Community-Engaged Learning and Unit Design Principles Guideline

Section 1 - Governing Policy and Scope

(1) This Guideline works in support of clause 34(b) of the Structuring Coursework Programs Policy which requires that "a core curriculum community engagement unit (10 cp), specific to each program that must be identified as part of the course approval process". The Guideline applies to all community-engaged learning in ACU undergraduate courses.

Section 2 - Community-Engaged Learning Purpose Statement

(2) Community-engaged learning at ACU refers to curriculum-embedded opportunities for students to learn in and with community. It forms a central part of the University's commitment to fostering thriving communities and developing graduates who can engage critically with societal issues and work with community in ways that recognise the dignity of the human person and advance the common good. ACU regards community-engaged learning as a vital component of a learning environment which is dedicated to developing the whole person. It prepares students to flourish in their lives and careers with insights formed through critical reflection; empathy for others' diverse lived experiences; imagination to pursue new solutions to society's complex issues; and a sense of responsibility to impact society and their professions by working for social justice and a sustainable world.

(3) Most commonly situated within ACU's Core Curriculum in the form of community engagement (CE) units, community-engaged learning provides students with the opportunity to build connections, act with humility, develop understanding, affirm dignity, and pursue justice, as inspired by Catholic Social Teaching.

(4) Community-engaged learning at ACU can occur in diverse forms which are adaptive to community needs. However, at its core are four essential criteria. Community-engaged learning experiences should:

a. Enable students to engage critically with societal issues, affirm human dignity, and work for the common good.
b. Support clear, integrated links between the community-engaged experience, learning outcomes, and assessment.
c. Facilitate deep learning through structured, critical reflection as part of the assessment strategy.
d. Be embedded in collaborative and reciprocal partnership with community, and ideally contribute to capacity-building.

Section 3 - Relationship to Course Level Outcomes and Graduate Capabilities

(5) Best practice community-engaged learning functions to inform and transform disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills acquisition at the course level. As such, units that further community-engaged

learning at ACU must:

a. Be meaningfully connected to Course Level Learning Outcomes and Graduate Capabilities;
b. Be positioned in the course map in a way that is appropriate to the delivery of these outcomes;
c. Employ discipline appropriate unit codes and nomenclature that flag the unit as CE learning;
d. Include pre-requisites where pre-existing knowledge and skills is required; and
e. Ensure any blending of curriculum function (such as combining CE with Work Integrated Learning or Practicum experiences) prioritises CE Learning outcomes.

(6) A course may offer multiple equivalent CE learning units within its course rules. Where this occurs, each unit must be demonstrably equivalent regarding the development of Course Level Learning Outcomes and Graduate Capabilities.

(7) Course and unit proposals must, prior to any approval under the Course Accreditation, Amendment and Review Policy, clearly articulate these relationships via the relevant CMAS template.

(8) Any existing course with an exemption to CE will have that exemption expire as part of the standard review cycle under the Course Accreditation, Amendment and Review Policy. These courses should consider adoption of a form of CE Learning outlined in this Guideline. The rationale for any renewal of an exemption must be documented in the course proposal and will be considered in line with this Guideline.

Section 4 - The Partner Relationship

(9) Community-engaged learning activities are predicated on partnership principles of mutual benefit, reciprocity, and subsidiarity, and are asset-based. According to the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification and ACU Strategic Plan:

a. Mutual benefit is the assurance that all parties involved achieve outputs and / or outcomes that serve their interests.
b. Reciprocity includes all partners, especially community partners and students, as thought-partners and collaborators who help decide and inform the direction, activity, assessment, and dissemination of the partnerships' efforts.
c. Subsidiarity involves supporting local autonomy and decision-making, and empowering communities to determine their own futures.
d. Asset-based is recognising and valuing the knowledge, capacities, resources, and resilience of all partners, especially community and student partners.

