



| ARTICLE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CRITICALLY ENGAGED CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES: MODELS FROM AUSTRALIA AND THE U.S.

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Increasingly universities are offering, and students are seeking, opportunities to use

skills and talents acquired through their studies to make a contribution to local and global

communities. The question for educators is “what constitutes academically-driven community engagement in higher education and how does it differ from work experience on the one hand and volunteering on the other?” This article discusses how two universities – Australian Catholic University and DePaul University – define and deliver community engagement experiences. We outline three key stages – preparation, action and reflection – and compare and contrast examples of community engagement activities undertaken by our students. Our goal in this paper is to explore and demonstrate from the perspectives of two large urban Catholic universities the value of diverse types of university-community engagement, facilitating ways of learning while transforming society.

By the time they reach college, many students have learned to refer to the larger society beyond the walls of academe as the “real world”. The separation this reflects is perhaps one of the most ironic, and tragic, aspects of traditional educational models – we isolate learners from the very culture we profess to be preparing them for. Yet

for many students, a deep encounter with those in need may be the most educational thing that ever happens to them (McPherson, 1991: p.50).

Community engagement is becoming widely accepted within the academy as a central component of higher education. As described by Holland (2017), the 2006 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines community engagement “as a method of teaching, learning and research [that] describes interactions between universities and their communities (business, industry, government, NGOs, and other groups) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity”. As Catholic universities, ACU and DePaul are driven by their faith-based missions that are embedded in their respective histories; building community partnerships and capacity for marginalised populations is always the priority of engagement activities and, consequently, the institutions share a particular perspective on ways of engaging

with those who experience disadvantage and/or marginalisation. As part of this Catholic tradition, both institutions

recognise the need to apply a critical lens to how community engagement experiences are structured and implemented.

It is important to acknowledge that there are barriers to meaningful community engagement – for students, for staff, and for community partners. These barriers, such as scheduling engagement in accordance with academic terms or taking time to orient students to working in communities, should not prevent universities from fulfilling the key teaching role of a university. Given the educational

mission of higher education, especially of our two universities, integrating community engagement with formal academic learning must be done with care and concern for both students and the community partners with whom they engage. As two universities with a primary focus on teaching, but that also focus on positively transforming society through

service, careful consideration is given to the processes by which community engagement programs are administered.

This article offers a comparative analysis of how each of our institutions prepares, orchestrates and reflects upon collaborative work with communities.

Preparation is critical for successfully integrating community engagement with curriculum. Students lead increasingly busy lives, often balancing employment and family responsibilities with their studies. Increasingly, students infrequently attend campus; listening to recorded lectures online, accessing library resources through online databases, and communicating with lecturers and tutors by online video and email. For these students, fitting community engagement activities into their schedules is difficult, and requires creative solutions – such as offering the choice of block placements or weekly participation and sourcing opportunities close to where students live and work. The homework support program offered at a primary school near ACU’s Melbourne campus, for example, addresses this issue by timetabling the sessions into the students’ class schedule, ensuring that all students are available to attend. At DePaul, service learning assignments in the community are carefully crafted in accordance with a short ten-week

¹At ACU we use the term ‘subject’ to describe a single unit of study, at DePaul the term ‘course’ is used; in this paper the two terms are used interchangeably.

²At ACU we use the term ‘academic staff’ to describe those who are employed at a university to undertake teaching and research, at DePaul the term ‘faculty’ is used; for clarity in this paper we use the term ‘instructor(s)’ to refer to those teaching community engagement/service learning.



Regardless of our institutional differences, the community engagement experiences our students find themselves in must challenge them in real and meaningful ways. An encounter with their own humanity helps them to reflect, learn and grow as people of compassion and initiative.

academic term. In a time of user-pays education, some students will question the value of community engagement, querying how it contributes to their education in their chosen profession and perhaps objecting to paying fees for a subject (or course) that requires them to work in the community. This is particularly the case at most U.S. universities, including DePaul, where the high cost of a college education is challenging for many students who work full or part-time to attain a degree and yet still graduate with significant debt.

