al., 1991; Stevenson et al., 2000). Those people who do aspire to higher education tend to leave rural and isolated areas:

"At the age of 17 I knew that I wanted to see something a little bit different. Certainly the job opportunities besides working in the tuna factory were pretty grey for the rest of my life. Besides, I had natural academic abilities that allowed me to do other than digging holes or throwing fish." Simon

Such people rarely return as the employment opportunities requiring tertiary qualifications tend to be in metropolitan areas:

"I suppose in my ... experience in the northwest, says to me that there is not a huge amount of emphasis on post compulsory education. There's that part of the community that sends their kids away and then they disappear off the plot forever. Which is really sad." Sam

"It's good to go and get your schooling or whatever and return back, but if you come back to a place you gotta be active, you've got to be able to work in that community. And that's pretty important." Leanne

Others who didn't pursue higher education commented that they didn't receive much information or encouragement especially if they were from rural schools:

"I think that that was what the problem was, I don't think that the teachers actually gave enough credibility to further education." Kasey

On a positive note, not all people with a disadvantaged background are precluded from participation. One interview participant successfully completing his undergraduate studies revealed he had no formal schooling at all:

"I had turbulent schooling, I went truant, so basically I just dropped off the system". Kent

Institutional Conditions

Institutional policies and practices of both higher-education government and university sectors are significant influences (Blair & McPake, 1995). Existing efforts are often fragmented between the universities themselves and between the different levels of government. There continues to be a degree of tension between government levels creating further barriers to the cooperation necessary to coordinate policy making between the State and the Commonwealth (Taylor et al., 1997). One interview participant noted the perceived link between social behaviour and educational achievement:

"You've got people missing education all along the way and sit on their bums and do nothing and then they get involved in crime and then you end up with a social problem - from my point of view the government, Federal and State government, are just delinquent in their inability to grasp this problem." Sam

The universities that cater to external students do not have the support facilities to maintain retention rates equal to those attending on campus. One interview participant was undertaking their degree with no library access due to the way the university administration had classified his enrolment status:

"I can't actually get access because of my situation, because they don't offer correspondence, I'm enrolled as an internal student. So if you're an internal student you don't have access to the library they have for external students because when it comes up on the computer, it says I'm an internal and it says they can't send me the books." Kent

Another interview participant noted the regular problem of universities providing part external – part internal courses:

“Curtin University were just a little bit too inflexible. They did say they could offer it externally but half the year you’d still had to be on campus, doing practical lab work and stuff like that, which made it, especially for aboriginal people who don’t like leaving home some of them, it was hugely difficult.” Ross

Most of the interview participants raised the issue of needing access to mentoring or support group programmes. They felt that mutual support through interaction with teachers and fellow students was a prime consideration in their propensity to enter higher education:

“I think it would be a good idea to watch lectures online ... because there is limited use by reading about it ... Also tutorials are of great benefit and to participate with a group ... you absorb so much ... from interacting in your studies you know if you don’t have someone giving you that feedback and challenging you, you may be going down the wrong track.” Rianna

“I just need the stimulation by people being there. I need the competition so doing it online or correspondence is just not enough.” Francis

“The worst part about it. Having to sit down with no tutor.” Kasey

Nothing in the interview responses indicated a satisfaction with approaches to distance education as perceived and experienced in Carnarvon and Exmouth.

Societal Conditions

Of the three sectors, this is the least investigated (Reay, 1998) possibly as a result of the acknowledgement to pursue research in this area arising in the later stages of the history in participation research. These more contemporary studies (consider Yang, 1998; Johnston et al, 1999; Tinklin, 2000; Jang & Merriam, 2004) have focused on aspects of societal conditions yet none were found to encompass a holistic approach to the phenomenon of higher-education participation.

The overlap between societal and individual conditions is obvious when considering the influence of socio-cultural variables. An interview participant commented on the lack of computing skills in her extended Aboriginal family:

“I know that there’s like a lot of like Aboriginal people just don’t use computers and they just don’t go out and use things. But if they’re shown the benefit of using certain facilities they will go in and use them. There’s a large gap there with you know like, technology and the community.” Leanne

Aspiration levels perceived to be associated with poorer socio-economic groups were also noted as a significant factor to deal with:

“If your children go the high school in the country you pretty well know that there’s going to be a fair ratbag influence in there and that the children in there generally come from families who have less drive or have less opportunity to see their children develop, for better jobs, better type of career. I don’t know whether I’m right or wrong with that comment but that’s the way I feel. Cause I’ve lived in Tom Price, Parabadoo, Onslow and Exmouth as well. The kids that are left in the high school up here, probably won’t achieve as high as those who get sent away.” Kent

The perception of slow social change and its challenges for long-distance education was noted by another interview participant:

"I think that it's probably just the same today as it was in 1970." Kasey

Another also confirmed his perception that the situation was not going to improve for him:

*"I guess in the short term I don't expect a lot of amazing things happening from the community in terms of being able to help me do my study. I'll beaver away myself."
Simon*

He went on to reflect on possible directions for positive change:

"Possibly trying to also get other people in town to be aware of maybe some of the problems, providing moral support ... perhaps just giving symbolic support to understanding the advantages of hanging in there, what it can mean individually and what it can mean to the wider community." Simon

It is this challenge of integrating the individual, institutional and societal dimensions of participation in a rural and isolated setting that can provide the impetus for a new phase of community-university engagement research focused on such isolated students. The need for a comprehensive framework for remote areas system linkages and support mechanisms is established in the concluding discussion section.

Remote Areas System Linkages and Support Mechanisms

To date, relying solely on either Australian government or university lead policy reforms in increasing rural and isolated areas' participation rates has not lead to an improvement. In slightly more than a decade, Australian universities have become more 'international' in focus (Fitzsimons, 2002) as opposed to growing their service delivery in rural and isolated areas. Contemporary policy development in Australian government is dominated by a neo-liberal ideology that promotes the role of market mechanisms to shape social and economic life (Pusey, 1991; Ozga, 2000). The disadvantage for people in rural and isolated areas is their inability to provide the necessary 'critical mass' to provide the economies of scale required to attract consideration (Alston and Kent, 2003).

Despite this seemingly bleak outlook, there is recognition at both the Commonwealth and, at least, the Western Australian government levels, of the need to adapt delivery approaches to teaching and learning to accommodate external students (DES, 2002). Some researchers are also contributing to the search for new approaches including Fitzsimons (2002) who suggests that policy makers need to revalue the present arrangements of education. Reviewing existing community conditions is also important (Haas, 1992). This allows for the identification of the gaps in the provision of locally-based support. To realise the aspirations of a person requires the investment of time, energy and resources from both the individual and others. The importance of the role of the local community is the extent to which it mobilises such support. That is, "conditions in the community interact with the imaginations of the students' to realise their life goals" (Haas, 1992, p1). Essential initiatives would include the necessity of ensuring that the community signal commitment to education by providing scholarships, recognising academic prowess and celebrating academic achievements (Hass, 1992).

Yarnit (2000) also notes that it is not useful to rely on traditional higher-education processes and has worked on the concept of 'Learning community partnerships'. Such efforts have met with various levels of success and Yarnit admits that it is too early to confirm whether such arrangements are "merely ancillary developments" (2000, p85) to traditional learning delivery systems. He states that such arrangements require further work to clarify suitable infrastructures, planning, quality and accountability frameworks, and therein lies further direction for new research.

A sobering reminder of the need to have any change adopted by Universities is offered by Cummings et al. (2005). They state that university administrations need to be open to evidence-based proposals and willing to take on and to fund partially implemented changes, which is not a common phenomenon in Australia. Again, Yarnit provides positive insight from his case study work, noting that: "in practice,

change has taken the line of least resistance and has taken place at the margins, leaving the mainstream relatively unchanged" (2000, p16). This again points to the possibility of answers emerging from the local level or a 'bottom-up approach'.

Cummings et al. (2005) offer the notion of a 'middle-out' approach that also allows for the involvement of 'top-down' approaches together with those from the 'bottom-up'. The findings of my research indicate the need to overcome the continuing disjuncture between the expectations and motivations of government and institutional functionaries and those of local residents. Facilitating interaction between these actors may allow larger-scale policies to enrich participation that are informed by local, embodied experience. The value of my research lays in the collection of some of this information through the use of the in-depth interviews.

Conclusion

Involvement at the local level implies a need for policies to be informed by local, embodied experience which implies a lack of control by institutional policy-makers as they cannot control the outcomes. This in turn indicates an iterative process of policy formation and practice development (Lyons, Smuts & Stephens, 2001).

Further research in such policy formation and practice development is needed. This paper concludes with the suggestion for new research to understand how to include local-level linkage mechanisms between the three participation dimensions including support mechanisms, personnel and facilities to compensate for the lack of higher-education institutional capital. The aim would be to contribute to the development of systemic inclusion of sustainable local participation from rural and isolated areas.

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Theme - embedding community engagement

The challenges of embedding engagement in Melbourne's West

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A U C E A

Abstract

Victoria University is committed to becoming an international leader in engagement to reflect its mission to transform the lives of individuals and develop the capacities of industry and communities within the western Melbourne region and beyond through the power of vocational and higher education. In order to implement the University's vision for engagement and development of partnerships as expressed in its Engagement Plan, an Office for Industry and Community Engagement (OICE) has been established. The principles guiding the work of OICE encompass respect, shared values and aspirations, shared knowledge and collaboration.

This paper analyses the challenges for the University of embedding engagement both externally and internally. The challenges of embedding engagement externally include VU's special mission to improve the lives of the many communities in the western region, particularly through providing student access and success, and improving its performance and reputation for excellent teaching, research and training, as these have the potential to transform the lives of people in the West.

The paper argues that a particular challenge in embedding engagement is to effectively communicate the University's vision internally. The Office for Industry and Community Engagement has addressed this challenge through a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy that includes an e-news, brochure and website; development in consultation with organisational units of an engagement database; and appointment and training of relationship managers.

The paper explores how VU as an engaged university will harness the diversity of Melbourne's western region as a source of knowledge, cultural capital and creativity to produce graduates who are equipped to work in an increasingly internationalised economy, and to link with its other communities nationally and internationally. It also explores how the University will build strong partnerships with external stakeholders that are strategic, well supported and the basis for sustaining relationships that have tangible and mutual benefit.

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A snapshot of Melbourne's West

Victoria University is committed to becoming an international leader in engagement to reflect its mission to transform the lives of individuals and develop the capacities of industry and communities within the western Melbourne region and beyond through the power of vocational and higher education.

The Western Region that VU serves is characterised by low income, high cultural diversity, and poor infrastructure. It covers six local government areas, extending from Maribyrnong in the inner West to Wyndham in the south, Melton – a satellite city on the urban fringe, and Brimbank in the North West with a large CALD community. During the 1970s and 1980s Melbourne's West lost many of its large manufacturing businesses; these were gradually replaced by smaller specialised manufacturers. While manufacturing continues to be a major employer in the region, the property and business services, transport and storage, health and retail sectors are growing employers. In 2001 the West had 16 per cent of Melbourne's population (628,575 residents), 15 per cent on Melbourne's manufacturing employment and 11 per cent of Melbourne's jobs.

There has been strong population growth based on significant urban renewal projects on old industrial sites, gentrification of the inner West, and new suburban growth on low cost land with easy proximity to central Melbourne. Some key trends in Western Melbourne are:

- Rapid population growth in some parts of the region
- Growth initially driven by population growth and private investment
- Extensive rather than intensive economic growth
- Low investment in knowledge industries and public infrastructure
- Increased social and economic diversity; overall low social capital
- Limited educational performance, including high rates of students not completing secondary schooling and consequent poor employment outcomes

The challenge for the region – and for VU as the major post-secondary education provider in the region – is to ensure that it moves to more balanced, knowledge intensive growth. At present the overall level of social capital is low compared with either Melbourne or Victoria.

Social characteristics of Western Melbourne, per cent

	West	Victoria
One-parent headed families, 2001	16.2	14.8
Unemployment rate, 2001	8.7	6.8
Recipients of family tax payment A – max rate June 2003	30.3	26.5
Language other than English spoken at home	35.3	20.0
Managers and Professionals 2001	21.7	28.7
Use Internet 2001	34.9	41.1
Bachelor's Degree 2001	11.2	14.3

Source:
Department of Human Services 2003, *Victorian Local Government Areas, Statistical Profiles*; and
ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing

As the above table demonstrates, the social characteristics of Western Melbourne clearly explain the low social capital of the region. The relatively higher percentage of one-parent families, higher unemployment, a higher percentage of families in receipt of educational maintenance allowances, and the significantly higher percentage than the state average of residents who speak a language other than English at home, all suggest large pockets of social and economic disadvantage in the West. Add to this lower levels of early literacy in the early years of primary school – although they do improve substantially by the end of primary school - and VCE scores that are the lowest for any region in the State and a picture emerges of significant educational disadvantage.

There are important implications of the West's low social capital for the University's access and success strategy, discussed later. To ensure greater participation and successful outcomes of students from the region VU needs to:

- Work more collaboratively with schools in the region to enhance student achievement before they complete VCE
- Provide access strategies, and a solid platform of good teaching and monitoring that can achieve good outcomes
- Acknowledge that economic pressures and academic vulnerability determine students' solutions (many prefer TAFE courses because they need to work, and often to not aspire to higher education courses)
- Provide courses that are strongly vocational, with a focus on employability and flexible delivery (students need to work)
- Design HE courses with an employment emphasis, and good strong interaction and feedback in the teaching process
- Enhance VU's reputation for teaching and outcome strength.

VU's Mission in and beyond the West

VU's origins go back to 1916 when the Footscray Technical School was established. By 1958 this had become Footscray Technical College, and a decade later Footscray Institute of Technology. Victoria University of Technology – and since 2005 Victoria University – was established in 1992 by an Act of State Parliament with a special mandate to serve Melbourne's West. VU is one of five dual sector universities in Australia, four of them located in Victoria. It has eleven campuses mostly spread across the western region. The West is passionate about VU and the communities adjacent to each of its suburban campuses have a sense of pride and ownership of their campus.

VU's student population reflects the diversity of the region. The student body comprises people from diverse backgrounds, including 40 per cent from families whose first language is not English. Many are the first in their family to attend University (Wiseman and White, 2005). While the West is one of the fastest growing regions in the state, participation in higher education is low, at only 85 per cent of the Melbourne average.

Implications of the region's low social capital for Victoria University include:

- Contributing to the process of lifting the region up the value chain to higher productivity and more knowledge intensive jobs through helping to build the human and social capital for participation in the knowledge economy, and co-location of significant research infrastructure
- Taking advantage of the special opportunities arising from the structural change in the region; for example logistics and supply chain management for training and research
- Benefiting from this evolutionary growth and development.

All parts of VU share a profound commitment to the West. Much of the work of the past three years has been devoted to forging a common set of values – now expressed in its Strategic Plan – and a common understanding of the way forward.

Engagement has been extensively explored as a means of expressing the two-way involvement of VU with its region and with local-global relationships that exist among the culturally and linguistically diverse communities of the West. VU has also participated actively in the national debates about engagement as a legitimate function of Australian universities. VU is a member of the nine New Generation Universities Group within Australia, and the US Coalition of Metropolitan Universities, which both share an interest in engagement.

VU's commitment to engagement in a broader context is important. Together with other 'New Generation' universities, VU prides itself on being at the forefront of engagement and access. As

Barbara Holland observes:

By far, the early adopters of engaged scholarship around the world are the younger, smaller, more locally oriented public and private universities with comprehensive programs, including some graduate degrees. Many of their students come from and tend to remain in the immediate geographic area; their graduates form a future leadership of the communities they serve (2005, p 5).

