AGEN 3008: Indigenous Land and Food Knowledge

Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, University of Sydney

INTRODUCTION

This Unit of Study was initiated by the involvement of the coordinators and their collaborators in Wingara Mura-Bunga Barrabugu, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Integrated Strategy for the University of Sydney, as a means to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and peoples and to further develop cultural competence in our staff and students.

Up to 25% of Australia is under some form of Indigenous land management with much of this land located in the northern part of the continent. Currently there are Indigenous owned and managed properties including cattle stations, market gardens and protected areas, and many people living on country are seeking a wider range of culturally and environmentally suitable enterprises that will enable them to generate income and build community capacity and resilience. At the same time, Australia faces the challenge of building the sustainability of agriculture in the face of climate change, and the knowledge, skills and wisdom of Indigenous people have yet to influence the way we manage our land, water and biodiversity. Understanding Country from the perspective of Indigenous people is essential for graduates who aim to develop a working knowledge that integrates traditional and scientific thinking in order to contribute to the achievement of sustainable land management.

The purpose of this Unit of Study is to develop participants’ knowledge and understanding of the specific opportunities and challenges facing Indigenous people living on and caring for country, whilst contributing to the development of community enterprises based on land and food knowledge. This unit includes a 10 day field-study in Northern Australia through which participants will develop a sophisticated understanding of the context and will develop skills that will enable them to work effectively with Indigenous people and across cultures. We anticipate that, at least some participating staff and students will be motivated to further engagement with Indigenous land and food initiatives with communities living on country.

Requests for inclusion are sought from both students and staff in Agriculture and Environment, Vet, Science, Business and Arts. Participants are selected following completion of a pre-enrollment activity.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The purpose of this unit is for students and staff to engage with key Indigenous organisations and communities to assist them in the development of sustainable land-use that provides local economic return. Participants will listen to what communities need and the vision they have for their land, whether that be conservation or production orientated or integrated. Students will then develop feasibility studies for land and food-based enterprise development in collaboration with key community members and organisations. Students will seek to understand the aims, needs and capacity of the community, the limits of the local environmental conditions then link them with market opportunities. They will research, develop and document potential management
strategies and write enterprise plans that might, if appropriate, go as far as an application for funding for development or implementation.

This will help students to gain professional experience working with Indigenous communities and at the same time providing the community with documentation that will bring them closer to the establishment of successful community enterprises. The long-term aim for this course is to have students, staff and communities deepening their level of engagement from consultation and involvement through to participation and empowerment. This would transform the course from a field study into a vehicle for community development facilitated by skilled and motivated people.

UNIT STRUCTURE

Both staff and student participants will be selected following a pre-enrollment activity. The unit is based around a 10 day field-study, initially to Darwin, Katherine and Kununurra. The field study will be preceded by a 2-day preparatory workshop, and followed by a 1-day debriefing workshop. Participants form small groups at the preparatory workshop each of which focuses on researching a range of different potential enterprises. During the first stage of the field study, participants will hear from key informants experienced and engaged with land and food-based community enterprise development, and visit communities that already have enterprises in action in and around Darwin and Katherine. The second stage will involve engagement with a number of communities in and around Kununurra to further develop feasibility studies. Participants will complete 3 stages of cultural competency and awareness training. The first will be conducted by University of Sydney at the preparatory workshop, the second in Darwin with Indigenous and other staff of CDU, and the third with a local Indigenous corporation in Kununurra.

ASSESSMENTS:

- Peer- and self-assessment of level of participation throughout unit
- Field study activities recorded in a booklet
- Daily entry in reflective journal with concluding summary and critical self-reflection
- Report including feasibility study, possibly a funding application and a final presentation

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The unit is designed (See Figure 1) around cultural training leading into experiences with key informants (purple), communities (green) and businesses (pink). Participants document these experiences (Field Work book) and reflect on what they have learnt and how they have change as a result of the experiences (Reflective Journal). Participants then develop, with ongoing engagement with community, a feasibility study (Participatory Feasibility Study) which becomes the property of the community.
Figure 1: AGEN3008 Instructional design

Experiences

- Cultural awareness and competence training
- Key Informants
- Communities
- Existing Businesses

Assessments

- Participatory Feasibility Study (information sourced pre-trip, submitted after trip)
- Reflective Journal (before, during and after the Field Study)
- Field workbook (community interaction and development of working knowledge and mutual understanding)

Outcomes

- Opportunities for further engagement in research and community
- Communities closer to the development of enterprises
- Some students and staff motivated to engage further
- Development of cultural competence
- Shared learning between students, staff and community and development of working knowledge
- Experiences

Assessments

- Opportunities for further engagement in research and community
- Communities closer to the development of enterprises
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Outcomes
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the ‘Indigenous Estate’ and describe the complexity involved in sustainably caring for Country
- Recognise multiple sources of knowledge and the impact of different world-views on engagement with communities
- Examine the nature and extent of Indigenous land management in northern Australia by working directly with individuals and communities living and working on Country
- Discuss the main challenges and opportunities facing contemporary Indigenous communities in the context of northern land development, and evaluate their potential future implications of these challenges
- Apply research skills and knowledge to work competently and confidently with individuals and communities
- Explore and describe options for enterprise development in collaboration with communities and assess the potential for increasing cultural inclusivity in the future of northern land management strategies
- Critically reflect on and analyse how different cultural values and beliefs affect professional communication and practice and the strategies that can be employed to enhance communication across cultures

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Complete a feasibility study for enterprise development and, if appropriate, a grant application tailored to include local Indigenous land and food knowledge.
- Develop the cultural competence to be able to work effectively with Indigenous communities and in cross-cultural settings.
- Some participants motivated to pursue future activities working with Indigenous communities and in cross-cultural settings.
- Develop awareness of unconscious bias and its impact on people and on their ability to view the world through others’ perspectives.
- Ongoing engagement between Sydney University, participants and communities that is mutually beneficial and leads to further activities including deeper opportunities for learning and enterprise development that is self-sustaining.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

The purpose of this unit is twofold, to both increase the cultural competency of Sydney University staff and students and to open up avenues for Sydney University staff and students to work with and develop professional relationships with Indigenous communities. In future years, we hope to move this unit into NSW to reduce course costs and engage with the Wingara-Mura Service hub development. Figure 2 summarises the long-term strategy.
Figure 2: Five-year plan for delivering AGEN3008

### Activities 2014/2015
- Liaison with and advice from Wingara Mura
- Development of UoS outline/Cross-faculty approval
- Preparation for Field Study with visits to MG Corp., Miramar, Northern Institute/Charles Darwin University, local government and private businesses

### Outcomes/outputs
- Better understanding of the scope of potential projects
- Draft funding proposals
- Developing MOUs
- Consultation and involvement with communities
- Culturally competent and motivated staff & students

### Year 1 (2016)
- Logistics

### Year 2 (2017)
- Development of funding proposals
- Well refined teaching program
- Honouring MOUs and establishing new MOUs
- Involvement of new staff for delivery
- Moving towards community participation and empowerment
- Additional culturally competent and motivated staff & students

### Year 3 (2018)
- Submission of funding proposals
- Plans to move to another area

### Years 4&5 (2019/20)
- Participant reflection
- Student USS
- Feedback from communities
- Advice from Wingara Mura
- Align with University practices
- Outcome of funding applications
- Alternative funding opportunities
- Logistics