The above challenges underscore the importance of preparation in order to derive well-planned (and mutually meaningful) action by students in the community; the latter is followed by reflection and a return to preparation in a cyclical process. Most well-structured higher education community engagement programs practice some form of this process, variably derived from the experiential learning model popularised by David Kolb in the 1984 article *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Yet the ways in which students' community engagement experiences are planned, the ways in which reflection is facilitated, and the ways in which learning occurs (whereby students conceptualise and explore their experiences in the abstract), are also distinct to a university's culture, geography, history and mission.

Given their primary role as educational institutions, universities need to assist students to understand *how* community-based activities benefit them directly by increasing their knowledge and skills, and *why* it is incumbent on them as global citizens to contribute to the

common good. At ACU, community engagement is the third component of the Core Curriculum, building on two formation subjects that engage students with these issues. At DePaul, in addition to the instructor-driven application of service learning pedagogy throughout the curriculum on a more selective sense, taking a course with community engagement is one of the primary options for fulfilling an Experiential Learning Requirement completed as part of the undergraduate Liberal Studies curriculum. Given that thousands of students are guided into these community engagement experiences annually, there are clear demands for support of instructors.²

Instructors may feel poorly equipped to provide meaningful community engagement opportunities for their students. Barriers for faculty include both identifying community partners and suitable projects, and providing the effective formation and reflection components of the course. Addressing these logistical issues precedes the skills needed to facilitate deeper discussions and learning that guide students to challenge existing structural and systemic social problems (Mitchell, 2008). In this regard, both ACU and DePaul work with community partners to source placements and support academic staff in the development and delivery of preparation and reflection activities. The alignment of curricular demands with community interests is a dance embedded with questions of institutional power and privilege in respect to how universities develop expectations for what and how students learn in communities. Shining a critical self-reflexive lens on the potential

imposition of the university on the community for the sake of student learning is essential to preparation.

Community partners can find it challenging to take on student placements or projects. It is often difficult to find meaningful and respectful ways for students to interact with community members within the time constraints of university terms and class timetables. Universities need to ensure that the provision of community engagement placements does not become an imposition on partners and that the time required for them to induct, supervise and debrief students does not exceed the benefits of the students' participation. For this reason, ACU and DePaul provide a range of placement options for students and community partners (see 'Action' section), recognising that 'direct service' is not the only way that students can make a meaningful contribution to communities. Each institution has developed unique community engagement initiatives and support units that seek to overcome the logistical barriers through providing support so instructors can teach in a way that facilitates students' learning in and outside the classroom while contributing to the capacity of community partners.

ACU AND DEPAUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS

The above challenges necessitate considerable funding and planning if universities like ACU and DePaul are to apply their missions in ways that are more than nominal; that is, in ways that offer students and community members mutual benefit as agents for transforming society.

As the two largest English-speaking Catholic universities in the world, both

ACU and DePaul share a similar philosophy of service that goes beyond one-off acts of charity or occasional volunteering. Central to their missions as Catholic educational institutions, both universities seek to build meaningful engagement initiatives through long-term partnership-building, particularly with those organisations that support people living on the margins. Seeking to address the barriers to inclusion and dignity for all, ACU and DePaul practise community engagement with an explicit focus on supporting social justice among the most marginalised. In other words, the universities do not shy away from engaging students in highly political issues such as those involving immigration, workers' rights, incarceration and equity in housing and education. Working on these issues as universities requires an approach to working in the community that involves partnership building where there are expectations for incremental progress or change; that is, that change may be seen over multiple years rather than a single academic term. In turn, the universities are faced with helping students understand how their relatively short time working in the community is both part of their formation as human beings, thus incremental to a Catholic education, and part of a longer-term project to employ the resources of the university to change society.

“Engagement gives students and staff greater understanding of themselves, of others, and of the settings in which their learning can have a positive effect. It offers concrete examples of their moral and ethical obligations as citizens

and human beings, and of the relevance of the Gospel in their lives.”

Professor Greg Craven,
ACU Vice-Chancellor and President

ACU explicitly uses the term “community engagement” for its student placements linked to curriculum, whereas DePaul use the term “academic service learning” for such placements or projects embedded in coursework. Whilst the terminology is different, students at both institutions undertake immersive community service opportunities with a similar approach and learning objectives. Students benefit from the relationships they build working with people outside the university in non-profits and often with those who experience marginalisation. In some cases, students come from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves, complicating the reflection on such experiential learning, and thus making it necessary to plan curriculum and partnerships that engage with, and draw upon, students' diverse backgrounds and that views knowledge as not only a product of the academy.