While the University has traditionally had strong links to its regional and metropolitan industry and community, as well as strong international links with partnerships such as:

- Education: 70 schools in the region, the Local Learning and Employment Networks, the Western Metropolitan Region of the State Department of Education and Training, and Learning and Innovation West, a regional lifelong learning network
- Business: IBM – for education in remote locations, Connex – transport training, Toyota, Satyam – Indian international company for IT
- Water: City West Water – the region's major water retailer
- Health: VicHealth and Western Health
- Arts: Footscray Community Arts Centre
- Recreation and Sport: Western Bulldogs, Racing Victoria

In the past three years engagement has been embedded in all the University's activities in a planned and intentional way. As Professor Elizabeth Harman commented at the 2005 AUCEA Conference: "Engagement represents a new way of crossing the traditional distinctions between research, teaching and civic responsibility".

Embedding Engagement

i. Establishing the Office for Industry and Community Engagement

This paper analyses the challenges for the University of embedding engagement both externally and internally. The challenges of embedding engagement externally include VU's special mission to improve the lives of the many communities in the western region, particularly through providing student access and success, and improving its performance and reputation for excellent teaching, research and training, as these have the potential to transform the lives of people in the West.

In order to implement the University's vision for engagement and development of partnerships as expressed in its Engagement Plan, an Office for Industry and Community Engagement (OICE) was established in January 2006. The Office is located in the Division for Industry, Research and Region and co-located with the Offices for Research and Industry and Postgraduate Studies and with Institutes and Research Centres.

The Office is a key strategy in establishing and positioning Victoria University as an engaged University that articulates the following values:

- Knowledge and skill, and critical and imaginative inquiry for their capacity to transform individuals and the community
- Equality of opportunity for students and staff
- Diversity for its contribution to creativity and the enrichment of life
- Co-operation as the basis of engagement with local and international communities
- Integrity, respect and transparency in personal and collaborative action; and
- The pursuit of excellence in everything we do.

OICE considers that University engagement is about relevance and transformation and functions at individual and organisational levels. It includes at one level the opportunity for students to relate to the knowledge and skills they acquire within their courses. Equally, it includes the point at which staff and students of the University, industry, community, the professions, government and the public come together in partnership for mutual benefit. Engagement is more powerful still when the context in which the partners work and the goals they achieve enable not just their own transformation but that of the educational, social, economic and environmental context of the West. Engagement is at its most powerful when the University's partnerships attract state, national and international attention as well as serving the region, and external partners can see in the transformation of the West opportunities for them to impact on future directions in VU courses, research and graduate outcomes.

The principles guiding the new office are that:

- Engagement is based on mutual respect for the strengths that each partner brings to the relationship
- Engagement is based on shared values and aspirations of the University and community and industry partners
- Engagement encompasses the development, exchange and application of knowledge, information and expertise for mutual benefit
- Engagement demonstrates a strong commitment to and practical expression of networking and links
- Engagement encompasses collaboration with communities, industries and other universities to explore, implement, fund and measure engagement policies and strategies.

These principles recognise that authentic engagement is an ongoing two-way dialogue. They also recognise that Universities can only enter into genuine engagement when they can judge how to lead and how to follow (Watson, 2003), when they can learn to listen (Forrant, 2001) and when they are prepared to acknowledge other ways of knowing:

For one to actually engage with an-Other, one must genuinely attempt to appreciate and understand the particularity of that Other and respond appropriately to her or him, and vice versa. ...those who participate in community engagement activities at the university level must seek to appreciate different ways of knowing and being and be open to multiple modes of engagement and power sharing (Australian Consortium on Higher Education, Community Engagement and Social Responsibility, 2004).

The underpinning for the work of OICE is developing and enhancing partnerships in and beyond the western region. The principles for developing partnerships were developed and approved by the University in late 2005, before the Office was established. These are that:

1. Partnerships enable Victoria University to achieve effective local, national and international links across community, industry and the professions
2. Partnerships provide a framework for professional learning for Victoria University students and staff and for external partners
3. Partnerships may start as small and one-dimensional and develop as more complex and multi-dimensional
4. Partnerships provide a basis for mentor relationships for all partners
5. Partnerships model a collaborative orientation in learning and teaching and in research and development
6. Partnerships by their very nature are mutually beneficial relationships in which all partners share and benefit
7. Partnerships involving early stages of education and training set patterns for future initiatives and partnerships
8. Partnerships encourage the development of broader (local, national and international) understandings and reflection by all partners
9. Partnerships are dependent on individual relationships, which need to be mediated through standardized protocols and guidelines which require commitment to Victoria University values and branding and as appropriate acknowledge the partnership's commercial focus
10. Partnerships must be jointly negotiated, implemented and evaluated by all partners

The Director and four staff of the Office have been drawn from other areas of the University and bring to their roles expertise and vast experience in engagement with the arts and issues of access and participation, industry, schools and educational innovation, local and state government, not for profit organisations, and CALD communities. The staff of OICE engaged in ongoing discussion in the early months around the nature of the Office. They are clear that its role is primarily facilitative, even though individual staff are involved in particular engagement initiatives and networks regionally, nationally and internationally. Its focus is to assist the two-way interaction between external partners and VU staff and students. The key role of the Office is facilitation of the implementation of the University's Engagement Plan.

It was agreed that the function of the Office for Industry and Community and Engagement was therefore to:

- Ensure the implementation of the University's Engagement Plan
- Implement the principles for Partnerships outlined above
- Provide a welcoming public face for the University's engagement strategies, as well as a clear entry point individuals and organisations seeking to engage, and enable a more integrated approach to responding to external requests in a timely manner
- Embody a strong commitment to and practical expression of networking and links
- Continue to define, refine and redefine the meaning of engagement with knowledge, with individuals and with organisations as scholarly and transformative practices
- Collaborate with other Universities nationally and internationally around the exploration and implementation of effective engagement policies, practices and strategies and their funding and measurement.

While the University in the past had demonstrated best practice in engagement with industry and the professions, OICE established a new framework for engagement. It was no longer an activity undertaken by one individual or a single organisational unit, often in isolation from other parts of the University and generally not known and therefore not acknowledged by senior management. But in order to provide this welcoming face for engagement both externally and internally, OICE from the outset had to demonstrate that it could add value to existing arrangements. It was agreed that the Office could only add value if it:

- Is welcoming and positive
- Is alert to opportunities
- Ensures that all its activities are examples of engaged University practice
- Has a wide ranging understanding of skills required both inside and outside the University that constitute potential partnerships
- Is responsive in facilitating arrangements to enable these partnerships to be initiated and developed
- Can document, monitor and evaluate all University engagement activities
- Can provide the training required to underpin successful partnership development.

ii. Embedding engagement externally

The University is clear that engagement is a core activity that is critical to teaching and research outcomes. As Holland (2005) asserts:

Attention to engagement can lead to greater institutional intentionality and consequently, more specific and focused agendas for research and teaching and more distinctive academic strengths.

The challenges of embedding engagement externally include VU's special mission to improve the lives of the many communities in the western region, as discussed above.

The University is continuing to develop a number of cornerstone partners through: a wide variety of external relationships with individual academics; partnerships that support teaching in both sectors (for example, partnerships with schools, industry and community groups), and partnerships that are mainly relevant to the West.

Marketing leading partners is also a critical part of VU's engagement strategy. At present VU has only a few iconic, whole of University partners. These partnerships may operate at a number of levels across the University and involve both sectors. The University has entered into formal partnership agreements with organisations locally, nationally and internationally and is at present exploring further potential partnerships. Some of these are central to Melbourne's West; for example, the partnership with the Western Bulldogs and with Western Health. Many are international and have been built up through the University's offshore teaching operations or other collaborations. These include twinning arrangements with Sunway, Malaysia, and Liaoning, China, and benchmarking with the University of Texas at El Paso.

VU is committed to building a national and international reputation as an engaged University. The link with its local region is central to this strategy. The University is aware that it therefore needs to understand a good deal more about Melbourne's West. It needs to understand why there are low levels of post-secondary qualifications, why there are high levels of disengagement among the 15 to 19 age group, why there is inter-generational low literacy and unemployment in some parts of the region, what are the aspirations of its secondary school students and why some students in the west are debt averse and therefore do not consider undertaking TAFE and higher education.

Many of these answers will come from research that the University is currently undertaking and from its access and success strategies discussed earlier in the paper. But other answers will come from ongoing dialogue with the diverse communities of the region. The University is committed to building strong partnerships with external stakeholders that are strategic, well supported and the basis for sustaining relationships that have tangible and mutual benefit.

Campus Engagement Days

A key component of this strategy is Campus Engagement Days, initiated in 2005 and extended in 2006. The rationale for the Engagement Days is to:

- Enhance the University's knowledge base about local communities and their key issues
- Provide a process for building new relationships and/or strengthening existing relationships with business, learning providers, and community organisations
- Provide an opportunity for building on earlier engagement and for reporting on outcomes

The Office for Industry and Community Engagement and the relevant Head of Campus are responsible for coordinating each Engagement Day, including the development of a program that identifies key issues for local industry and the community, and identifying external as well as internal presenters. The Vice-Chancellor and senior management host the event, including a lunch at which the Vice-Chancellor and the Mayor of the relevant local government area make short presentations.

An action report for each Engagement Day and a consolidated report for each year are then approved by the University. In this way, the Engagement Days are more than events that engender lively discussion. Relevant senior managers have responsibility for following up agreed actions and reporting on their outcome or progress towards an outcome. All participants receive an evaluation form and are asked to fax this back to the University. The evaluations have been mostly positive and have offered helpful advice on improving the logistical operation of Engagement Days. Participants can indicate on the evaluation form if they would like to discuss any aspect of the Engagement Day with staff from the Office of Industry and Community Engagement. Several have done so, mostly to either offer thanks or advice.

iii. Embedding engagement internally

A key challenge for the University is to enthuse and inspire staff and students about its engagement strategy. While most know about the University's mission to the West, do they understand it? Moreover, do they see a link between their teaching, research and engagement and that mission?

This paper therefore explores how VU as an engaged university will harness the diversity of Melbourne's western region as a source of knowledge, cultural capital and creativity to produce graduates who are equipped to work in an increasingly internationalised economy and to link with its other communities nationally and internationally.

The University aims to provide an affordable and world-class education. It is committed to cornerstone courses that offer access and success in the West. This includes a wide range of course choices for western region student markets; being responsive to industry, ITABs and labour needs; providing many pathways from school, TAFE and Higher Education and flexible entry and exit points; support to address the issue of affordability for western region students, supports to meet special student needs such as language, and supports to bridge current VU graduate outcomes, attrition, progress and satisfaction. At the same time VU is committed to market leading courses that will be few in number, identified by strong market signals (local, national and international), and demonstrate investment in superb quality and cutting edge curricula and delivery.

As part of this strategy, Learning in the Workplace is an essential component of the undergraduate experience. This policy recognises learning in the workplace as an important conceptual framework for developing innovative approaches to learning and teaching, while at the same time enabling the University to reach its potential to be a leading example of an 'engaged university', through strategic linkages with the professions, industries and the communities it serves.

Specifically, the policy provides:

- A pedagogical framework for learning in the workplace with a view to enhancing learning experiences for VU students and staff
- A mechanism for significant and sustained reciprocal engagement of students and staff with employers and the professions
- A mechanism for reciprocal engagement with the local and global communities that Victoria University serves.

The University also focuses on preparing its students to work in a globalised economy with a range of support and value-adding provided by Student Career Services. This includes curriculum-integrated careers education, an innovative vacancy website, and programs to support the development of employability skills.

In addition, its Staff College ensures that University staff have ongoing professional development to ensure excellence in teaching and administrative support.

Similarly, the University encourages a wide variety of research interests that are mainly relevant to the West (that is, applied and engaged research), and may provide a source of commercial and fee-for-service income. At the same time it encourages market leading research, preferably relevant to the West, but capable of developing an international reputation. This research will be the major driver of research grant income.

A particular challenge in embedding engagement is to effectively communicate the University's vision internally. Part of the role of the Office for Industry and Community Engagement is to work with organisational units to ensure that they harness the diversity of Melbourne's western region as a source of knowledge, cultural capital and creativity. VU has always had strong links with schools in the West, and the Portfolio Partnership Program - an alternative entry scheme open to Year 12 students in VU partnership schools, with selection based on a portfolio of evidence rather than the ENTER score - has ensured strong pathways for VCE students in the region into VU undergraduate courses. However in the past much engagement or community service as it was known was often a subterranean activity by individual staff members. The general perception was that engagement was not rewarded in promotion applications. Therefore, staff did not share information about their partnerships even with teaching colleagues, let alone the wider university community.

The Office for Industry and Community Engagement has addressed this challenge through a set of inter-related strategies.

Some initial strategies of OICE have included:

- Developing close links with all units across the University to ensure implementation of the Engagement Plan and the related Operational Plans, and identifying Campus Liaison Representatives in each organisational unit
- Maintaining collections of all Operational Plans, particularly their engagement strategies
- Analysing course reports and other documents prepared across the University to maintain comprehensive records of engagement practice

Perhaps the most important early activity has been the development of a database to record all the University's external engagement. This has been developed by and is housed in the Office for Industry and Community Engagement. Staff have visited each organisational unit to discuss their engagement, to gain information about engagement activities, and to identify a link person for OICE.

In addition to the Engagement Database, OICE has its own *contact* or *people* database. This database is populated by contacts made by OICE staff, engagement day invitees and other University event guest lists. The Office does not randomly add lists of people. In virtually every instance a name on the contact database means that the person has had contact with the University in some way.

OICE is keen to establish itself as a knowledge centre of people and organisations for the University. This role is already acknowledged in the short time the Office has been in existence; OICE has the ability to quickly provide contacts and details for specialised events that the University organises.

OICE understands that it needs to develop a method of regularly updating and verifying details on the database. Presently the University has only one publication that can be mailed to the database twice a year. Nevertheless, this will be a way of saying to people that we haven't forgotten meeting with them and that we would like to remain in contact.

A regular engagement e-news produced by OICE is another means of encouraging staff interest in engagement. Its function is to inform staff of the various University engagement activities and to enhance its engagement profile internally. The Office is currently developing a website that will inform the external and the University community of the University's engagement strategy, new partnerships, news on existing partnerships and services OICE provides, including contact list, engagement database, and coordination of Campus Engagement Days and Relationship Management Training. OICE's marketing and communications strategy for engagement extends to promotional material, including a brochure, and specific branding.

The Campus Engagement Days, while an important strategy for external engagement, also create interest internally in the University's engagement strategy. Most staff now know about and have often participated in Engagement Days. The internal feedback has been generally positive.

The Office is currently developing a model for Relationship Management for major partnerships in collaboration with the Staff College and the Office of the PVC (Education, Strategy and Enterprise).

The Staff College will work with partners of the University in conducting two Relationship Management seminars each year that will draw together current and likely future Relationship Managers and partnership contacts to the University. One seminar will be conducted within the University and the other will be external to the University. Each will have four main purposes: an update on current partnership activity, overview of policy, protocols and administrative arrangements for partnerships, presentations that addresses current issues in partnership development, and networking.

In addition, there will be regular events for Engagement Liaison representatives. These events will take the form of reviews of the activities of the Office for Community and Industry Engagement and seminars by invited speakers.

Conclusion

Victoria University's commitment to engagement is firmly linked to its mission to Melbourne's West. The University has implemented an Engagement Plan that establishes a clear framework for engagement. A centrepiece is the Office for Industry and Community Engagement. The challenge of embedding engagement externally is for VU to assist the region to move to more balanced, knowledge intensive growth, to improve the lives of communities in the West, particularly through providing student access and success, and to realise the transformative power of improved performance and reputation for excellent teaching, training and research. The challenge of embedding engagement internally is to ensure that all organisational units value, celebrate and share their engagement across the University.


The University is committed to building a national and international reputation as a leading example of an engaged university. It is doing this by harnessing the extraordinary diversity of Melbourne's western region as a source of knowledge, cultural capital and creativity to produce graduates who are equipped to work in an increasingly internationalised economy, and to link with its other communities nationally and internationally.