(10) The extent of the role of the community partner in community-engaged learning will vary according to the form of the activity. Partnerships for community-engaged learning also tend to exist on a continuum where the level of collaboration may change over time according to the needs of both parties. At a minimum, however, community-engaged learning should be embedded in collaborative and reciprocal partnership with community and pursue co-created goals and outcomes around an issue/s of public concern.

(11) Additionally, partnerships should be formed with the intention of sustainability and ideally contribute towards building the capacity of individuals, groups, and organisations involved to understand and collaboratively address the issue/s of public concern. Note that ACU cannot transfer its obligations under the Higher Education Standards to a third party. Partners will not normally be directly involved in the assessment of students.

(12) CE Learning experiences should be designed to accommodate the role of the partner organisation in unit content

and teaching.

(13) Entering partnerships for the purposes of CE Learning operates according to the Delegations of Authority Policy and Register and the Educational Partnerships Policy and Educational Partnerships Procedure.

Section 5 - Forms of Community-Engaged Learning

(14) There are three primary forms through which community-engaged learning occurs in the ACU curriculum:

a. Direct service-based: Students engage directly with the community to undertake or support activities through an existing community-based program offered by ACU and / or an external partner organisation.
b. Project-based: Students (individually or in groups) work with partners on a project to understand, address and / or advocate for a community-identified issue with tangible, meaningful outcomes. Projects may span multiple years and feature contributions from multiple ACU student cohorts.
c. Research-based: Students conduct or contribute to research initiatives appropriate to an undergraduate level in collaboration with a community organisation and related to a community identified need.

(15) Learning aims, position in course map, unit cohort size, and the above principles of partnership should all be considered when choosing a form of community-engaged learning.

(16) Direct-service CE should feature 25 hours of practical experience with the community-based program (i.e., in person or remote active engagement with program participants) explicitly linked to content covered within the unit of study. The 25 hours of practical experience tied to direct-service must be undertaken through an approved community-based program arranged either by an ACU School or ACU Engagement.

(17) The other forms of CE Learning will incorporate equivalent community-engaged learning activities that feature interaction and engagement with the partner (i.e., partner-informed, community-driven project work).

(18) Student self-sourced direct service necessitates the formation of a new partnership arrangement for each student. This is time consuming and poses a risk to quality based on ACU's capacity to safeguard the student CE experience. Self-sourced direct service should only be utilised by exception and following a dedicated process of forming a relationship with the partner along with due diligence and risk activities prescribed by the Educational Partnerships Policy and Educational Partnerships Procedure for each experience.

Section 6 - Unit Design, Learning Outcomes and Assessment

(19) Units that facilitate CE Learning must:

a. Ensure unit-level learning outcomes address the principles articulated in the CE Learning Purpose Statement by incorporating explicit links to CE knowledge and practice;
b. Be based in a discipline and supported by relevant scholarship;
c. Highlight the rationale for the adoption of a particular form of CE learning in the Generic Unit Outline Learning and Teaching Strategy statement;
d. Be adequately flexible in terms of content, learning design and assessment to allow for partner collaboration and co-design;
e. Describe, to the extent possible, the community partner organisation(s) or types of organisations and the partner(s) role as co-educator(s) in facilitating student learning; Full details of the role of partners will be articulated in the extended information available in a unit's Canvas site.

f. Incorporate assessment linked to CE learning outcomes with multiple opportunities for students to engage in critical reflective practice on the CE experience through the teaching period.
g. Consider how partnership arrangements will operate in relation to the proposed mode, location and term of offer.

Section 7 - Roles and Responsibilities

(20) The responsibility for designing and developing a CE unit falls primarily with the relevant discipline, school and faculty, in consultation with the Centre for Education and Innovation and ACU Engagement.