As Catholic institutions, developing partnerships with community organisations involves recognising the value of local knowledge and respecting community partners as purveyors of that knowledge. In practice, that means working in solidarity with those local institutions that work directly with those who are marginalised or oppressed in some manner. Given such external partnerships as learning environments, instructors need to be comfortable acknowledging that there may be local knowledge brought into the classroom by students with diverse backgrounds that contradicts the literature

and/or perspectives of well-respected scholars. The seasoned instructor knows that the unknowns of such community-engaged curriculum are often the richest and most critical forms of learning. In this way, students learn from the opportunity to develop and utilise discipline-specific skills in real world environments, even in the short period of their university-guided community-based activities. At our institutions, institutionalised, academically-integrated community engagement is thus constituted by a vision that is bigger than a temporary volunteering experience or merely a transactional experience; it is a vision that expects mutual benefit between student and community partners that is not unidirectional or simply an opportunity for students to feel good about doing service, but gradually leads to long-term systemic changes in the communities where we work and in the ways our graduates lead their lives.

Ideally, for our students, academically-embedded community engagement provides opportunities for them to grow intellectually, personally and socially. For community partners, such collaborations can provide enthusiastic student participants to assist in activities designed to strengthen communities through the local institutions that serve the population. Such partnerships can provide an opportunity to interact with students and demonstrate their own skills and capacities as they contribute to the students' education. For those university administrators and instructors that are privileged to have roles that enable us to develop, teach about and nurture these community-based forms of learning, such partnerships provide enormous personal fulfilment as we watch students grow as caring, empathic and engaged citizens.

FIGURE 1:

ACU'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES³

Building connections	ACU community engagement builds genuine connections with community through respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships.
Acting with humility	ACU community engagement acts with humility, looking 'outward' with equality to work collaboratively with community, not 'on' or 'for' community.
Developing understanding	ACU community engagement responds with empathy, aiming to understand the people we work with and interact in a considered, compassionate, and respectful manner.
Affirming dignity	ACU community engagement recognises the fundamental rights and worth of all human beings and is committed to affirming the dignity of all people in a holistic manner.
Pursuing Justice	ACU community engagement stands in solidarity with the most disadvantaged and marginalised, and works to realise a fair and just society for all.

FIGURE 2:

DEPAUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES³

Co-Educators	At DePaul, community partners are not considered solely as recipients of services or resources, but as equal. We view them as co-educators who have an equal stake in exchange of resources.
Mutual Transformation and Cooperation	At DePaul, partnerships develop out of relationships resulting in mutual transformation and cooperation between parties. Well planned and transparent collaboration creates a sense of shared purpose that serves the common good.
Asset-based Community Development	DePaul employs a capacity building approach to community engagement by beginning with the premise that all communities have people with talents and skills; that all communities have assets.
Critical Self (Institutional) Reflection	DePaul asks partners to provide systematic critical self-reflection on the university's support in order to improve our efforts to build partners' capacities to serve members of the community.
Social Justice	DePaul is committed to community engagement that works for social justice. Working for social justice begins with affirming human dignity and through subsequently building connections to resources that challenges systemic inequality.

³These are brief summaries of our underlying principles. Please contact the authors for the full statement of principles



At the outset, curriculum needs to have clear learning goals for students – including knowledge and applied skills but also goals in relation to ethical formation, interpersonal skills, empathy, communication and leadership.

However, as with all great privileges, these roles come with great responsibilities.

Embracing our university missions in the planning of community-engaged learning is central to how we operate our respective community engagement units. That means designing community engagement in a manner by which meaningful student learning occurs without imposition on communities. We also need to be ever vigilant that our service learning, or community engagement, does not slip into being just about “service” or just about “learning”. Community engagement that is solely focused on “service” is synonymous with volunteering and can reinforce marginalisation by positioning the student as an altruistic giver and the community member as a passive recipient. Community engagement that is solely focused on learning is synonymous with work experience such as through a practicum or internship, positioning the student as a passive recipient of knowledge from an organisation.

