



Australian Catholic University and Service-Learning during the Pandemic

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Australian Catholic University

- Eight campuses across Australia and a campus located in Rome.
- More than 34,000 students, and 2,000 staff.
- Community engagement critical to ACU's Mission:
 - Pursuit of knowledge
 - Dignity of the human person
 - The common good





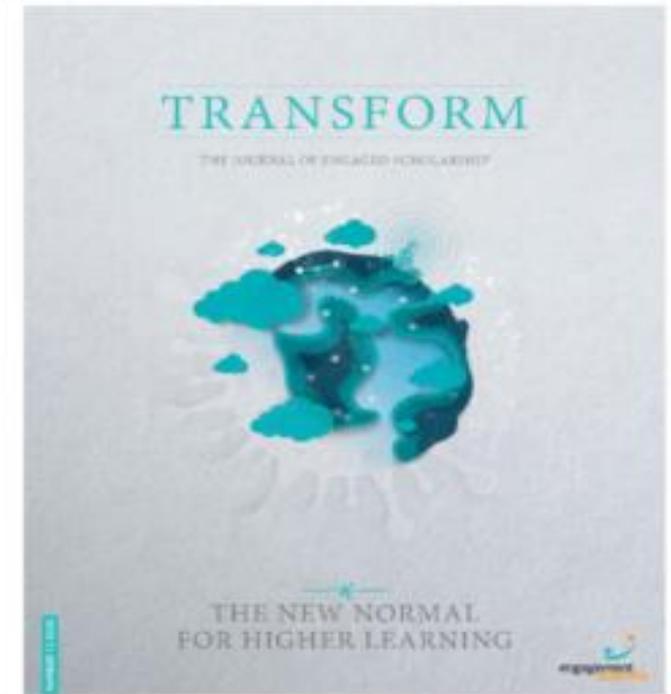
Where is Service-Learning at ACU?

ACU's Core Curriculum

- The Core Curriculum is comprised of three units:
 - two University Core Curriculum (UNCC) units that are common to most undergraduate programs
 - a Core Curriculum Community Engagement unit that is specific to each program, offering students an opportunity to live the Core Curriculum in action.
- **20** course units with community engagement placements
- Nearly **4000** students complete a community engagement placement each year

Enter COVID-19

- Nearly all placement opportunities were suspended!
- How could our students progress when this relied on a placement experience?
- How could we be agile within such an elaborate institutional CE structure?



Pink, Azordegan, Jones, & Lavey (2020)

'Pivoting' Placements

Moving online

- Shifting opportunities online (where possible)
- Examples:
 - Autism Inclusion Program: Peer to Peer mentoring
 - International English Language Student Peer Support Program
- For many partnerships, online was not possible*
- Sourcing online opportunities



<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theeducatoronline.com%2Fhe%2Fnews%2Funiversity-rolls-out-gamechanging-online-learning-solution>



'Pivoting' Placements

Alternative Assessments

- Prospective alternative assessments
 - Research a community organisation and reflect on prospective engagement in the framework of ACU's CE principles (15 hours)
 - Complete a literature review on a community issue and effective engagement methods (35 hours)

ACU Community Engagement is about...

- Developing understanding** (Icon: Head with heart)
ACU community engagement responds with empathy, aiming to understand the people we work with and interact in a considered, compassionate, and respectful manner.
- Acting with humility** (Icon: Two people)
ACU community engagement acts with humility, looking 'outward' with equality to work collaboratively with community, not 'on' or 'for' community.
- Building connections** (Icon: Two hands shaking)
ACU community engagement builds genuine connections with community through respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Affirming dignity** (Icon: Fingerprint)
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** (Icon: Scales of justice)
ACU community engagement stands in solidarity with the most disadvantaged and marginalised, and works to realise a fair and just society for all.

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

'Pivoting' Learning

Alternative debriefing and reflection

- COVID-19 as a 'teaching moment'
- Online debriefing workshop using Gibbs' reflective cycle and ACU's CE principles exploring how COVID-19 has
 - Impacted the learning experiences of students
 - impacted groups experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation*
 - Created newly vulnerable groups



Student feedback

- “Nearly all (92%) of students who **did not** have an opportunity to attend a placement felt that the alternative task lead to at least a moderate increase in their understanding of community engagement” (Pink et al., 2020)
- “65 % rated this increase as ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’
- How could this experience have been improved?
 - Virtual placements (35%)
 - Guest speakers (32%)



<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gse.harvard.edu%2Fnews%2Fuk%2F17%2F11%2Fmaking-student-feedback-work>

Responding to our communities

- International students in Australia particularly impacted by COVID-19
 - Partnered with Federation University to provide food and essentials (Ballarat)
- A University partner, St Mary's house of welcome provided 500 meal packs to our international students (Melbourne).





So what did we learn?

1. Deep, established, and institutionally-embedded CE can be a platform for curricular agility during a time of crisis
2. A centralized community engagement team meant that ACU could consistently support CE teaching staff during the crisis

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3. A greater (but cautious) openness to online CE opportunities where they can be deemed mutually beneficial and appropriate

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Challenges ahead

- Viability of our campus spaces!
 - Envisioning our campuses as ‘community precincts’
 - **What are the reasons students and staff will come to campuses in the future?**
- Embracing the ‘online age’ of higher education
 - Making sure our students are adequately supported before, during, and after





Thank you!

I would be happy to respond to questions and open up discussion.