It is early days but the sense of optimism is palpable. Industry and communities in the West now consider that the University has a sustained commitment to the region and to building ongoing partnership. Internally, staff and students are now realising that VU's mission to the West provides a potential strong social, economic and cultural dividend for the University and the region.

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**The university and a non government organisation:
An engaging case of mutual benefit**

Key words:

Teaching and Learning
Mutual benefits
Engagement
Partnerships

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A U C E A

Abstract:

Providing human services in rural Australia has primarily been undertaken by 'not for profit non-government organisations' (NGOs). Since the mid 1990s, many smaller NGOs in the human services sector have struggled to survive as a result of an increasingly uncertain operating environment. One such organisation is the Whyalla Counselling Service (WCS) which after 30 years of operation was faced with imminent closure in August 2004. Closure was averted by the development and implementation of an agreement, brokered by community stakeholders (Munn 2005b), for the University of South Australia (UniSA) to manage the WCS.

Using Boyer's (1996) concept of the scholarship of engagement as a framework, the paper explores how the agreement between the WCS and UniSA has developed from a charity to a justice relationship (Morton (1995)). The paper argues that what set out as a somewhat reluctant agreement for UniSA to provide operational support and assistance to WCS has gone well beyond that. The actual outcomes are a collaborative relationship which enhances community capacity and provides considerable mutual benefit to the parties and the broader community.

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Introduction

The Whyalla Counselling Service (WCS) has traditionally provided counselling, group work and other social support to the Whyalla community for over a 30 year period. The organisation has always been a significant yet boutique operation that serviced parts of the community that mainstream providers in Whyalla were unable or unwilling to provide.

During the major part of its existence, the WCS was governed by an elected Board of Management whose membership was drawn from the broader Whyalla community. In recent years, the organisation experienced critical financial and organisational problems. There were also profound difficulties in attracting and retaining Board members. This was due in part to the considerable time demands on members, the perception by potential Board members that they lacked the necessary skills to be part of such a Board, and general concerns about personal liability and accountability of Board membership. These issues came to a head in mid 2004 and the WCS was unable to cover its financial commitments and faced compulsory termination.

Following considerable lobbying and negotiation, the University of South Australia, Whyalla Campus, was coopted by the community to rescue the WCS service. The rescue involved the use of UniSA management expertise and other resources to support, review, restructure and reshape the operational and governance structure of the WCS so that it was sustainable.

As a result of UniSA's intervention, a new constitution was developed and the WCS organisation restructured. Under the new model, the manager of the service oversees and manages the day to day operations and activities of the WCS and the University provides financial, HR and OHS&W inputs. UniSA also undertakes both a strategic and supervisory oversight role.

The management aspect of the organisational transformation of WCS and the processes involved are discussed elsewhere (see Munn 2005a and 2005b). It is clear from these previous papers that UniSA's initial involvement with the WCS was a reluctant one. This reluctance was underpinned by what Morton (1995) describes as a charity perspective. Essentially, UniSA's rationale for involvement with WCS was one-dimensional; where UniSA was the giver of expertise and time resources and the community was the receiver (Morton 1995). While UniSA did not seek to adopt a justice model with WCS, where the relationship is based on mutual benefit and sharing of resources (Morton 1995), the paper argues that a justice model is what eventuated.

This paper explores the justice model (Morton 1995) of campus community partnership which has developed and continues to do so between UniSA and the WCS. To achieve this, the paper adopts Boyer's (1996) concept of the scholarship of engagement to examine the nature of the relationship between UniSA and WCS and the mutual benefits they derive from the relationship. The paper then explores and discusses reasons why the relationship developed as it has. A brief conclusion reviews the main issues, concepts and findings in the paper. To begin with, the paper provides an overview of the concept of community engagement.

Community Engagement

Boyer (1996) advocates for universities to have a greater involvement in communities by developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships. Furthermore, the nature of these relationships can be explored and examined through what Boyer terms the scholarship of engagement (Boyer 1996). 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.

Bringle and Hatcher (2000) recognise that whilst community service is often included in the tenets of universities' strategic frameworks, it has not been valued or evident in an academic's workload when compared to teaching and research. They also acknowledge a resurgence of interest in community service as an academic role and their paper explores ways in which the 'scholarship of service can change the nature of faculty work, enhance student learning, better fulfil campus missions and improve town gown relations' (Bringle and Hatcher 2002, p 273).

Boyer argues (1997, cited in Bringle and Hatcher 2000), that higher education must be more vigorous in searching for resolutions of the problems currently facing society. That there needs to be a commitment to the 'scholarship of engagement' through building important collaborative partnerships. Bringle and Hatcher (2000) agree with this argument and stress the need for the sector to invest in infrastructure which supports community engagement.

Inman (2004) supports the need for a university to commit to community engagement. She explores the Kellogg Commission research and recommendations on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. These recommendations expressed unease in terms of the lack of commitment by universities to community issues. The Kellogg findings strongly suggest that engaging with the community and its people becomes a university priority.

Wiewel, and Lieber, (1998) explore partnerships between universities and community organisations from a planning perspective. They recognise the difference between the two organisational entities and the need for each organisation to take into account the other's values, interests, and goals in planning what gets done and by whom. A disjuncture in priorities is often the reason that universities are at times loath to develop relationships with community organisations. Wiewel and Lieber (1998, p5) indicate that:

because of the nature of the partners involved--universities and community organisations--the pretence of a rational planning approach is less likely to be important or feasible, opening the door to a planning process that is more explicitly oriented toward building relationships, taking advantage of strategic opportunities, and remaining fluid, or messy.

Cumpston, Blakers, Evans, Maclachlan and Karmel (2001) consider the positives of potential university and community relationships and point to the range of significant expertise and knowledge in higher education institutions that can be of considerable benefit to the success of local businesses. For example, a university can work with its local and regional community to stimulate economic development through a variety of innovation and technology transfer partnerships and research and development activities with local industry. This can be achieved by enabling local access to technical and professional services available within the university; through research and development collaboration projects; through the provision of technology transfer infrastructure such as business incubators; through business centres and science parks; through university spin-off research and development-based businesses; and through staff and student secondments and practicums to local business (Cumpston et al 2001).

However, community engagement should not be considered a one-way process. As Holland states (2005), there are mutual benefits to be gained from such relationships:

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. These interactions enrich and expand the learning and discovery functions of the institution while also enhancing community capacity. The work of the engaged institution is responsive to community-identified needs, opportunities and questions that align with academic strengths (Holland p 33).

In many respects, the need for community engagement is more acute in regional settings as these areas often suffer from a shortage of experienced professionals. Universities can help address this by partnering with relevant organisations, providing them with knowledge and expertise and assisting them to meet their objectives (Cumpston, et al 2001). The same report states that whilst a number of higher education institutions have research centres involved in sustainable development agendas, few of these focus on 'engaging with the region that they are located in to achieve sustainable regional development objectives' (Cumpston et al, Section 3.7).

Holland (2005) suggests that geography and age of the institution play a part in engagement uptake. She argues that it is the younger, regionally-oriented campuses that seek to be a proactive and collaborative force for change in their communities by aligning scholarly work with public purposes (Holland 2005). She believes this is due to a number of reasons including their greater interdependency with communities. The scholarship of engagement challenge is for the more traditional universities to recognise the need for community engagement and to develop collaboration and partnerships in order to generate community and economic benefit and improve academic image and relationships (Holland 2005).

In the context of this paper, UniSA's Whyalla campus is in a regional location and as a university campus it is relatively young. From an organisational perspective, the Whyalla campus's relationship with the Whyalla Counselling Service is consistent with UniSA's strategic priority of regional and community engagement. UniSA's strategic priority itself is consistent with the international trend of tertiary institutions becoming more engaged with communities. A reasonable and meaningful test of these relationships is how they conform to Boyer's notion of the scholarship of engagement (1996). The following discussion will argue that the relationship between UniSA and WCS is a mutually beneficial one that is consistent with Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement concept.

Exploring the relationship

There is little doubt that the notion of charity (Morton 1995) underpinned UniSA's agreement to be involved in the rescue of the WCS. There were extensive negotiations involving various community stakeholders which revolved around the scope and extent of the University's resource commitment of expertise and time. Although UniSA's commitment was seen by the University negotiators to be consistent with the social justice aspects of the University's charter, the resource decision was significantly influenced by economic rationalism. The main goal of the involvement was to limit the University's financial exposure and resource commitment. At the evaluation stage of the relationship, the 'do we or don't we commit scenario', little cognisance was given to potential reciprocal or mutual benefits which might derive from the relationship.

UniSA and the WCS: A new beginning

Having made a decision to commit utilising a resource limitation strategy, the initial relationship involved the Head of Social Work and Rural Practice (who became the project director), the local state Member of Parliament who was the patron of the service and two remaining board members. They asked that the university did whatever was needed to be done to ensure the service would be ongoing and sustainable.

As an incorporated body, the WCS had a constitution. However it was not adhered to in any way and a number of un-constitutional changes had been made in the past. The first task for the project director was to develop a new constitution which included the role of UniSA and reflect the new management structure. Rather than board members being individuals, five agencies agreed to be part representatives. The agencies are Children, Youth and Family Services, The Whyalla Hospital and Health Services, The Whyalla City Council, The South Australian Housing Trust and Nuyarra Wellbeing Centre, a local indigenous service. The University of South Australia has an ex-officio non-voting role. The role of the Board is now just that of governance. They meet quarterly to receive and review the reports developed by the Project Director, Finance and Human Resource Manager and the Service Manager. They have no input into the day to day operations except as an advisory role.

The structure of the organisation also gave rise to concerns as some of the staff employed as counsellors had no formal qualification. In addition to this, staff members were appointed to a particular funded program which meant that some workers were extremely busy whilst others were waiting for suitable clients to engage with the service. Administrative support was also poorly managed and the service had the ludicrous situation of having four staff job sharing a .5 admin position.

To fit with the new constitution and in order for the Whyalla Counselling Service to effectively and efficiently provide services to the community of Whyalla, it was decided that a total re-structure of the organisation was required. Workers would no longer be program specific but would be employed to work across all the programs. Given this, new position descriptions and job and person specifications were written and staff informed that current positions would no longer be required. As a result, new qualified staff and one administrative officer were appointed. The Project Director also ensured appropriate policies and procedures were in place and that the approval requirements of the funding bodies were adhered to.

UniSA now has a contractual arrangement with the WCS to manage the service. This became effective as of July 12 2004. The university performs all of the financial, human resource and service delivery management. There is an onsite manager, supervised by the Project Director, who manages the day to day workings of the organisation.

Mutual benefits from the perspective of the WCS

While the original charity perspective, with the benefit of hindsight, now seems conceited, there was a strong belief by the university that the partnership benefits would be one sided with little if any advantage to the University. However, eighteen months into the relationship the observations are quite different. It is clear that the relationship has developed into the two levels of the scholarship of engagement argued by Boyer (1996) - connection and climate creation.

The connecting (Boyer 1996) of the university's expertise and time resources to WCS has, as anticipated in the evaluation of the University commitment, led to multifarious benefits for the WCS. Not only does this new structure improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency, it also reflects what is seen to be best practice in rural areas. In order to ensure overall good practice, agencies need to have in place the quality standard requirements of federally funded services.

This ensures consistency in the way services are offered and staff who work across programs are also fully aware of the minimum standards of service (which are the approval standards) and the particulars of the individual service agreements (Munn 2005a).

A number of rural agencies offer multiple services, the WCS included. Wherever possible, whilst staff may be employed to work in a specific program, they are also encouraged to work across a number of areas (Munn 2002). This ensures that some staff are not busy chasing their tails whilst others are sitting around waiting for the next client to phone in. This also ensures staff have both a generalist experience and the opportunity to specialise in their field of interest.

Lonne and Cheers (2000) recognised that if rural workers were provided with more useful administrative supervision and better training opportunities as well as regular reviews of the worker's well-being, increased retention of rural workers could occur. 'Premature departure could be reduced through enhanced employer supports' (Lonne and Cheers 2000, p.170). To this end all staff at the WCS have regular structured supervision and a current professional development plan in place. Overall, enhanced retention was most likely to be achieved by those in generalist positions, with good employer supports, those who were able to embed themselves and their practice within the fabric of their community, resulting in a good balance between community involvement, visibility and privacy (Lonne and Cheers 2002). This has been the basis for the staff employed at the WCS and to date there has been 100% retention!

The Whyalla Counselling Service is now a thriving organisation, its profile within the community is well known and other human service organisations, who had refused to refer clients due to the service's poor reputation, now see the organisation as credible and offering best practice services. This in turn has meant the number of clients utilising the programs offered by the WCS have more than trebled in the last twelve months. The WCS are now seeking funding to cope with this demand and expand their activities.

Mutual benefits from the perspective of UniSA

In addition to these operational improvements, the development of a climate of continuous creativity and communication (Boyer 1996) between the two organisations, as a result of the partnership, has led to significant mutual benefit

A Student Unit onsite

The Manager of the WCS has a strong commitment to providing high quality practicum experiences for UniSA students. To this end he allocated space at the WCS to be developed as a student unit. This is an open plan area which includes resources (furniture, computers, journals, books and so on) for up to three students at a time providing a valuable and supportive field education placement service for the university. There are currently three social work students on placement at WCS. Given this is a 500 hour placement, it entails a significant commitment and effort from the manager and social work staff at the agency who provide professional supervision to the students.

In the future, it is anticipated that students from the other programs, business and nursing, at the Whyalla campus will also be able to do a practicum at the agency. For example, a nursing student would be able to do a community nursing placement whilst a business student could be encouraged to work with WCS management on a research project or funding application.

Academic input to the Bachelor of Social Work Program

The WCS provides qualified social workers willing to share their practice wisdom and expertise by presenting guest lectures in the social work program. In addition, staff at the agency provide hourly paid tutorial support on the UniSA Whyalla campus. Staff at the WCS are also willing to contribute their relevant social work experience in research project partnerships.

Opportunities for academic staff at UniSA

There is the opportunity for academic staff at the university, in particular the social work staff, to update their clinical skills as volunteer counsellors at the WCS. This ensures the lecturers maintain their professional skills as well as providing them with 'real life' case scenarios to use in class. Feedback from students suggest they believe an academic has more credibility if they have recent social work experience rather than being seen as an academic who has lost touch with the real work.

Service to the students and staff of UniSA

The WCS provides a contracted student and staff counselling and support service to the university. The service is available both onsite at UniSA or at the premises of the WCS depending upon the user's preference. Counselling is available for a variety of issues including, but not limited to:

- Emotional issues such as anxiety, depression, grief, trauma or shock
- Family and other relationship issues
- Interpersonal, self esteem and other social issues
- Harassment and abuse
- Concerns around work or study
- Vocational, work environment, work stress and other work related issues
- Alcohol and other substance abuse
- Gambling problems
- Personal stress management
- Advocacy and other support as required

Other benefits for UniSA

Managing the WCS has in a sense operationalised the Whyalla campus's focus on regional engagement and community participation (Munn 2005a). The reputation of the campus in the region has also been enhanced through its willingness to support a community organisation such as this. Providing academics with opportunities to be involved in clinical practice as well as clinical research is an added benefit.

Discussion

The UniSA – WCS relationship is an example of Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement where the community and the higher education sector can work together for mutual benefit. For this type of innovation to work, universities need to strive to become part of the community rather than remaining in an academic ivory tower. Traditional research needs to be extended to include practical components that enable communities to develop innovative practices and ensure sustainability.

In order for UniSA to reap the benefits from the contractual agreement with the WCS, it first needed to rid itself of the paternalistic notion of rescuing the organisation and saving it from itself. Whilst early on there was an element of this, and there is no doubt the WCS would have closed had UniSA not provided the intervention required, once the new structures were in place and the new manager appointed, the relationship became a collaborative partnership. This occurred in part because of the willingness of UniSA to 'let go' of some of the control and allow the manager to manage rather than UniSA micro-managing both the manager and the service.