While exclusively “service” or “learning” models are “easy” options for busy students and staff, they do not provide the potential for student growth or meaningful contribution to the community that are the cornerstones of mutually beneficial and reciprocal community engagement in a manner aligned with the underlying social justice ethos of our universities. Operationalising community engagement that integrates service and learning in higher education requires resources in the form of staff who have the time and expertise to build relations that connect instructors and curriculum to community-based participants. Each institution structures such support in a unique way, given

resources and the level of commitment to embedding community engagement within the processes of teaching and learning. Such units (ACU Engagement at ACU, and the Steans Center at DePaul) act as liaisons between universities and communities in a way that implements an overall set of guiding principles for how community engagement is applied institutionally. As noted in Figures 1 and 2, we outline some of the approaches to community engagement at our respective institutions with the goal of explaining how our community engagement initiatives are configured in accordance with our distinct faith-based backgrounds, institutional structures, culture and practice.

ACU AND DEPAUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STAGES

1. Preparation

Through our respective community engagement offices, ACU and DePaul plan and implement community-based learning activities and link them to curriculum. Given numerous potential pitfalls that can result from obligating students through curriculum to work in communities, ACU and DePaul seek to ensure that our students are prepared for their community engagement experience. Not only do we need to select appropriate community partners, but students also need to understand their goals and expectations; we need to ensure that what we and our students are able to offer is consistent with those expectations of community partners. At the outset, curriculum needs to have clear learning goals for students – including knowledge and applied skills but also goals in relation to ethical formation, interpersonal skills, empathy, communication and leadership. Perhaps most important, we need to

adequately and rapidly prepare students for their interaction with the community so that they approach people with whom they engage from the starting point of their common humanity.

For community engagement to be a truly reciprocal and mutually beneficial experience in line with our respective institutional missions, our students need to be empathic in their work with communities. They need to seek to understand the causes of inequity and disadvantage and to be motivated to address social, economic, environmental and structural factors and to work with communities to address the root causes of inequality. Moreover, given the missions of our respective faith-based institutions, we hope to guide students toward developing increased empathy through listening with their hearts and minds and then critically reflecting on people’s circumstances, history, dispositions, needs, and worldviews (Dawson, 2000; Passmore, 1985; Segal, Cimino, Gerdes, Harmon, & Wagaman, 2013). Indeed, scholars highlight that listening and critical reflection with a humble disposition and open heart and mind is the key to this learning and development (Dawson, 2000; Pink & Butcher, 2014). Developing empathic understandings means students use their intellect, and their hearts to “see the world through the eyes of the other” (Segal et al., 2013). As Passmore (1985) argued however, this isn’t a simple task when groups are culturally, socially and economically remote, and such a challenging process needs to be supported before, during and after student engagement experiences.

FIGURE 3:

CATEGORIES OF SERVICE LEARNING/ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

DEPAUL		ACU	
Direct service	Students engage in service that directly benefits a community organization’s existing programming (e.g., tutoring, providing health screenings)	Direct community engagement	Students interact with community members through an existing program offered by ACU and/or an external partner organisation (e.g., tutoring youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds).
Project-based service	Students produce a tangible product by the end of the term (e.g., creating a website, PR plan, assessing organizational recruitment strategies).	Project-based community engagement	Students (individually or in groups) work on a project with a tangible outcome for a community organisation (e.g., develop a website for a community organisation, develop a strategic plan).
Community-based research	Students contribute to a research effort defined and driven by a community partner.	Community-based research	Students conduct or contribute to a research project needed by a community organisation.
Advocacy and Solidarity	Students support an ongoing campaign to address a critical social, economic, and/or environmental issue in Chicago or internationally. It involves valuing the dignity of all people, respecting them as individuals, in the pursuit of justice, community-building and peace.	Advocacy	Students participate in/support one of ACU’s partner organisations with an ongoing campaign to address a social issue.

At ACU, all undergraduate students complete the core curriculum, two university-wide coursework units and a school-specific community engagement placement. UNCC100 (Self and Community: Exploring the Anatomy of Modern Society) focuses on the principles of Catholic Social Thought, encouraging students to think critically about how issues relating to the dignity of the human person and the realisation of the common good may be addressed in their personal and professional lives now and in the future. The unit aims to equip students with knowledge and understanding of the ideas of “self” and “community” as interrelated concepts, and develop basic skills to enable them to contribute to a more just society. UNCC300 builds on UNCC100, and the call from Pope Francis for a renewed emphasis on the dignity of the human person as the basis of all action, advocacy and solidarity. This unit provides students with the skills and knowledge to become an active agent for change in an interconnected and interdependent world. Importantly, it also prepares students’ hearts and minds for the action, reflection,

and experiential learning that is to come in their community engagement placements.