Schools

(21) ACU Schools are responsible for:

a. Designing CE units according to the Guideline and relevant policies;
b. Delivering CE units with ACU community partners;
c. Establishing and maintaining suitable partnerships for project- and research-based CE opportunities;
d. Communicating to ACU Engagement, the Faculty and wider University on the partnerships maintained by the School and outcomes emerging from these partnerships.
e. Managing self-sourced CE opportunities (in exceptional cases only);
f. Undertaking regular monitoring and quality assurance activity for CE units as per policy;
g. Providing adequate resourcing for the relevant form of CE Learning;
h. Supporting CEL scholarship; and
i. Supporting or providing professional development to staff tasked with CE-related roles (e.g., NUL, NLIC, CE Coordinator, School or Faculty CE liaison).
j. Ensuring students are aware of relevant supports for student safety and wellbeing along with mechanisms to report incidents and concerns.

Academic Board

(22) Academic Board is responsible for:

a. Approving course curriculum per the Course Accreditation, Amendment and Review Policy;
b. Scrutinising the monitoring and quality assurance activity undertaken by Schools;
c. Considering cyclical review of CE curriculum per the Course Accreditation, Amendment and Review Policy; and
d. Overseeing the policy framework related to CE-learning and Educational Partnerships.

Centre for Education and Innovation

(23) The Centre for Education and Innovation is responsible for:

a. Supporting course and unit design based on an evidence-based review and evaluation processes;
b. Providing advice on the design of CE units, particularly in the alignment of links between the community engaged experience, learning outcomes, assessment, and critical reflection activities;
c. Facilitating the gathering of student experience and satisfaction feedback tailored to CE learning; and
d. Providing opportunities for CE unit improvement through Teaching Awards and Teaching Development Grants as appropriate.

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ACU Engagement

(24) ACU Engagement is responsible for:

a. Establishing and maintaining suitable partnerships for direct-service CE opportunities;
b. Connecting students to direct-service CE opportunities;
c. Offering selected project-based and research-based opportunities as requested by community partners;
d. Providing advice on the design of CE units, particularly in the criteria areas of integrating community / partners, engaging with societal issues and mission, providing exemplars of different forms of CE learning;
e. Delivering briefing and debriefing sessions for students in CE units regarding community engagement opportunities;
f. Providing advice on other best-practice community-engaged learning topics (partnering with community, risk, etc.), where guidelines do not exist;
g. Assisting with CE unit tracking and evaluation, specifically in relation to community partner outcomes and impact;
h. Providing capacity-building and professional learning opportunities for staff through the CE Community of Practice and connection to the wider community engagement field; and
i. Advocating internally for support, reward, and recognition of community-engaged learning and teaching.

Section 8 - Monitoring and Quality Assurance

(25) A project or unit co-designed and delivered with a community partner must be monitored and quality assured through its lifecycle. The following activities are designed to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for ACU's students, staff and partners:

a. A statement of agreed purpose and intent will be developed prior to the commencement of the project. This will include a statement of agreed contributions of each party to the project including, where applicable, funding or resourcing.
b. ACU and the Community Partner(s) must each nominate a key contact person responsible for the contribution of each party. The ACU contact will typically by the NLIC or NUL.
c. A minimum schedule of meetings will be agreed between ACU and the Provider(s) prior to the offer of a unit.
d. Participants in the co-design will work within the constraints of ACU policy, including but not limited to, the Privacy Policy, Data and Information Governance Policy, Risk Management Policy, WHS Risk Management Procedure, Student Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy and Assessment Policy.
e. Where the project involves direct service, the Provider will provide a safe working environment and ensure compliance with WHS legislation.
f. Intellectual Property arising from the project will remain the property of ACU unless a prior agreement is reached.
g. Concerns around the operation of CE learning partnerships should be elevated to both ACU Engagement and the Head of School.

(26) In addition to the above, CE Learning is monitored by Schools in line with the Course and Student Monitoring Policy.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	18th October 2024
Review Date	18th October 2029
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	18th September 2024
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Gerald Gleeson Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Catholic Mission)
Responsible Manager	Jen Azordegan Manager, Community-Engaged Learning
Enquiries Contact	ACU Engagement

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