It also quickly became apparent that the management and staff of the WCS had knowledge and skills which would be beneficial to both staff and students hence an approach was made offering hourly paid tutorial work, opportunities to guest lecture and so on which assisted the relationship to develop on a more 'equal footing' up to today when the aforementioned mutual benefits are in place.

In order to minimise the potential rift between the university and other human service organisations in the region due to fears of the campus competing for funds, the Project Director contacted all of the agencies assuring them of the willingness of the campus to partner with organisations in their endeavours to ensure people who live and work in rural and remote areas are provided with the services they require. In addition to this, an offer to provide mentoring, supervision, training, research and support to human service organisations was also made. As a result there have been a number of community partnerships developed in the past year, including research projects, provision of joint training programs and opportunities to work together on funding submissions.

In reflecting upon the collaborative relationship that exists between UniSA and the WCS, there are lessons to be learnt and practices built upon to ensure the strengthening of relationships between higher education institutes and the community. Thomas (2003 p 8) compares the universities' outreach practices of the past, 'a benevolent dictatorship in which the university decides what the community needs and gives it to them' to the current policies of engagement whereby the university works collaboratively with the community to 'maximise their capacity to value add in social, economic and cultural development activities'. It is crucial that universities are mindful of the changes which need to occur to enable meaningful collaborative relationships to form. The partnerships need to be between university staff and students and community stakeholders including government (both local, state and federal), people in positions of leadership, as well as rank and file interested community members (Bringle and Hatcher 2002).

Conclusion

The partnership between UniSA and the WCS is an example of the tertiary sector's international move towards ensuring academia embraces a scholarship of engagement. It ensures the mission and commitment of the University of South Australia towards regional engagement is upheld and demonstrated in a meaningful way. Furthermore it has assisted other collaborative partnerships to develop around the region as other organisations see in this example a willingness by the university to work together with the community as opposed to 'doing for' the community.

The outcome of this collaborative relationship has enhanced community capacity and provided considerable benefit for both organisations. The Whyalla community has retained an important service that was under threat of closure. Through sharing and applying the university's knowledge, expertise and information, the WCS has significantly improved its financial and future security. In return, the interaction with WCS enriched the learning and discovery functions of UniSA and facilitated a supportive and beneficial teaching, learning and research environment.

Funding bodies at both Federal and State levels have expressed interest in this WCS initiative and are viewing the governance and oversight model as a possible solution for rural community services where their Boards of Management are unable to sustain the managerial demands required of them (Munn 2005a).

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UniSA in Mount Gambier: implementing a community engaged teaching and learning environment

UniSA in Mount Gambier: implementing a community engaged teaching and learning environment

Key words:

Mutual benefits
Community engagement
Collaborative and sustainable relationships

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A U C E A

Abstract:

In October 2004, the University of South Australia (UniSA) commenced a collaborative process with a diverse range of Limestone Coast Region stakeholders to establish the UniSA Regional Centre in Mount Gambier, South Australia. The Centre commenced operations in February 2005 when 85 students were enrolled through the Centre in three full-time, on-campus, undergraduate degree programs.

This paper examines how UniSA engaged with the regional community and external organisations and entities to develop and implement a sustainable tertiary educational model in the region. The paper explores the notion of mutual benefit and the exchange of knowledge and expertise (Holland 2005) which underpinned the development. It argues that the University was able to engage with the Limestone Coast Region as it developed a sustainable educational delivery model that satisfied the twin criteria of being financially responsible and socially responsive. The engagement is successful as the University was prepared to be responsive to the community's identified needs and the opportunities this presented by aligning these with its academic strengths (Holland 2005).

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Introduction

Garlick states that while the presence of a university campus in a regional area may intuitively appear to a good thing, there is no guarantee that it will be beneficial for a region's development prospects in a knowledge world' (2003, p48). Despite the lack of guaranteed outcomes, Garlick indicates there are 'more than 150 university campuses spread throughout Australia, as well as many other regionally located non-campus learning' centres and access points (2003, p49). He suggests that this is indicative of the emergence of a new 'regional community/university relationship' which in some cases generates significant mutual benefit.

Not surprisingly, many regional communities not currently blessed with a university presence continue to seek to have a university in their region (Magennis 2005; Webb 2005). These demands range from their own stand alone regional university to study or service centres with a whole range of options in between. The demands often include bricks and mortar solutions with a prominently situated university building as an iconic centrepiece (Magennis 2005; Webb 2005). The community often takes a service model approach (Morton 1995) to university engagement in a region where they place quite unrealistic expectations on the university's capacity, capability or desire to engage with the community (see recommendations in Magennis 2005 and Webb 2005).

The challenge for universities seeking to engage in regional areas is to avoid the trap of adopting the service model perspective themselves. Instead, universities should adopt a justice perspective (Morton 1995) in their regional relationships and seek to achieve mutual benefit from regional engagement. As Garlick states, the motivation for university interest in developing meaningful regional relationships is the opportunity for them to 'boost competitiveness, enhance institutional viability, and reduce inequity within and between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas' (2005, p12). They can only achieve these goals through a mutual benefit or justice approach.

In 2004, the Limestone Coast Region was one regional community in South Australia (SA) that sought to establish a university presence in its region. The community established the Mount Gambier University Steering Committee to secure a University campus for the City and the Region. Following extensive community and political lobbying at State and Federal level by the committee, 40 full-time equivalent university places were allocated to the University of South Australia (UniSA) for the region. These 'on campus' DEST funded places were specifically allocated to one, 4 year and two, 3rd year undergraduate degree programs.

Having secured the university places, the Limestone Coast community associated them with a 'bells and whistles', stand alone university campus situated in the City of Mount Gambier. From the UniSA perspective, there was a need to meet DEST obligations in a financially viable and sustainable way; essentially a financial risk minimisation approach. At the same time, UniSA had embarked on a regional engagement strategy underpinned by a mutual benefit framework. The challenge for all parties to the relationship in Mount Gambier was to develop a model that was financial viable, sustainable and which provided mutual benefit to all stakeholders. As Duke (2003, p2) attests:

Engagement is becoming a new mantra. In association with ideas about networks and innovation clusters, as well as 'softer' notions of social capital and social inclusion, this gives a quite different twist to the question of regional provision, away from individual study opportunities and hand-me-down outreach for those suffering the tyranny of distance towards sustained co-production of knowledge and prosperity. For universities regional provision is coming to mean sustained partnership, even preserving degrees of freedom of action through interdependency.

The aim of this paper is to explore how the Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE), University of South Australia (UniSA), the Limestone Coast community and other stakeholders collaborated to create an engaged teaching and learning environment in the region. The paper briefly examines the expectations of both the Limestone Coast community and the UniSA in terms of a university presence in the region.

The educational delivery model that eventuated and collaboration that ensued to achieve this outcome is explored next. Lessons to be learnt from this experience are then discussed and the paper concludes with a summary of the main issues and findings.

Expectations

In June 2005, a research project was undertaken in the region to explore the perspective and preferences of individuals from a variety of fields on the advantages and disadvantages of accessing higher education, in particular, their views regarding a campus presence within the region. The exploratory study, involving 27 participants from professional and management positions in the Limestone Coast region (Pullin, Petkov, Munn, Bouilly and Crozier 2005) found positive regional outcomes and benefits expected from a university presence in the region were extremely high. This section of the paper outlines some of these findings.

All of the participants interviewed identified and stressed the need for a tertiary education presence in the region. They highlighted various combinations of difficulties and barriers that existed in relation to the regional community accessing higher education. Among the most concerning elements for communities within the Limestone Coast Region are “aspects of population decline” and increasing “difficulties of recruiting and retaining professionals to and in the region”. Many participants emphasised this difficulty. Furthermore, issues were raised regarding the transition of professional staff, “those from metropolitan often only stay in the region for 2 to 3 years”.

Some participants considered a regional campus would “offer [higher education] opportunities to both regional youth and others otherwise not feasible due to geographic, financial, family or personal constraints”. One participant classified this as “tapping into local resources” many others deemed “educating those with local ties” as a strong rationale for retaining employees. One participant felt that “setting up a university [in the region] offers opportunity to balance back age and skill representation in the region”. A manager of a human service agency voiced concern regarding “employees often moving through the ranks, not necessarily before they are qualified or experienced”. This factor was often discussed as a reality in ‘the rural context’ due to “skill shortages”. Another employer of staff stated “we are used to training young people in their gap year and experiencing frustration that they leave and often do not return”. These participants saw having a regional campus as the only way of addressing these issues.

The range of circumstances addressed in the interviews varied from possible location of the campus, availability of delivery-modes, program options, accommodation and desirable provider. Although some participants did not suggest recommendations on structure or delivery, many aspects were discussed in regard to current issues surrounding challenges of distance education and housing. In support of these views, Winchester, Glenn, Thomas, and Cole (2000) found that financial and social factors are barriers for regional populations in accessing higher education and that regional campuses offer stability in regard to optimism, planning and employment for individuals, business, health, industry and communities.

A recurring theme from the study (Pullin et al 2006) is what we previously termed in this paper as the ‘iconic building’ approach. Participants associated a university presence in the region with a ‘bricks and mortar’ university. This would include a true sense of a campus environment, so that young people could have a university experience and all that this entails. This includes an active student association, social opportunities and the university bar etc. To complete the full-on university experience, many participants even suggested that university accommodation would need to be built on site.

In contrast to community expectations for a university presence in the region, the UniSA expectations were based around three main objectives. First, to develop a sustainable educational model that would enable it to offer 40 full time, on-campus places in Mount Gambier in 3 undergraduate degree programs in nursing, social work and business in a financially responsible and sustainable way. It is important to point out that the DEST places were not supported in any way by seed, infrastructure or any other additional funding provision.

Secondly, to provide a university presence that would engage in the region through teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Thirdly, to ensure that the university presence in the region would be mutually beneficial for stakeholders by adopting and vigorously pursuing a consultative and collaborative approach to tertiary education provision in the region.

The development of regional and community engagement as a UniSA strategic priority area, ensured that from the top down the University was committed to developing long term, sustainable collaborative community partnerships. This included the establishment of a specialist unit, the Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE), to undertake regional engagement projects such as implementing a UniSA presence in Mount Gambier. Importantly, the CRE was well equipped for the task at hand having available the staff, infrastructure and other physical and intellectual resources of UniSA's regional campus in Whyalla SA. However, perhaps the CRE's most important asset was the Vice Chancellor's unequivocal and ongoing support both in the University and the broader community for a justice model of regional engagement based on community collaboration and mutual benefit. This approach is supported by Scott and Jackson (2005, p 164) who state that:

An essential component of a quality framework is to have a CE strategy which is closely aligned to the strategic directions of the university as delineated in Strategic Plans, both at University and College/Faculty/School level.

The balancing of the considerable community expectation of a university presence in the region with the need to provide a financial sustainable yet mutually beneficial solution provided a significant challenge to the CRE and UniSA.

The Mount Gambier Regional Centre

From the onset, the university presence engagement project was guided and underpinned by four C words: collaboration, consultation, communication and cooperation. The project itself comprised three main engagement dimensions. These were: the involvement and support of the community; the development of an appropriate teaching and learning delivery model; and, the acquisition of 'fit for purpose' teaching, learning and administrative infrastructure and facilities (see Figure 1).

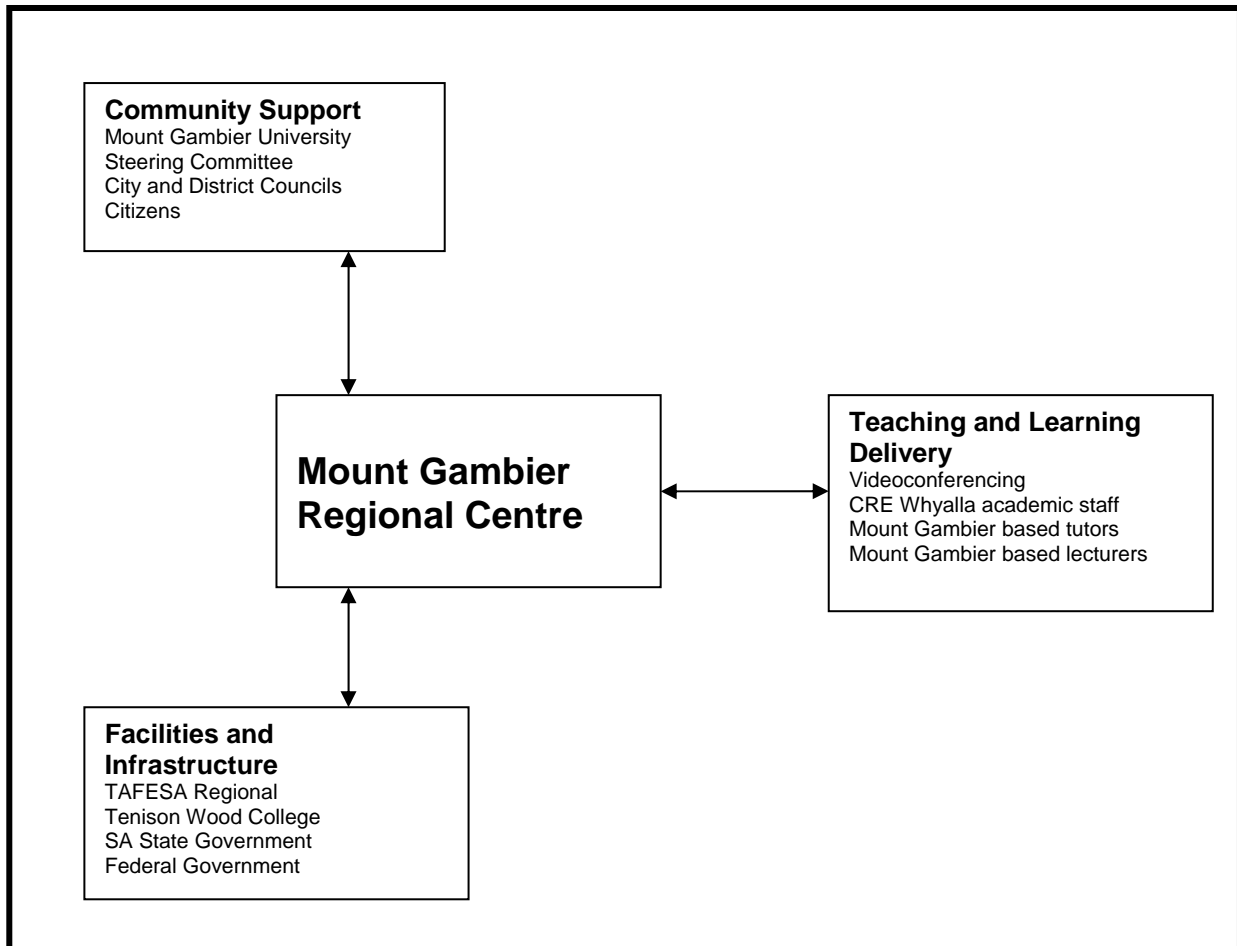


Figure 1: Establishing the Mount Gambier Regional Centre: engagement dimensions

Community involvement and support

The efforts of the Mount Gambier University Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) were instrumental in securing the 40 funded DEST places for the region. The Steering Committee is an extremely influential and well connected ginger group of senior public figures from the region. The group comprises members from both the public and private sectors. It has an excellent understanding of the Limestone Coast, regional and economic development issues, the national and SA tertiary education sector and models of tertiary education provision

From the onset of the project, the CRE project team collaborated with the steering group and adopted a sustained partnership approach (Duke 2003) where a high trust relationship was quickly established by open and transparent communication and consultation. This involved regular meetings with the committee and nominated members to discuss, develop and establish an acceptable academically feasible and financial viable educational delivery model to provide the foundation to adequately satisfy community expectations of a university presence in the region.