At DePaul, all undergraduates complete an Experiential Learning (EL) requirement as part of the university’s Liberal Studies curriculum. One of the four ways to fulfil

this requirement is to enrol in an approved course that integrates service learning pedagogy. This occurs for about 20 to 30 of the 60 courses on average per term that incorporate service learning. The courses approved as EL come from a wide array of disciplines but are mostly taught through the humanities and social sciences. For students who otherwise would not take such a course, the EL requirement guides them out of their curricular and experiential comfort zone and into communities throughout Chicago

where they learn about issues of power and privilege and how and why social inequality exists. Equally important, through EL courses, students begin to see the types of solutions crafted by

local residents and non-profits to address systemic inequality. For many students in majors that have little to do with such a topic, the EL courses offer a profound example of how the university lives out its Vincentian mission – to respect the dignity of all people regardless of their situation, manifested through solidarity with those who live in the most dire circumstances – through curriculum.

2. Action

Planning community engagement in curriculum requires foresight into the types of work that students can logistically and meaningfully undertake. Community engagement, or service learning, has often been seen as synonymous with direct service – that is, that “real” community engagement requires individual one-on-one interaction between the student and the disadvantaged community member. While this is an important form of engagement, it is not the only form of engagement that is beneficial for our community partners and our students. An over-emphasis on direct service as the only, or best, form of community engagement overlooks some of the real barriers to this form of interaction that some students experience.

First, some of our students may not have the capacity or the desire to engage in such direct interaction; while we may argue that requiring them to do so will force them to confront their prejudices and grow as a person, this ignores the potential harm to the community recipients of such reluctant service. Second, the increasing numbers of students enrolled in our universities means an ever-increasing need to provide “opportunities” for direct interaction that risk seeing the



For community engagement to be mutually beneficial - for the student, the community and the institution – it must be a critically engaged process at the institutional, curricula and individual level within universities. Deep engagement is reflective, open and realistic within the structure and function of the university and prioritises community interests.

marginalised and disadvantaged as a resource rather than a partner. Third, an insistence on direct service may put community engagement/service learning out of reach of students who themselves experience barriers to direct service, such as those with a mental or physical health issue, those who have caring or work responsibilities, and those who are unable to obtain a police clearance due to a previous criminal conviction. Finally, the underlying principles of community engagement are partnership and mutually beneficial exchange; if our partners are regularly asking for assistance with projects and research (which they are) then refusal to provide anything other than direct service is not honouring their needs, and a mutually beneficial partnership. Further, we argue that through carefully structured learning and reflection activities, students can develop rich, empathic understandings of community members through several modes of community engagement. In recognising the need for – and value of – different categories of community engagement, the Steans Center provides four types of service learning for DePaul students, and ACU has recently adopted these four categories (see Table 1).

The fourth category, advocacy and solidarity, is one that causes anxiety among some university faculty and administrators out of fear of being politically controversial. However, it is this type of engagement that will in the long-term provide the most benefit for the student, the community, and society at large. Further, universities have traditionally been places where youth challenge orthodoxy as the next

generation to effect social change. Our universities are training students for future professional careers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be leaders in their communities. If we, as a global community, are to address the social, economic, environmental and structural factors that create systemic inequality we need to be training our future leaders to use their skills and resources to work with communities to reduce the barriers to equal access, participation and shared human dignity. Sometimes this means we need to challenge the status quo and “stand beside” those most in need and advocate loudly for change.

To illustrate the value of the four categories, the following section provides examples of current and recent community engagement activities from both institutions.

Direct service

Homework Support: On ACU’s Melbourne campus, undergraduate students, particularly those enrolled in education degrees, participate in The Atherton Gardens Homework Support program. This program – a partnership between ACU, Sacred Heart Primary School and The Smith Family – offers weekly after school homework support to local primary school students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and refugee backgrounds. Based in Fitzroy, the program began in 2002 with 18 students and has grown to supporting more than 100 students each year. ACU students work as dedicated one-on-one tutors to enhance school-based learning and encourage the development of literacy and numeracy skills through a variety of

learning activities. The program has been developed to:

- provide a safe learning environment where children are supported by tutors to improve their literacy and numeracy skills
- raise children’s educational aspirations and promote positive relationships between the children from the estates and ACU students
- build the capacity of parents to support and encourage their children’s learning at home
- support the Social Emotional Literacy Education Model used by the school’s teachers.

ACU students receive training and induction prior to commencing as a tutor and ongoing support is provided onsite by staff from ACU, Sacred Heart Primary School, and The Smith Family. Throughout the course of the program, tutors are encouraged to reflect on their professional practice to complement their university studies.

Intercambio: Established in 2002, intercambio integrates a social justice-based curriculum and critical reflection through popular education to raise awareness of social issues while providing students and community members with the opportunity to exchange in language acquisition. A year-long program offered as a result of collaboration between DePaul’s Department of Modern Languages and the Steans Center, Intercambio involves students enrolling in an intermediate level, year-long sequence of Spanish classes with a service-learning component. Through the service-learning component, students fulfill their Liberal

Studies Experiential Learning requirement in a unique program that offers the opportunity for English and Spanish-speakers to build conversation skills while learning about each other's lives, cultural backgrounds and common issues impacting society. Intercambio works by

partnering a DePaul student (Spanish language learner) with a community member enrolled in English as a Second Language class (English language learner). Students and community members meet in an informal space outside of a classroom that allows participants to practice what they learned in their respective language classes. The program includes eight, three-hour sessions at a community-based organisation serving the Latino communities of

Chicago. The program was built from the popular education theories developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire that stress collective learning and empowerment of community members. As they practice their language skills, participants critically reflect on important social justice issues occurring every day in Chicago and globally. Topics include issues such as health, immigration, and the environment; all designed to encourage conversation

through structured activities and lively interaction.

Project-based service

Needs Mapping: ACU Engagement often receives requests from partner organisations for donations of much-

needed items, and requests from staff and students looking for suitable organisations to donate good-quality items that are no longer needed. Over the recent summer break, an ACU undergraduate Arts student undertook a "needs mapping" project, contacting organisations near our six Australian campuses to ascertain what types of goods and resources they are looking for. He then developed a searchable spreadsheet of organisations' needs, including any specific

requirements or limitations on the types of goods they are able to accept. While this was a largely desk-based activity, by directly contacting the organisations he was able to develop a deep understanding of the needs of the communities they serve and the issues faced by charitable organisations (such as well-intentioned donations that are not usable and actually incur disposal costs for the organisation). Whilst some would argue that community

engagement requires capacity building at individual level, we believe that community engagement can also be about bringing capacity to organisations that serve those who experience disadvantage and/or marginalisation. This student developed deep and rich understandings through helping to develop the capacity of the organisation, serving the common good by affirming the dignity of those most in need through the provision of goods. The resulting report and database has since been used regularly to match donations to needs. For example, when the university found itself with a large over-supply of UHT (long-life) milk, we were instantly able to identify organisations near each campus that were looking for milk, and get the supplies delivered to them within the day.

Nonprofit Website Incubator: DePaul offers "Software Projects for Community Clients" to assist small community-based nonprofits in building, rebuilding, or improving their websites. Computer science students engage in real-world problem solving for organisations that are working on critical social, economic and political issues while non-profits gain essential communication tools. The students use software applications that are new to them and they work in teams, essentially as website development companies for their non-profit client. In addition to learning and applying technical skills, students practice intercommunication skills and learn how to work on a team and how to listen. They also learn how non-profits with limited resources operate; and how human and social service organisations operate on narrow budgets that don't always permit the affording of website development services. Students build or rebuild websites



Community engagement is increasingly seen as a central component of higher education - as universities acknowledge their capacity to serve the community, and their role in education students to be global citizens.

for organisations that don't usually have anyone with information technology (IT) skills. The students thus take on a role of being their own IT organisation, giving them a window into how organisations juggle information from various constituents and then how their project can develop a web-based application to help make the organisation's work more streamlined so they can save time and better serve community members. The students also train their clients so they are able to make changes to their websites, leaving them with a product they can edit and that is easy to manage. DePaul then hosts the website on its server for up to a year.