The Regional Manager, Mount Gambier Campus, TAFESA Regional Institute and the Principal, Tenison Wood College were members of the Steering group. As were the CEO of Mount Gambier City Council and the CEO Grant District Council, within the borders of which the TAFESA Mount Gambier Campus is situated. These links to community and educational assets, facilities and infrastructure in the region were to prove invaluable in quickly resolving the university's accommodation issues. The resultant dialogue speedily despatched any thoughts of a bricks and mortar, campus building option for the university. This was replaced by a co-located option on the TAFESA Mount Gambier Campus addressed more fully later in this paper.

The transparent dialogue between the Steering Committee's and the University, coupled with the Steering Committee membership's tertiary and other educational expertise and knowledge, meant that key stakeholders in region were able to quickly relate to the financial limitation of the DEST 40 place quota for the region. This knowledge greatly facilitated an understanding by the Steering Committee of what educational delivery model was and what was not feasible for the region.

Teaching and learning delivery model

The DEST funded places stipulated they should be offered in an on-campus delivery mode. However, a traditional on-campus delivery model was not financially feasible due to need to deliver the first year of each of three completely different undergraduate degree programs to relatively small groups of students. The problem was resolved by developing an on-campus equivalence model of education delivery which is financially sustainable yet provided UniSA's Mount Gambier based students an on-campus university experience.

A key underpinning feature of the on-campus equivalence model (Figure 2) is the use of video-conferencing by CRE and Adelaide based lecturing staff as the main course content delivery mode. Initially, many of the lecturers were Whyalla campus based and a dependency (on Whyalla) concept was adopted where the majority of lectures were video conferenced from Whyalla to Mount Gambier. In February 2006, three permanent academic lecturing staff were appointed in Mount Gambier. As a result of these appointments, the Whyalla dependency concept for course content is progressively changing to an inter dependency model where a significant and increasing proportion of lecture content is now delivered from Mount Gambier to Whyalla in either single or dual audience mode.

In addition to the video conferencing of course content, the Whyalla and Mount Gambier based lecturing staff visit the students at the other sites at least twice during each study period for face to face contact with students and their tutorial staff. The video conferencing is also supported by a continuous quality improvement program which targets technical improvements and staff development and training initiatives.

Course evaluations indicate that the students have adapted to this model, feel connected with remotely based lecturing staff and, apart from some concern with minor videoconferencing technical issues, are satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning provided by this mode of delivery. At the beginning of 2006, the technical concerns were addressed by a major upgrade of the videoconferencing equipment at both Whyalla and Mount Gambier providing much improved picture and voice transmission.

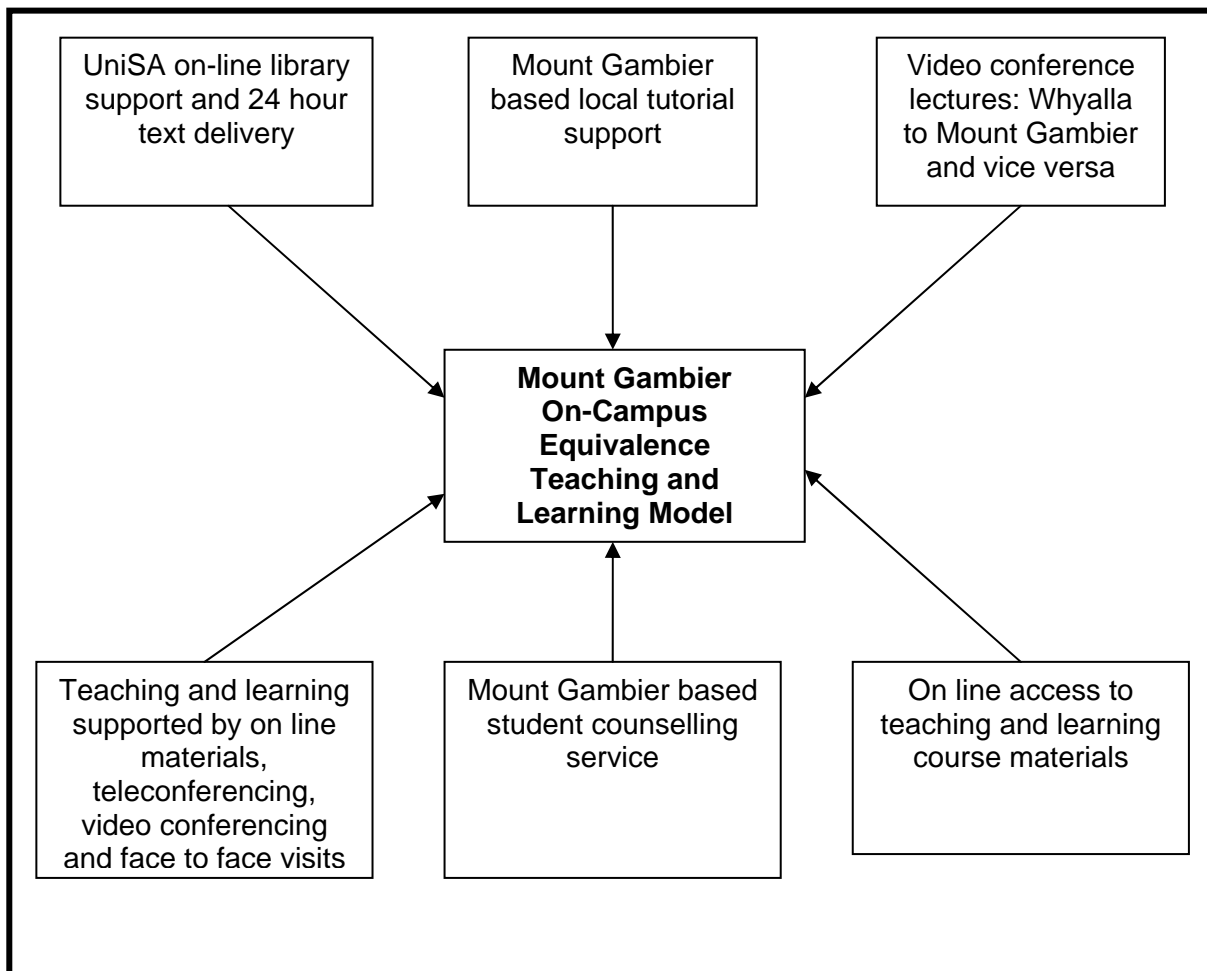


Figure 2: On-Campus Equivalence Delivery Model

The on-campus model also comprises a sophisticated blend of other delivery options. These options include an on-line library service which features a free to student, 24 hour turn around, text book courier service for Mount Gambier students. Student counselling is provided in Mount Gambier by a local service agency while teaching and learning support is available through a range of options including on-line, teleconferencing, video conferencing and face to face sessions at least twice a study period. The on-campus equivalence model also included local tutorial support in Mount Gambier from experienced professionals working in the field. Apart from hard copy course notes, students have access to other, often sophisticated, course related on line teaching and learning materials.

It should be emphasised that although the model was by need, Whyalla centric at the beginning, that this focus is progressively changing as the programs build to their upper levels. Eventually, the CRE's Whyalla campus and Mount Gambier Regional Centre will essentially service each other's students depending on where the most appropriate staff resources are at any moment in time.

Engaged infrastructure and facility provision

Despite community expectation of a stand alone City based campus in Mount Gambier, the available funding level was quite inadequate for such an approach. In initial consultations with the Steering Committee, a co-located option with TAFESA Regional Institute on its Mount Gambier campus appeared to be the most feasible option. The TAFESA campus had spare capacity sufficient to UniSA's needs and it was also an acceptable option to UniSA, the TAFESA Regional Institute and the Steering Committee.

Although the decision to co-locate with TAFESA Mount Gambier was a relatively quick and eminently sensible decision to make, the implementation was not so simple. It was also exacerbated by the very short time available for staff consultation and the reassignment of the TAFESA Campus manager during the implementation process.

As a result, the co-location process faced significant change management impediments. The most fundamental of which was the need to accommodate two significantly different organisational cultures on one site. This was quite difficult to begin with as the resident TAFESA culture was challenged by a somewhat at times diametrically opposed University cultural environment. The cultural differences were apparent across a whole range of organisational levels and practices relating to both staff and students.

Although progress in developing a common culture on the campus has been slow at times, what is now emerging are essentially three cultures. The embedded rituals and practices peculiar to TAFESA operations and activities, the embedded rituals and practices of UniSA operations and activities, and a developing common cultural ground facilitated by tangible and intangible mutual benefits and outcomes from the engagement of co-location.

The tangible mutual benefits and outcomes include a significant increase in TAFESA enrolments since the University co-located on the TAFESA site and the building of new facilities and the upgrading of old facilities from a \$650000 State Government grant for University infrastructure on the TAFESA site. The developments of these facilities were project managed by the UniSA property unit and have significantly benefited the university and TAFESA staff on the campus. A further \$1.6 million has been allocated by the Federal government for further University infrastructure work on the TAFESA campus and this is anticipated to attract other funding to a total of \$4.0 million. Again, both the University and TAFESA staff will be significant beneficiaries from these developments.

The lack of suitable science facilities on the TAFESA campus was covered by an offer by Mount Gambier's Tenison Wood College to use their science laboratories for nursing students. This is a generous offer which stemmed from the collaborative, high trust relationship established between UniSA and the Steering Committee. By opening their facilities to the university, the College has enabled the full nursing program to be offered in the region to the ongoing benefit of the University and the Limestone Coast community.

Discussion

As the analysis indicates, the establishment of the Mount Gambier Regional Centre has created an engaged teaching and learning environment in a region that desperately wanted a university presence in its midst. At this stage, the engagement with the community, though significant in terms of mutual benefit is still only in its infancy.

This year, UniSA has adopted an anchor tenant role at TAFESA and will broker relationships with other universities to facilitate them offering their programs through the regional centre. Southern Cross University has already taken advantage of this service and implemented their Forestry Science program in Mount Gambier through the regional centre in Semester 1, 2006.

The University has already embarked on two significant research projects in the region and more research projects are under consideration. The Limestone Coast this year will benefit from a regional seminar series organised and hosted by the Mount Gambier Regional Centre where internationally acknowledged researchers will present cutting edge research relevant to the knowledge needs of regional communities. UniSA nursing students are already active in the Limestone Coast community providing health fairs and health assessments to the community in conjunction with community health professionals. The nursing students are also undertaking their clinical and other placements in regional hospitals. UniSA academic staff have also been instrumental in establishing a Mount Gambier branch of the Australia Association of Social Workers; a first for the region.

Moody and Bell (2003) argue that it is not enough for regional universities to extend their role of providers of education and research to include community service as well as adding to the regions economy. They state that for 'regional campuses to reach their full potential and for them to maximise their contribution to their regions they must be agents for social transformation' (Moody and Bell 2003 p3). As this paper demonstrates, the University of South Australia through the CRE has engaged with the Limestone Coast Region and transformed the educational environment in the region. Importantly, this transformation is sustainable. In seeking mutually beneficial outcomes through stakeholder collaboration, UniSA has responded to the community's identified needs by aligning these with its academic strengths (Holland 2005).

Winchester et al (2002) argues that regional campuses as well as providing opportunity for local people to access tertiary education locally, developing research opportunities in the region and providing professional development and training opportunities, also provide home grown professionals and an opportunity for the retention of young people in the area (Winchester et al 2000). As this paper has demonstrated, the engaged teaching and learning environment created through the collaboration between UniSA, the regional community and other stakeholders is well on the way to providing the benefits identified by Winchester above.

Conclusion

The paper has examined one example of the process of balancing the needs and expectations of a region with the realities universities face with delivering their degree programs on site in regional locations.

The Limestone Coast community had for many years fought and lobbied to establish a university presence in the region. During this period, expectations emerged about what the university would look like, what it would offer and what benefits would emanate from its presence in the region. Underlying these expectations, the community initially believed that universities would queue up to establish themselves in the region. When university interest failed to materialise, the community struggled to understand why. Apart from a small group of well informed community members, the general community in the Limestone Coast Region had little knowledge of the intricacies involved in tertiary education provision, the federal allocation of university places and the generally city centric and low risk exposure orientation of Australian universities.

The paper has shown that the door to a University presence in the region was opened by the Steering Committee's tenacity in gaining 40 DEST funded places specifically located in the Limestone Coast Region. From this beginning, the paper has explored the journey of community expectation, community and stakeholder collaboration and the implementation of a university presence on the Limestone Coast.

However, has the Mount Gambier Regional Centre, co-located on the TAFESA Mount Gambier Campus, fulfilled the community's expectations of a University presence in Mount Gambier? A yet to be published study (Pullin et al 2006) identified that the Limestone Coast community strongly associated a comprehensive range of benefits with a university campus based in Mount Gambier. In the same study, the same respondents strongly associated the same comprehensive range of benefits with the UniSA Mount Gambier Regional Centre. There was no significant difference between the two sets of matched results ($P= 0.001$).

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University Research and Community Engagement

Keywords:

Universities and community partnerships
Events research

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A U C E A

Abstract:

Bendigo, in the heart of Victoria, is a unique heritage city and the annual Bendigo Easter Festival (BEF) an iconic event. Such events shape the character of the city, enhance social cohesion and promote well-being in the local community. They also promote economic activity by stimulating income and output in the regional Bendigo economy. The evaluation of the impact of such events presents an opportunity for University research staff to form ongoing partnerships with local government.

This paper analyses the process by which an ongoing research relationship with the local community can be built. It is centred on, firstly, demonstrating mutual benefit, secondly, building personal relationships to identify community needs and, thirdly, developing a long term program to integrate the university staff and students with the local community.

An initial survey into business perceptions of the BEF was conducted with a view to promoting more effective support for the event from the business community in Bendigo. The findings provide some interesting insights into past mistakes, present shortcomings and future strategies for the BEF Festival Committee.

Following discussion with the Director of City Futures and Bendigo Tourism, a research proposal was developed to survey other Bendigo events with a view to providing input to the strategic planning process of the Council. Subject to budget approval by the City of Greater Bendigo (CGB) Council, approval has been granted to undertake four similar projects over the coming year. These projects will cement the collaborative relationships built up by the BEF project.

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Introduction

The process of imbedding the research activities of regional universities, or the activities of the regional arms of metropolitan universities, into the local economic and social fabric can be premised on the grounds of allocative efficiency, that is, simply, placing the appropriate goods and services in the right places in order to promote the mutual benefit of the university and the community. And this process includes the welfare gained from the reduction of market imperfections.

Community can be defined in a variety of contexts, but this paper will adopt a spatial model consisting of the regional centre and its surrounding service area – an area in which people in the surrounding townships and municipalities can typically commute to the central city for government services, retail facilities and work opportunities not existent in their own locality. The City of Greater Bendigo is an example. The perimeter townships, such as Inglewood, Elmore, Heathcote and Dunolly are approximately an hour drive from the central hub. In effect, the cost of services provided and consumed is an amalgam of the costs of production and the costs of travel, the lowest combination being the economic determinant (Frank, 2006). This type of definition of community in the context of this paper is chosen because it provides an opportunity for university personnel to build network relationships with the local community facilitated by personal contact and relatively low information and transaction costs. In this spatial context, the process of engagement can be described as fusion of the university and the local community with a view to a general improvement in the allocation of private and communal resources.

The process can be more closely described as *civic engagement*, a process that ‘...connects the intellectual resources of the institution to public issues such as the community, social, cultural, human and economic development.’ Civic engagement is not to be confused with civic service, that is, volunteerism. ‘Civic engagement embodies values of collaboration, cooperation, shared power and knowledge exchange’ (Holland, 2001, p.6). The collaborative process of civic engagement helps to break down the traditional divide between University researchers and the local community. In the past the divide may have been exacerbated by the perception that research is done on the community, not with the community.

Initially, the biggest challenge was to win the trust of ... community groups. That meant living down a well-know pattern of academics and their students taking up a community's time by "studying" them and then leaving with the data – never to be heard of again. (Lynn, 2000, p. 8)

Events research provides an opportunity for the locally imbedded university to foster the development of a truly collaborative partnership in the search for an improvement in the use of local resources.