Community-based research

Housing co-operatives: Housing co-operatives have the potential to provide stable housing for those with limited income, an important social issue in a time where housing affordability is reaching a crisis point in many cities. In addition to providing a home, this form of housing is also believed to provide social support and improve the wellbeing of residents. However, there is limited research data on these outcomes. At ACU, we were approached by a local housing co-operative seeking to document the benefits gained by their residents, but without the budget to pay for a commercial evaluator. We were able to attract a postgraduate psychology student to undertake a small qualitative study with residents to begin to document the outcomes for residents in the housing co-operative. While the project is still underway, preliminary results show that the members report receiving emotional, instrumental and informational social

support, leading to increased well-being. Future student research projects will build on this initial study and provide an ongoing partnership between the university and this not-for-profit organisation.

Community-based Research Faculty Fellowship: The Steans Center awards two-year Community-based Research Faculty Fellowships to fund faculty to conduct collaborate research projects with community partners throughout Chicago. The research project must be driven by the interests of a community/ community organisation and thus benefit community and must be integrated into curriculum taught by the award recipient. For example, one project recently worked with a homeless services organisation that assists people in attaining employment. An instructor in the Masters in Public Health (MPH) program and her students evaluated the effectiveness of the organisation's job skills training for individuals experiencing homelessness. Specifically, their research explored how career counselling intervention impacts employability, hope, well-being, use of strengths and employment. They collaboratively defined research questions such as "How does a strength-based career counselling intervention impact participant self-perceived employability and full-time employment status?" The research team administered pre and post-test surveys and MPH students enrolled in a Career Counseling course learned how to evaluate a career counseling intervention with individuals experiencing homelessness. Students learned about the challenge of collecting data with participants who have difficulty using

computers for surveys and how human service organisations experience high attrition rates especially when working with homeless populations.

Advocacy and solidarity

The School of Science and Mental Health Awareness Week: For the past three years, the School of Science at ACU has taken a special focus in advocating for, and "standing beside", those who suffer from a mental illness. This has been built into a course work unit where students develop posters that can be used to educate on the prevalence of mental health conditions and the stigma surrounding these. Additionally, students in the course organise guest speakers who have a mental health condition to raise awareness on campus and actively raise funds to support the Australian mental health awareness week initiatives. Through advocating for awareness and the reduction of stigma, and providing a platform for the voices and stories of those with a mental health condition, students are affirming the dignity of these people, while increasingly learning to see world through their eyes. These learnings are then linked with the field of neuroscience specifically, and social justice broadly, as in keeping with the principles of Catholic Social Thought.

Inside-Out Prison Exchange: In 2012, DePaul launched the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, a project started at the Inside-Out Center at Temple University in Philadelphia. In the U.S., more than 2.3 million people are currently incarcerated. DePaul trains faculty and students to learn together with students on the inside of the prison system as a direct reflection of the university's Catholic identity and Vincentian mission. This personalism is

manifested through solidarity with those who live in the most dire circumstances, including prisons. The university's Community Service Studies Minor in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences engages the inside (incarcerated) students as equals through facilitating the offering of courses onsite at two Chicago area prisons. The classes bring DePaul students and inmates together to learn as peers, engaging in a variety of topics depending on the faculty member and the course offering. For the outside students, the experience is very different than a traditional classroom and distinct from other service learning courses they may have taken. The focus is not the transfer of resources to a community from the university but on connecting students — inside and out — in learning about restorative justice methods through a variety of disciplines such as philosophy, political science, gender studies and critical community studies. Outside students travel to the prison and join the inmates to learn these topics together through readings, discussions and written assignments. The course is therefore not about serving others in the traditional sense, but more about transforming lives of students on the inside and out. It provides an academic space where, in solidarity, DePaul's Vincentian values are lived out.

3. Reflection

While many of our students are not Catholic, community engagement is aligned with our universities' respective Catholic missions of promoting knowledge, human dignity and the common good.

To approach all strangers we meet with respect and dignity (and thus equal

worth) to a person, is a core Christian value that underpins the design of our engagement programs (Byron, 1999). This means the students, regardless of their faith, are encouraged to reach deep within themselves to find genuine human connection in the experience, to discover their capacity for approaching people facing challenging circumstances, and not just see it as an uncomfortable token gesture, a troublesome academic obligation undertaken with gritted teeth, or an insincere feel-good exercise. At our institutions, the first step to doing this type of reflection is to base our work in community engagement on principles grounded in Catholic Social Thought; principles that highlight "ways of doing and being" in community engagement. For example, Figure 1 shows the principles underpinning community engagement at ACU, which were developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy. These principles highlight to the students the importance of forming connections, developing understanding, acting with humility, affirming dignity, and pursuing social justice. Communication of these ways of doing and being in community engagement sets a foundation for the students' action and learning. DePaul is in the process of forming its own set of principles for community engagement that follow similar sentiments to those of ACU.

Regardless of our institutional differences, the community engagement experiences our students find themselves in must challenge them in real and meaningful ways. An encounter with their own humanity helps them to reflect, learn and grow as people of compassion and initiative. If they are not provoked to

reflect deeply from the experience, then the exercise has fallen short.

Therefore, both our institutions seek to create structured opportunities for reflection for our students – acknowledging that their service learning may have been challenging as well as rewarding. At ACU, reflective tasks are built into discipline specific community engagements units at the micro level (i.e., after an individual community engagement experience) and the macro level after a semester's community engagement placement has completed. At both institutions, reflective tasks can include written assignments such as online blogs, reflective journals and reflective assignments, and oral tasks such as group debriefing circles and reflective presentations. Typically, these tasks are based on sound pedagogical frameworks such as Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle, Kolb's (1981) experiential learning model, or Dawson's (2000) See, Judge, Act model from a Catholic perspective. Regardless of their origins in scholarship, these frameworks all highlight the importance of reflection after a concrete experience. Within such frameworks, there are carefully constructed reflective questions that challenge students' hearts and intellects to understand the personal and social influences on the behaviour and dispositions of community members. Such reflective questions and tasks can be clearly mapped to the Catholic intellectual tradition, the universities' institutional missions and principles of community engagement. In doing this, students are supported and disciplined to embark on a transformational learning process that requires analysing the disequilibria and challenges to their frames of reference,

which can occur after a rich community engagement experience (Mezirow, 2012). In this sense, the development of empathic understanding is a holistic, person and context bound, and rigorous process that enables work with community members in a respectful considered and effective manner. Once learned, students can apply this to personal and professional situations in their ongoing lives. Such an approach seeks to develop students who are global citizens with a critical habit of mind, an empathic disposition, and who are connected to issues of contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Community engagement is increasingly seen as a central component of higher education – as universities acknowledge their capacity and responsibility to serve the community, and their role in educating students to be global citizens. As Catholic universities, ACU and DePaul have a deep commitment to working with those experiencing marginalisation or disadvantage. Integral to an ACU education is giving students time to reflect on ways we can change the world by applying the principles of Catholic Social Thought, emphasising the dignity of the human person and our role in working to achieve the common good. Integral to a DePaul education is the Vincentian mission, asking students to understand the values of St. Vincent de Paul as they relate to respect for human dignity and service to others.

Thus, community engagement is part of the fabric of both institutions and clearly tied to our missions and core philosophies, which are built into the students' education. However, community

engagement has an equally important and integral role in students' education at secular universities. The purpose of this article was not to suggest that as Catholic institutions we have a superior or unique role to play in educating tomorrow's leaders to work for the good of all humanity. This is a task incumbent on all universities as institutions of citizenship; to harness the power of their mission, culture and cohorts to these ends. Rather, we have sought to describe our processes, considerations and outcomes as examples of community engagement in action; and the challenges we have faced and will continue to face in the rapidly changing higher education environment. In sharing our experiences we hope to contribute to the broader discussion, understanding and integration of community engagement in the curriculum of all Australian universities and universities internationally.

For community engagement to be mutually beneficial – for the student, the community and the institution – it must be a critically engaged process at the institutional, curricula, and individual level within universities. Deep engagement is reflective, open and realistic within the structure and function of the university, and prioritises community interests. Importantly, we must always be critically engaging with our own community engagement processes so we can remain agile and responsive to changing higher education and community landscapes.

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