Events Research: An opportunity for engagement

Events in the regional centres and their surrounding communities are both part of the social and historical fabric and future drivers of economic and social development. From a research point of view they are a good example of ‘... locally tailored processes that enable a broad array of people and organizations to work together on an ongoing basis’ (Lasker and Weiss, 2003, p.16). Given that public events in regional communities are typically run by locals for locals, they present an already established tradition of civic engagement from which to build on. The Federal electoral division of Bendigo rates in the top 10 divisions in Australia in terms of wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2005). Civic engagement and civic service may be a significant factor in this achievement. The 135 year old Bendigo Easter Festival is an example of a traditional community event that contributes to economic activity, social well-being and a unique regional identity. Yet it has not been associated with rigorous research with a view to further improvement of its outcomes. One such area is the relationship between the BEF and the local business community.

Whilst the BEF has been supported by a small number of long established businesses in the City, the function is heavily subsidised by the CGB Council which has ongoing requests for assistance from other existing and prospective events.

And yet, although the BEF has the attributes of a public good, the potential for a greater partnership with the business community exists. The enduring popularity of the BEF and the obvious 'feel good' factor in the local, expatriate and visitor populations presents an opportunity for the Committee to package future sponsorships which are unique and attractive to the business community. To build a bridge between the BEF and the wider business community in Bendigo, a survey was designed to capture the perceptions of the business community about the BEF. The findings present an opportunity for the BEF Committee to extend the relationship between the BEF and the local business community. The survey itself presented an opportunity for the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities of LaTrobe at Bendigo to engage itself in community research and demonstrate the potential for ongoing links with the CGB Council in its evaluation of other existing events and, indeed, future events.

Methodology

The pathway to imbedding the local business school in regional research in Bendigo closely matches the *participatory action research* (PAR) approach attributed to Friere (1990) and detailed by Bailey (1992). The first step involves making contact with the people or organisations who are stakeholders in a particular resource-use issue. Research areas are identified and matched with the resources and capabilities of the local faculty and students. The development of personal collaborative relationships fosters participation of all stakeholders in the project at some stage or other.

Partnerships are learning environments. Too often the university arrives with the answers. True partnerships are spaces within which questions are created, there is genuine reciprocal deliberation and the work to find the answers is begun. (Bruskardt, et al., 2004, p.9)

With events research, the aims of the project are identified and the survey questionnaires passed around for scrutiny and amendment. Secondly, data collection is designed to include as many stakeholders as possible under the PAR method. In this respect we diverged from the general inclusion principle. The BEF questionnaire was designed to be delivered by trained interviewers for quality enhancement. To this end, marketing research students could be effectively deployed as trained interviewers, and for data entry. They are stakeholders and have a comparative advantage. The third stage is data analysis and the presentation of findings back to the stakeholders. Fourth, plans to achieve identified outcomes can be developed with consultation and, finally, evaluation of the outcomes performed. The process is interactive and dynamic and closely resembles community health governance programs in the United States where the aim is

...to take action to address problems that people in the community care about without waiting for external players, like the federal and state governments or national foundations, to develop programs and initiatives. (Lasker and Weiss, 2003, p.19)

Demand-driven research into regional community events provides a unique opportunity for the local university to contribute to the process of civic engagement.

The Stakeholders

The BEF is run by the BEF Committee on a volunteer basis. They are the custodians of the event and have an on-going interest in preserving its traditions and developing its future potential. In a regional context community engagement overrides the use of commercial events managers. The committee encourages sponsorship from the business community but the response is limited to a few long-standing firms.

The City of Greater Bendigo Council heavily funds the BEF on the grounds that it is essentially a public good. But, there are many competing demands for events support and greater support of the business community for the ensconced BEF would free up valuable development funds. The business community itself has a vested interest apart from altruism. Forming a collaborative relationship with the local University may facilitate the development of an 'enterprise culture ... - creating the circumstances that allow "coalitions" to form to exploit the opportunities that they identify' (Taylor and Plummer, 2003, p.560). The BEF, for example, represents the potential for commercial exposure, provided suitable sponsorship packages can be put together. University staffs are part of the community and stand to gain as researchers, scholars and teachers from the process of civic engagement. Students are also significant stakeholders; by immersing themselves in community events research, they are identifying with the local community, its needs and aspirations (Brukardt et al., 2004).

The ultimate payoff for all the stakeholders is a reinforcement of the sense of community itself brought about by working cooperatively to foster the development of what Putnam (1995, p. 2) terms '...social capital ... social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'. Put simply, the development of social capital reminds us all that we have a collective gene as well as a selfish gene. It is not only the community event, but community engagement itself that can be defined in terms of a public good. This represents a unique role for local university research: not so much university engagement itself as the primary aim, but the fostering of community engagement in the provision of regional public goods. The building of partnerships between the stakeholders at the local level is an intrinsic part of the civic engagement process (Delaforce, 2004).

The Bendigo Easter Festival: Identifying Opportunities for Engagement

Canvassing the local community to identify resource-use problems and present opportunities for mutual gain matches well with what most economists regard as an opportunity for an improvement in efficiency, or pareto improvement where a potential change is an improvement in efficiency and welfare if '...at least one party prefers it and the other party likes it at least as well' (Frank, 2006, p.591). Events research presents such an opportunity.

The BEF, established in 1871, is the oldest community festival in Australia and one of the oldest in the world. It began for the purpose of raising money for the Benevolent Asylum, which is now recognised as the Anne Caudle Centre. The governor of Victoria opened the first festival. It came at a time where hardships; such as floods and fires, had recently been endured by local residents. The hardships were forgotten when the town witnessed brilliance, creativity and happiness in the first Bendigo Easter Festival. Over the years the festival has gone through many significant changes. However the Chinese have always played a significant role and this represents a unique feature of the event.

The Chinese came to Bendigo after the discovery of gold in 1851, and this search for gold created the coming together of many cultures that is responsible 'for the diversity and richness of the Annual Easter Celebrations' (Hartwell Players, n.d.). In 1890 the Chinese were given a traditional position in the parade, at the end, where they still remain today. 1891 saw the introduction of the first Chinese dragon and since then the tradition has remained and the population of dragons involved has increased to seven (Smith, 2003). Despite World Wars and individual protests to cease the existence of the Bendigo Easter Festival the tradition continues to be a major part of the Bendigo community and 'injects millions of dollars into the Bendigo tourism economy' (Where to stay in the Victorian Goldfields, 2005).

The Bendigo Easter Festival involves a street carnival, concerts, a torchlight procession, gala parade and a spectacular fireworks display. 'Every street, park and building in Bendigo becomes a venue for free entertainment, cultural enrichment and fun' (Bendigo Easter Festival, 2005).

Originally the Bendigo Easter Festival made a large profit and this was the motivation that led the festival to become an annual event. Whilst numerous businesses continue to sponsor the festival the

money raised is only just enough to cover costs, hence the Bendigo Easter Festival is no longer making a profit.

The population of the CGB is approximately 93,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005) where the Bendigo Business community is made up of approximately 4,500 businesses (City of Greater Bendigo, 2005). Currently the Bendigo Easter Festival caters for a variety of different categories of sponsors. Premier sponsors are their major contributors, however Gold, Heritage and Shiraz sponsors also contribute in many areas, such as the Bendigo Advertiser subsidising the printing and 3B0 and Star FM radio stations helping with the broadcasting.

The older generation has strong values and beliefs surrounding the BEF and is very committed to carrying on the tradition. However there are major concerns as to whether the current generation understands the significance of the festival and whether they are willing to take over the organising and continuation of the festival. Without the current generations support and understanding of the significance of the festival it undoubtedly will cease to exist. The older generation sees the Bendigo Easter Festival as a living treasure that cannot afford to be lost, hence are looking for a general re-birth of the festival to secure the tradition for the next century.

The main concern for the festival at the moment is that it runs at a sizable deficit. Insurance costs, namely that of public liability, have had a major increase recently meaning more money needs to be raised in order to cover insurance. Without the involvement and support of local Bendigo businesses the festival will either have to start charging for some events or it will not be able to continue because costs cannot be covered. At the moment the festival is greatly lacking sponsorship numbers and questions are being asked as to whether Bendigo Businesses want to see the festival continue or not.

It is extremely important for Bendigo businesses to become involved in the BEF if they wish to see the festival tradition continue. However there may be perfectly good reasons as to why the BEF is not gaining the support of local businesses. It could be due to businesses lack of awareness of the festival, businesses not gaining enough recognition in return for sponsorship, businesses lack of interest and understanding of the significance of the festival, or merely due to lack of knowledge about how to sponsor or not being approached to sponsor the festival.

Determining the general perceptions of local businesses towards the BEF will assist in uncovering the reasons behind the lack of support. This in turn will enable changes to be made to facilitate these perceptions and hence build a stronger level of support for the festival to ensure the festival tradition lives on.

Overview of the BEF Study

Research Objectives

The general purpose of this research was to assess Bendigo businesses' perception of the BEF and identify possibilities for future engagement with the BEF. In consultation with the BEF Section 86 Committee of Management, four research objectives were identified:

1. To determine how businesses in Bendigo currently perceive the Bendigo Easter Festival.
2. To determine whether Bendigo businesses were prepared to support the BEF through sponsorship or other support.
3. To determine whether Bendigo businesses were prepared to support the BEF through sponsorship or other support (such as economic return, community service etc), to determine what Bendigo businesses expect to achieve in return.
4. To determine what improvements Bendigo businesses think need to be made to the festival? (Can be generally or in relation to specific events).

Summary of Findings

- A considerable majority (74.1%) of Bendigo businesses surveyed have never been approached by the BEF committee for sponsorship/support.
- The main reasons Bendigo businesses cited for not currently supporting the BEF is the fact that they have never been approached and 29.9% of respondents feel that sponsorship/support of the BEF is not value for money.
- The results indicate that 15.6% of businesses surveyed currently support the BEF. And a total of 73.5% have never supported the BEF
- The majority of Bendigo businesses believe the BEF is an important event for the social wellbeing of the community and business environment; however they do not appear to recognise value for their own business. 60.9% of respondents held a neutral stance, or disagreed on some level that the BEF is an important event for their business.
- There is no particular type of business, which would be more likely to be the sponsor the BEF. It could not be predicted, for example, retail or manufacturing business would be more inclined to support the BEF rather than service providers.
- There is no relationship between a Bendigo business being located on the path of the Easter procession or in the CBD and their willingness to sponsor/support the BEF
- The results of the research investigation indicate that the respondents were mainly small firms of less than 20 employees (88.6 %). Medium and large organisations (more than 100 employees) only represent only 11.4% of the sample population. There is no relationship between the size of a Bendigo Businesses and their willingness to sponsor/support the BEF
- A relationship exists between what a Bendigo business receives in return for sponsorship and support of the BEF and their willingness to sponsor the BEF in the future.

- Businesses who strongly agreed with the survey question 'would be more likely to participate if specific changes were made?' would be likely to support the festival.
- No significant relationship exists between the businesses decision to support the festival and the nature of the suggested improvements for the festival.
- There is a very weak relationship between the likelihood of participation and the level of importance of the improvements in the likelihood to participate.
- Two homogeneous groups of businesses can be identified according to how important they consider the realisation of eventual improvements of the festival in their likelihood to support it:
 - Businesses that have never supported the festival and those which used to support it tend to be neutral concerning the importance of improvements of the festival in its likelihood to participate.
 - In contrast, businesses which currently support the festival tend to 'agree' on the fact that if some specific changes were made, they would be then more likely to participate.
- There is a significant relationship between the number of years established in Bendigo and the likelihood of commitment to the festival however this relationship is very weak.
- 41 % of Bendigo businesses have some level of satisfaction with the overall performance of the BEF in 2005. However 36.3 % of respondents had a neutral stance regarding the BEF's performance in 2005.
- Bendigo businesses wish to see the BEF continue. 87.45% of respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' to the continuation of the festival.

Recommendations

- It could be suggested that the BEF Committee place a greater focus on approaching more Bendigo businesses to sponsor/support the BEF. The majority of Businesses surveyed have never been approached for sponsorship/support by the BEF Committee.
- When deciding upon prospective Bendigo businesses to approach for sponsorship/support, the BEF Committee should place focus on Bendigo businesses that have been established in the Bendigo community for a long period of time. Results indicate that the longer a Bendigo business has been established in Bendigo, the more likely they will be to support the festival. This could be due to a greater appreciation for the festival developed over time and/or a greater willingness to support a community event.
- It could be recommended that the BEF Committee ensure that current and potential sponsors/supporters of the BEF feel that their sponsorship/support is value for money.
- The BEF Committee should provide more business recognition for Bendigo Businesses who support/sponsor the BEF. 56.4% of the respondents expect business recognition in return for sponsorship/support for the BEF.
- The major changes suggested by Bendigo businesses which are
 - More advertising/promotion/other incentives
 - An increase in the awareness of the BEF itself

should be considered by the BEF Committee in so far as these major changes are of great importance for Businesses who are 'very likely' to contribute to the festival as well as those businesses who currently support the festival.

Further study could investigate if businesses' awareness of the possible discontinuation of the BEF due to lack of support, would influence their willingness to sponsor the festival.

Building the Relationship

Following the BEF Business Perceptions study, dialogue was opened up with the newly appointed Director of City Futures and the Director of Tourism for the CGB. Events research was placed on the agenda for the coming year: the Beef Expo in May 2006, the Annual Sheep Show in July 2006, The Bendigo Swap Meet in November 2006 and a new event to be held in February, 2007. The Director looks forward to building a relationship that provides quality opportunities for the team at the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities and students of LaTrobe University whilst providing the CGB with useful research and management intelligence.

The Ugly: Tread Carefully

Whilst canvassing community groups or officers with responsibilities within the regional councils to determine their research requirements, it is prudent to be aware of certain realities: local politics, local networks and the rationing principle. Regional communities are an amalgam of interacting, but often competing interest groups. Identifying and addressing the needs of one group, or officer, may be construed as partisan activity and a misuse of a community asset: in this case, the research facility of the local university. It also raises the possibility of conflict of interest in that the BEF, for example, is competing for business sponsorship with other community events. Supply-driven university research would be especially prone to this problem. Demand-driven research, such as that following the PAR approach, is likely to be more attuned to relative needs and the priorities of various community groups. But, competition for the research facility does present a rationing problem. Personal networks in the regional community quickly ensure that information is quickly and widely disseminated. If a favour is performed for one group, say, some volunteer research, other groups will catch on and the queue at your door will become longer. Costing and negotiating a service fee performs several functions. First, the needs are prioritised by the price mechanism and, second, reward for service will encourage professional delivery. Accordingly, participating students are trained and paid. The positive externalities associated with the process of civic engagement along with the mission commitment of the university ensure that the services are provided at considerable subsidy. The reports will be in confidence, but permission may be granted by the CGB to use results in conferences and journals.

Conclusion

Events research in regional communities presents an opportunity for the local university to practice and foster the process of civic engagement. Making contact with local councils and community groups enables the development of partnerships to determine research needs and to form ongoing relationships. The outcomes provide mutual benefit for all the parties involved, not the least of which is the process of civic engagement itself.


The BEF study is an example of the type of activity that can trigger an ongoing relationship between the university and the local community. Opportunities were identified to enable the BEF Committee to engage further with the local business community in the delivery of the event.

The process involves making contact and forming working relationships with local councils, their officers and community groups. Research needs are identified in a collaborative framework and matched with the resources of the faculty and students. A tendering and bargaining process helps to prioritise needs and reduce over commitment. Findings and recommendations are presented in a non-technical manner and the opportunities for follow-up research identified. The relationship becomes dynamic and on-going.

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Quality management of higher education community engagement in South Africa: embedding service learning through good practices

Keywords:

Service learning
Transformation of higher education in South Africa
Scepticism & reluctance
Quality management
Benchmarking
Commitment

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A U C E A

Abstract

The era of Apartheid created a segregated higher education (HE) system in South Africa that was fraught with inequalities. Subsequently, after the advent of the new dispensation, the national Department of Education (DoE) has been placing a high premium on quality assurance, especially since the commencement of the drastic restructuring of the HE sector. A special body was created to steer and oversee the quality management process on an ongoing basis, viz. the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education.

The renewed focus of the DoE on what was initially referred to as "community service" and later as "community engagement", is reflected in the HEQC's *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004). Criterion 18 contains the following provision: "*Quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalised and integrated with those of teaching and learning ...*"

The contention is that by demonstrating their social responsibility through community engagement, HE institutions will be able to meet the national requirement for transformation in terms of broader participation, greater responsiveness to the challenges of society, and the formation of partnerships with other constituencies.

In recent years there has been increasing support in SA for the experiential pedagogy of (community) service learning as a valuable form of community engagement which involves not only staff and students, but also external partners. What is of the utmost importance, however, is that the quality and outcomes of service-learning activities should be monitored and evaluated collaboratively by all stakeholders.

During the second half of 2005 the presenter coordinated a national project of the HEQC and the Joint Education Trust aimed at developing a document entitled: *A Good Practice Guide and Self-evaluation Instruments for the Development and Management of the Quality of Service Learning*. Contributions were made by lecturers from various HE institutions and their partners working in the field, while several of the indicators included in the Guide were derived from experience - varying between 'good, bad and ugly' - gained at the presenter's own institution.

The paper will reflect on the need to and value of including community engagement in the quality management systems of the (rather reluctant) HE sector in South Africa.

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1. Democratisation and quality assurance - a balancing act in South African higher education

The era of Apartheid created a segregated higher education (HE) system in South Africa that was fraught with inequalities. Some institutions were located in so-called homelands; others were reserved for white, Afrikaans-speaking students; one was mainly for "Coloureds"; while the VISTA University campuses catered for urban Blacks. After the momentous first democratic elections in 1994, the national Department of Education (DoE) embarked on a process of drastically restructuring the HE sector for the purpose of eradicating the artificial divisions of the past. Several institutions were merged to form new entities; some of the smaller ones were incorporated with larger institutions; while others underwent changes in respect of the nature of the programmes they were to offer. After the restructuring process, 21 HE institutions (compared to the previous number of 36) were formed (cf. DoE, online: 1-6). Most of these institutions are currently still grappling to find a way through the structural, programmatic, philosophical and political chaos of the new hybrid entities that came into being.

In addition to the restructuring process, and in order to further pursue its transformation goals of increasing democratic participation, responsiveness and partnerships (DoE, 1997), the DoE also resolved to place a high premium on quality assurance. One of the explicit purposes of transforming higher education, which is particularly relevant for the argumentation of this paper, is the development of a system that will "contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality" (DoE, 1997: 11, 1.14).

A special body, similar to the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) (cf. <<http://www.auqa.edu.au>>), was created to steer and oversee the quality management process on an ongoing basis, viz. the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (cf. <<http://www.che.ac.za>>). The mandate of the HEQC is to (1) promote quality assurance in HE; (2) audit the quality assurance mechanisms of HE institutions; and (3) accredit programmes of HE. In its mission statement, the HEQC's central objective is described as that of ensuring that HE institutions "offer education, training, research and **community engagement** which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress" (CHE, online; emphasis added by author). The specific significance of the *Good Practice Guide and Self-evaluation Instruments for Managing the Quality of Service-Learning* (henceforth referred to as the *Good Practice Guide*) on which section 6 of this paper will focus, is that it was developed under the auspices of the HEQC, and is thus imbued with all the authority and "staying power" that such a body brings to a process.

What HE institutions find particularly challenging is the need to balance all the (apparently) diverse demands that they are facing. The vision of the University of the Free State (cf. <<http://www.uovs.ac.za>>) refers to the institution's commitment "to be an **excellent, equitable and innovative** university", providing one example of the kind of balancing act that it has embarked on. The real challenge is to find ways to embrace a broad variety of goals and ideals, allowing them to coexist in a situation of creative tension, as different sides of the same coin, and not as destructive, opposing forces (cf. inauguration speech of the Rector and Vice Chancellor, F C v N Fourie, 2003). Many concerned parties at the University of the Free State (UFS) are convinced that community engagement has the potential to be a catalyst in this regard: what we at the UFS can do better than any other institution in the world is to engage with regional stakeholders in order to search for and find solutions to our unique regional challenges. Whenever we find innovative ways to collaborate in cooperative partnerships, achieving the excellence and equity for which we jointly strive, these successes serve as examples of how such collaboration can lead to the generation of the kind of "socially useful and enriching knowledge" that the HEQC refers to.

2. Community engagement as a catalyst for HE transformation

Within the quality management context the renewed emphasis on community engagement as a core function of HE is reflected in the *Founding Document* (2001) of the HEQC, which identifies “knowledge based community service” as one of the three areas – along with teaching and learning, and research – for the accreditation and quality assurance of HE. Subsequently, the HEQC incorporated community engagement and its service-learning component into its national quality assurance systems. In South Africa, as in many other countries, a distinct philosophical and epistemological shift has taken place from the traditional, rather vaguely-defined notion of “community service” towards a conceptualisation of community engagement that emphasises its full integration with academic work. In the definition provided in the Glossary of the HEQC's *Framework for Institutional Audits* (June 2004a: 15), the link with teaching and research is made explicit in referring to community engagement as:

Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research is applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes).

The national policy drivers and motivational factors behind the renewed emphasis on community engagement are distinctly, and understandably, political and are meant to serve what some refer to as the “ideology of transformation”. The contention is that by demonstrating their **social responsibility** through community engagement, HE institutions will be able to meet the national requirement for transformation in terms of broader participation, greater responsiveness to the challenges of society, and the formation of partnerships with other constituencies. In this context, the “fitness of purpose” of individual HE institutions is based on national and regional goals, priorities and targets. As argued by Subotsky (2000) Michael Gibbons' notion of Mode 2 (i.e. open systems of) knowledge-production that is reciprocal and mutually beneficial, in collaboration with external constituencies, is relevant here.

Another policy driver is the dire need to prepare students for a rapidly-changing globalised world (by enabling them to “think globally”), while at the same time developing the knowledge, skills and special disposition needed in order to be able to “act locally” in the highly uncertain, challenging environment of a developing country. Mandatory in all learning programmes are Generic or Critical Cross-field Outcomes, which include developing a macro-vision of the world as a set of related systems; identifying and solving problems; working effectively in a team; effective communication; and cultural sensitivity. This goes hand in hand with a renewed commitment to increasing the relevance and contextualisation of academic programmes and curricula. Some are convinced that objective can best be facilitated through the real-world experiences that lecturers and students are confronted with through community engagement. The following excerpt from the 2005 UFS Transformation Plan Task Team brief bears testimony to such a commitment at the institutional level; as one of its objectives, the Task Team is instructed, *inter alia*, to focus on “(a)cademic transformation with emphasis on increased South African and African relevance (teaching and learning modes and methods; academic programmes and curricula; research foci).”

It will not serve the purpose of this paper to embark on a typology of the forms of community engagement that are found in South African HE (cf. HEQC/JET, 2006: 13-15 for a typology of student engagement). Suffice it to say that even though the value of extra-curricular, volunteer community service is acknowledged, the main emphasis is on academically integrated forms, such as community-based research and service learning (see discussion below). In addition, the universities of technology have brought to the table work-based learning (also referred to as experiential learning or co-operative education in South Africa). In some instances these student placements also involve “service to the community”. One of the key questions in looking at this is: Who is the “community” in community engagement? Could the term be understood broad enough to include the “business community” and industry involved in co-operative education?

One might well argue that the intention behind the inclusion of community engagement in DoE and HEQC documents was to direct HE efforts towards addressing the most pressing challenges faced by South African society. It might, however, not be necessary to define the communities that HE institutions engage with as "previously or presently disadvantaged", "marginalised", "under-served" or "under-serviced", if cooperative partnerships with regional stakeholders are established within which the most pressing issues to be addressed jointly would be likely to arise naturally and organically in dialogue and deliberations. Thus, such partnerships are rightfully considered to be a *sine qua non* for the kind of community engagement that has the potential to transform the nature of HE to the extent that it will embrace more open, collaborative and reciprocal systems of knowledge generation.

The following section will focus on service learning, an experiential, community-based educational method that was chosen by the UFS as a vehicle for the contextualisation of its curricula and for the integration of community engagement into the learning programmes of students.

3. Integrating teaching and learning with community engagement through service learning

In recent years there has been increasing support in certain quarters of South African HE for the pedagogy of service learning (referred to as "community service learning" at the UFS) as a valuable form of community engagement which involves active participation of HE staff, students and external stakeholders. The growing support largely came about as a result of the national CHESP initiative of the Joint Education Trust (which later became the JET Education Services section of the Trust). The Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative was launched in 1999 in partnership with the Ford Foundation and the WK Kellogg Foundation. The aims of this initiative are: (i) to support the development of pilot programmes that explore the potential of community engagement as an integral part of the core academic functions of HE institutions; (ii) to monitor and evaluate these programmes; and (iii) to use the data generated through this process to inform higher education policy and practice at a national, institutional and programmatic level (cf. <http://www.chesp.org.za>). The strong links of CHESP to donor organisations and HE institutions from the USA naturally resulted in the introduction into the South African agenda of service learning (also referred to in the USA as "Service-Learning" and "academic service learning") as a well-established mechanism for integrating service with the learning programmes of students in the USA as a preferred form of what they refer to as "civic engagement".

According to Bringle and Hatcher (2005: 27), service learning is regarded by the American Association of Colleges and Universities as a powerful pedagogy "because it brings a civic dimension to teaching academic material, contributes to a civic purpose for institutions of higher education, and fosters a civic dialogue between institutions and their communities". In the oft-cited definition of Bringle and Hatcher (1995: 112), service learning is described as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility". Over the past decade or more, a staggering amount of service-learning material has been produced in the USA. A great deal of this material can be accessed via the Campus Compact website (<http://www.compact.org>).

So why all the hype about service learning at some South African HE institutions? One might argue that, among the myriad possibilities relating to how community engagement could be effectuated, service learning appeared on the South African horizon as a well-defined, well-considered pedagogy with committed advocates from the USA, flown in regularly with US donor funding through the CHESP initiative.

All along, these experts have been able and willing to guide South African colleagues in exploring, investigating and investing in service learning. In a draft version of the revised Community Service policy of the UFS, it is stated that "(t)he development, implementation and maintenance of its community service learning initiatives are regarded by the UFS as key indicators of the effective integration of service with teaching and learning" - hence the special emphasis on this component of the University's commitment to community engagement.

Currently there is a growing awareness that the quality and outcomes of service-learning activities should be monitored and evaluated thoroughly, and that the quality management should be a collaborative effort of all stakeholders. This emphasis on joint quality management has been receiving due attention in the USA for several years now and is also recognised within the South African HE sector, particularly in the light of the special emphasis that the HEQC has been placing on quality arrangements in respect of community engagement and service learning.

For obvious reasons, quality management of service learning in South Africa will have to be based on the specific conceptualisation of the notion for the South African context. The following is a continuously emerging definition of "community service learning" which is revised from time to time by UFS staff involved in service learning for the purposes of delineating the parameters within which we work. The sections indicated in bold letters specifically show where our conceptualisation is different from most US-based definitions:

Community service learning is a curriculum-based, credit-bearing educational experience based on a well-structured, organised service activity through a clear connection between course objectives and service activities aimed at meeting identified (**service**) needs in the community, **with due recognition of the indispensable role of the service-sector partner as the primary service provider**. It further entails:

- the joint and mutual acquisition of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes);
- a collaborative **triad partnership among the UFS, the service sector and local communities**;
- reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership;
- seeking a balance between effective learning by students and the provision of service to and in the community;
- reflection on the service activity in order to achieve personal and professional growth, as well as a deeper understanding of curriculum content and inter-disciplinary linkages;
- appropriate formative and summative assessment of student learning; and
- collaborative quality management (monitoring, evaluation and review).

Community service learning ultimately contributes to students' understanding of community life, concerns and challenges; leads to community-building; and fosters a sense of **social responsibility** among all those who are involved.

As indicated by the highlighted sections above, many at the UFS and other HE institutions in South Africa, believe that the South African situation more often requires a triad partnership than would be the case in a "developed" country or state, since the mediating role of the service sector (public and private) becomes crucial where well-organised community-based organisations are lacking. Direct partnerships with vaguely defined "community" groupings often suffer from insurmountable power imbalances, unrealistic expectations, a lack of proven representivity, and various kinds of political tensions. In South Africa, however, the service sector more often than not also suffers from what is broadly referred to as a "lack of capacity", which may imply, *inter alia*, being under-staffed; not having the required expertise among staff members; and being so caught up in internal power struggles that little enthusiasm remains for providing a service to society.

At the UFS, the number of service-learning modules (or courses) has grown to over 30, spread over the various faculties and schools. Most of these modules have been entered in the Community Service database (cf. UFS, online). The more experience we gain in this often rewarding field, the more we realise that the challenges are enormous, but exciting - although definitely not for the faint at heart - and that it requires a broad array of institutional support mechanisms.

One of the various forms of support for UFS staff who engage in service learning is capacity-building in the form of a dedicated, credit-bearing module within the Master's Programme in Higher Education Studies, which has also come to serve as a starting point for creating an interdisciplinary learning community and peer support group. In order to encourage the development of service sites where triad partnerships are already functioning, the UFS has identified, and is currently supporting, several "flagship" projects, such as the rural Grow !Xhariep Partnership Project in the Southern Free State; the Mangaung-University Community Partnership Project or MUCPP (cf. UFS, online: Links) in collaboration with various government structures; the Boyden Observatory and Science Centre (cf. UFS, online: Links) in collaboration with the Department of Education; and the Lengau Agri Centre in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, the local government and the farming sector (including both emerging/new and commercial farmers).

The remainder of this discussion paper will comprise reflections on the dire need for, and the potential value of, including community engagement, and more particularly service learning, in the quality management systems of the rather reluctant HE sector in South Africa.

4. Reluctance and scepticism regarding community service and service learning in South Africa

The notion of "community service" has featured in the mission statements of HE institutions in South Africa for many years. The vagueness of the term has rendered it rather non-threatening, since any activity that could be regarded as some form of service to any constituency could serve the purpose of providing evidence of service being rendered to a community. However, references to community service in policy documents have become increasingly more specific, often linking it to the notion of the transformation of HE. For example, use was made of terms such as "community service programmes"; and in the course of time, new pedagogies such as community-based education and service learning have become more prominent. In accordance herewith, it has become necessary to bring about shifts in philosophical and epistemological thinking, and to embrace paradigms in which new forms of knowledge production come more strongly to the fore. However, perhaps the majority of South African academics are still very sceptical about these changes, and many seem bound to remain so. Some of the most prominent reasons for this that have emerged at the UFS (many of which will be familiar to all those who work in the field of community engagement), are mentioned below as they relate to (1) philosophical and epistemological matters, (2) pragmatic policy issues, and (3) issues of quality and scholarship

4.1 *Philosophical, epistemological and paradigmatic issues*

In an interview with a much younger colleague a senior academic staff member on the UFS campus stated categorically that community service could not be regarded as a task of the University, and that he regarded service learning as a "fad" about which people are "bright-eyed and bushy tailed", but which will soon pass. Another UFS scholar also recently voiced his resistance in no uncertain terms in the UFS-based academic journal of which the senior staff member quoted above is the editor-in-chief: Visagie (2005) saw fit to appeal to no less an authority than Jacques Derrida to affirm and confirm his "deconstruction" of community service as a form of "ideological colonisation" of the university.

In many instances academic staff regard their fields or sub-fields as "basic" (versus "applied") fields, thus wishing to be exempted from having to engage in real-world situations in which their students will be able to "learn and serve in partnerships for sustainable development" (as specified in the community service slogan of the UFS). Regarding the work of those academic staff members who have already embarked on the presentation of service learning modules, the question has been asked as to whether their work has led to any real paradigmatic or epistemological shift as yet (cf. M. Fourie, 2003, who pointed out that, by the end of 2002, there was no evidence available that service learning at the UFS had tapped into local epistemologies).

A systematic inquiry into this matter needs to be undertaken in the near future, building on the seminal work done by Bawa (2003), McMillan (2002) and O'Brien (2005).

4.2 Pragmatic policy and management issues

Other more pragmatic reasons for the apparent lack of enthusiasm at most HEIs include factors such as a general resistance to more change, and other issues that need to be addressed through institutional commitments in respect of policy and practice, such as the following:

- Under-staffing in academic departments, resulting in pressing time constraints.
- Insufficient rewards and recognition in the context of performance appraisal.
- The perception among staff that institutional leaders are not prepared to enter into high-level dialogue with regional stakeholders to form overarching, enabling partnerships.
- Management of various security risks, ranging from muggings, hi-jacking, rape and other forms of violent crime. Even though students are exposed to all of these wherever they are in any case, lecturers are nervous about the fact that any disasters in this regard would have implications for themselves and the institution, if they were to occur during official service-learning time.
- Financial constraints and uncertainty about sustained funding.

What is important to note at this stage is that the DoE has been reluctant to adopt a community engagement policy until now - which implies that they are not yet obliged to provide financial support for community engagement endeavours. Such endeavours have proven to be quite costly in terms of staff time, as well as additional expenses for transport and for supporting development agendas of external partners. The implication is that HE administrators have to be sufficiently convinced of the value of community engagement initiatives to (1) make provision in the central institutional budget, (2) assist staff in accessing third-stream funds, and (3) enter into partnerships which would link HE academic programmes with government skills-development initiatives, which would also open up new sources of revenue.

4.3 Issues of quality and scholarship

There is a prevalent attitude of scepticism in many quarters regarding the quality of the work - for example, in term of the degree of rigour that can actually be achieved, in the context of community engagement, from the point of view of scholarship and research. In a nutshell: the question has arisen as to whether or not we can clearly define the academic, development (cf. Erasmus & Jaftha, 2002) and/or partnership (cf. Marais & Botes, 2005) goals that we are pursuing by means of community engagement and service learning.

How do we respond to the often justified scepticism and criticism? South African advocates of community engagement as a means towards increasing the relevance and contextualisation of the teaching, learning and research activities of HE institutions need to take up the challenge of providing evidence, on an ongoing basis, that quality management is regarded as a vital element of the work. The many examples to be found in this regard in the work of colleagues from the USA, and to a lesser extent other countries, provide us with invaluable examples for benchmarking purposes.

5. Some international benchmarks and indicators of community engagement and service learning

There are many, mostly US, examples of indicators of, and self-assessment tools for, community engagement and service learning, some of which are useful for the purposes of providing a broader perspective on the *Good Practice Guide*, which will be discussed in the next section.

Hollander, Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski (2001: 35-36) provide a USA Campus Compact perspective, listing and discussing ten "Indicators of Engagement", relating to the standard issues of pedagogy and epistemology; faculty (i.e. academic staff) development; enabling mechanisms; internal resource allocation; external resource allocation; faculty (staff) roles and rewards; disciplines, departments, interdisciplinarity; community voice; administrative and academic leaderships; and mission and purpose. In a more recent publication Brukaradt, Holland, Percy and Zimpher (2006) address the question: "What's next for University Engagement?" in a manner that clearly constitutes an attempt to move decisively beyond "calls to action" towards a recognition that in order for engagement to be effective, "it requires institution-wide effort, deep commitment at all levels, and leadership by both campus and community" (Brukaradt et al., 2006: 244). The authors identify and discuss six promising practices (pp. 244 - 245), providing provocative arguments about what it would require to take community engagement to its logical conclusion. Two of the "promising practices" that are particularly thought-provoking deal, respectively, with the forging of partnerships "as the overarching framework for engagement", and with the creation of "radical institutional change".

The "Institutional Self-Assessment Tool" for "Building Capacity for Community Engagement" that was developed by Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown, and Mikkelson (2005) has recently been chosen as the framework for the development of a tool to be utilised in a national survey of HE community engagement in South Africa. This initiative, again jointly embarked on by JET Education Services (CHESP), the HEQC and representatives from various HEIs, under the guidance of Prof. Sherril Gelmon of Portland State University, promises to provide the means through which longitudinal studies of community engagement in South Africa could be undertaken for benchmarking purposes in future.

Various USA scholars, administrators and institutions have produced tools to measure the development of service-learning institutionalisation. Andrew Furco's (2002) self-assessment rubric contains five dimensions, some of which are strongly reminiscent of the institutional self-assessment tool of Gelmon et al. (2005) referred to above. Each dimension includes a set of components that characterise the dimension. These dimensions, with some components mentioned in brackets, are:

- 1) The philosophy and mission of service learning (definition; strategic planning; alignment with institutional mission).
- 2) Faculty (i.e. staff in the South African context) support for and involvement in service learning (staff awareness; involvement and support; leadership; incentives and rewards).
- 3) Student support for and involvement in service learning (student awareness; opportunities; leadership; incentives and rewards).
- 4) Community participation and partnerships (partner awareness; mutual understanding; leadership and voice).
- 5) Institutional support for service learning (coordinating entity; staffing; funding; administrative support; evaluation and assessment).

An informative perspective from Australia, by Steve Garlick (Regional Knowledge Works, University of the Sunshine Coast), is provided in a paper presented at the InsideOut Conference on HE and Community Engagement (University of Queensland, July 2003). Garlick's contribution is entitled "Benchmarking 'good practice' university-region engagement efficiency". As the title indicates, the paper deals with the designing of a benchmarking regime for university-region engagement; the relevant phases are all conducted in a "collaborative learning exchange environment" (Garlick, 2003: 7).

The regional community focus of benchmarking, as proposed by Garlick, is particularly useful for the South African situation, where HE institutions are constantly reminded of the need to take the perspective of external stakeholder interests into account in their engagement activities. Garlick (2003: 9) further argues that the university and community that are partnering in an engagement benchmarking exercise should "identify and define their own categories and agree on the contextual environment in which the category sits with respect to their own circumstances". The three generic measures of engagement that Garlick (2003: 9) proposes include both quantitative and qualitative components, and relate to input, processes and output, in a manner that is reminiscent of the evaluative stages in the South African quality assurance system (cf. section 6 below).

When studying community engagement sources from "developed" countries, what becomes obvious is that the same issues are being addressed, but that the sense of urgency that has taken root in the USA is not yet visible in South Africa. This is indicative of a prevailing tendency to deny the fact that, for HE institutions in developing countries, "there is no other way" (to quote one of the stalwarts of community engagement at the UFS, Prof. Basie Wessels of the MUCPP). In addition to the HE call to "publish or perish", we have taken on the challenge of "partnerships or perish", because in the South African context this could mean the difference between a future of hope, on the one hand, and the inevitable decline of the democratic ideals embodied in the country's Bill of Rights and the rest of the Constitution (RSA, 1996), on the other.

The South African service-learning agenda was largely influenced by those exponents for the USA who were directly involved through the CHESP initiative, such as Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; cf. IUPUI Portfolio: Civic Engagement), Sherril Gelmon (Portland State University), Timothy Stanton (Stanford University) and Kathleen Stacey (Eastern Michigan University). However, at the time when the *Good Practice Guide* was developed, the levels of emancipation and "empowerment" that had been achieved through our own practice were such that we could to a large extent also rely on our own experience in the field of service learning.

6. Embedding service learning through good practices and continuous improvement

The national higher education quality assurance agenda holds the promise of continuous improvement through self-assessment, peer evaluation and institutional audits at various levels. The *Good Practice Guide* provides an example of how this objective could be achieved regarding service learning as one of the manifestations of community engagement. The very fact that community engagement features in the HEQC's *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004b: 19) is already impacting on the way in which HEIs view the importance of this recently re-focused core function (from "service" to "engagement"):

CRITERION 18

Quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalised and integrated with those for teaching and learning, where appropriate, and are adequately resourced and monitored.

In order to meet this criterion, the following are examples of what would be expected:

At the UFS, Section 7 of the Institutional Audit Report that is being prepared for the official audit in October 2006 is devoted to "Quality Arrangement for Community Engagement". The Institutional Self-evaluation Instrument of the *Good Practice Guide* was utilised as the framework for this section of the Report.

The HEQC's service-learning priorities are evident from its *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004b) and *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004c). In Criterion 7 of the *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (HEQC, 2004b: 11), it is stipulated, under (iv), that the following expectations are applicable in the case of institutions with service learning as part of their mission:

- Service learning programmes which are integrated into institutional and academic planning, as part of the institution's mission and strategic goals;

- Adequate resources and enabling mechanisms (including incentives) to support the implementation of service learning, including staff and student capacity development; and
- Review and monitoring arrangements to gauge the impact and outcomes of service learning programmes on the institution, as well as on other participating constituencies.

In response to this a national initiative was launched by the CHESP initiative of JET Education Services in 2004 to develop a set of indicators that would represent the good service-learning practices that HE institutions in South Africa would aim to achieve. During the second half of 2005 the author of this paper coordinated and managed the final stages of this national project, which by then was also being conducted in collaboration with the HEQC. As has been mentioned above, what resulted from this is the manuscript entitled: *A Good Practice Guide and Self-evaluation Instruments for the Development and Management of the Quality of Service Learning*. Contributions were made over a period of time by lecturers from various HE institutions and their partners working in the field, while some of the indicators and reflective questions included in the *Good Practice Guide* were derived from experience - varying between "good, bad and ugly" - gained at the UFS.

The fact that the Guide bears the hallmark of the HEQC is important, despite the following disclaimer in the Foreword (iii):

Importantly, however, this Good Practice Guide is neither a prescriptive checklist nor an expansion of the HEQC's criteria; rather, it is intended as a resource to assist HEIs in meeting and going beyond HEQC requirements in respect of developing, reviewing and improving their service-learning programmes.

In order to ensure that the Guide would be comprehensive, it was decided that it should contain good practice guidelines, i.e. recommended indicators and arrangements for managing the quality of service learning, relevant to the different levels within the institution on which service learning functions: the institutional level; the faculty and/or school level; the programme or qualification level; and the module or course level, making provision for the various entities and qualification structures used by institutions. Each of the instruments contains a management information section, a full set of indicators, appropriate reflective questions and examples of evidence, with the explicit provision (and consolation!) that all of these "can be adapted by institutions for self-review purposes" (HEQC/JET, 2006: 20).

For the purposes of aligning the Guide with other documents published by the HEQC, it was decided to follow the same approach to quality management that HE staff had become accustomed to. Managing quality in the core functions of higher education institutions involves four evaluative stages, namely (1) input, (2) process, (3) output and impact, and (4) review. Therefore, these evaluative stages also form the basis of the framework for managing the quality of service learning (HEQC/JET, 2006: 8):

- INPUT with regard to the development of service learning (i.e. mission statement and values; policies and regulations; structures; resources; and strategic and action plans);
- PROCESS-related arrangements for the implementation of service learning (i.e. management strategies, implementation support, capacity building, and partnership development);
- Monitoring and evaluation to gauge the OUTPUT and IMPACT of service learning; and
- REVIEW of service-learning modules/ courses.

In line with the HEQC's expectations and procedures, it is advised that self-evaluation should comprise the primary mechanism for managing the quality of service learning in the different functional units. Such self-evaluation should be complemented and validated by external peer evaluation.

If necessary, this process must be followed by an improvement and development plan, outlining actions to address the gaps or weaknesses identified during the evaluation process (HEQC/JET, 2006: 9).

One example of how the Guide was influenced by local experience relates to the special emphasis placed on the formation of overarching partnerships by the executive management with the executive leadership bodies of provincial, regional and local government and other sectors. Experience has shown that the eloquent calls of our leadership, in which the importance of becoming a "truly engaged university" with "robustness" is strongly urged, do not necessarily translate into any attempts by the said leadership to set an example in this regard by entering into high-level dialogue and negotiations regarding the growth, development and service priorities of those sectors with which we need to collaborate in a well-structured, coordinated way. This invariably leaves those staff members working at the chalk-face with the responsibility of engaging in cooperative relationships with external partners, without the sanctioning and relative safety of overarching partnerships which would create a much more enabling environment for them to work in.

Indicator 5 (2006: 39-40) of the Institutional Level Self-evaluation Instrument specifically addresses the above issue:

Engagement, collaboration and partnerships are cornerstones of the institution's service-learning objectives.

The following is provided as an arrangement for managing quality in this regard:

5.1 *The institution has effective structures and processes for identification and formulation of regional engagement and collaboration.*

One of the reflective questions that may guide the process in this instance is: "How are partnerships for service-learning aligned with regional priorities?", and three of the suggested examples of evidence are:

- Documents stating regional priorities and alignment with those priorities.
- Descriptions of structures for negotiations, and their roles and responsibilities.
- Examples of partnership agreements (...)

The pilot-testing of the Guide was undertaken at the UFS, and was also conducted in the context of two service-learning modules of the Central University of Technology, towards the end of 2005. The instruments were then refined and the full Guide was submitted for publication by the HEQC; it is due to be released in September 2006. What the further national roll-out will entail is not clear at this stage. At the UFS, the Guide will also be made available during the second half of 2006 to be used in preparation for the HEQC's institutional audit. The Guide will also serve as a tool for continuous self-improvement of service learning, to be administered annually at the end of the year.

7. What factors are likely to determine the future of community engagement in South Africa?

The world is currently changing at a rate that requires a radical rethinking and reshaping of every sector of society on an ongoing basis. In 1899 John Dewey made the following comment, which is as valid now as it was then: "That this revolution should not affect education in other than formal and superficial fashion is inconceivable." William Plater's (1999) contention is that HE institutions should "change their habits of living" (i.e. be transformed) by "engaging the campus as citizen one scholar at a time", *inter alia* by ensuring that the measures of accountability become clearer and more useful in establishing and documenting actual accomplishments (cf. Plater, 1999: 168). In South Africa, we might need to move faster and with more urgency than is necessary in developed countries. Our ability (or lack thereof) to provide convincing evidence of HE's commitment to achieving good practices in service learning is likely to determine the future of this promising pedagogy in South Africa. Proving to local communities, service sector partners and our own institutions that service learning is worth the extra time, effort and resources, is a vital aspect in this regard, requiring strong partnerships, systematic data-collection and effective dissemination of the results of such joint investigations.

Embedding community engagement, and service learning, in this way will require a multi-pronged approach, addressing all the factors causing resistance mentioned above. However, even if we do attend to all of these aspects, our endeavours may still not be as successful as we would hope. The fact of the matter is that engagement is difficult work (Brukardt et al., 2006: 244); and therefore, those involved constantly need to be reminded to be patient, resilient, hopeful and committed.

The following is proposed as a research question for the next phase of this investigation: How and to what extent does the introduction of a self-evaluation tool for community service assist in (1) continuous improvement of the work; (2) changing perceptions regarding the quality of community engagement generally; and thus (3) furthering the cause of embedding community engagement, i.e. "fixing it firmly and deeply", in academia and in society simultaneously, as a fully integrated core function of HE, equal in status to teaching and research?

The key questions that remain are: Is the HE sector in South Africa ready to commit to community engagement? Do we really have a deep understanding of the fact that HE institutions in South Africa actually do not have a choice in this matter?

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¹ Various clans were found amongst the Koranna: Cloetses, Linkse, Regshande, Katse, Springbokke, Skerpioene, Pampiere, Karosdraers, Afrikander, Towenaars, Slaparms, Bitterboschse and Taaiboschse (Buys 1989:33, Engelbrecht 1936:55; and Maingard 1932:120). The Taaiboschse are regarded as the most important clan, which means that the person who is the leader of the Taaibosch clan is likely to also be regarded as the traditional leader of all the Koranna.