Remote and Rural Enterprise (RARE) Program

OVERVIEW

RARE is a community-engaged learning program, connecting postgraduate and undergraduate students at the University of Sydney with remote and rural enterprises in Australia to collaboratively complete action-research projects. The Program ensures the University’s entrepreneurial activity benefits some of our more challenged communities and businesses while increasing students’ social and cultural empathy and respect.

Students are selected based on rigorous criteria including academic performance, work experience, extra-curricular activities and motivations. Students work with enterprise owners to prepare business plans and feasibility studies through action-research projects as part of their units of study. Final deliverables are completed as coursework and supervised by academic staff, earning students credit towards their degree. In 2014 we will have students from business, sustainability, and architecture backgrounds participating in the RARE Program.

EXAMPLES of RARE PROJECTS

The communities currently involved with RARE are located across Australia representing a range of industries and include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, commercial and social.

RARE projects aim to deliver practical and accessible recommendations, backed by rigorous academic literature and market relevant data and information. Emphasis is placed on community consultation, reviewing local markets, researching best practice internationally and locally, and adapting business models to suit Australia’s challenging remote environments, and socio-cultural differences. Students share their skills, expertise and time with the enterprises while learning to manage uncertainty, multiple stakeholder demands, and the human and economic influences affecting businesses.

Projects include (but are not limited to) business plans, feasibility studies, information memorandums, or specific analysis of a particular issue or opportunity relevant to the enterprise i.e. analysis of particular markets, technology, business models, and governance.

Table 1: Examples of past RARE Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Focus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West Land Corporation</td>
<td>Dubbo, NSW</td>
<td>NWLT is considering creating a BioEnergy initiative whereby invasive native species would be collected and processed in Dubbo to produce energy, fertilisers and other soil productivity improvers. Students analysed income generation models, employment opportunities, environmental benefits, training opportunities and social and cultural benefits in making the BioEnergy project a reality.</td>
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<td>Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC)</td>
<td>Alice Springs, NT</td>
<td>ALEC is looking to enter the renewable energy market and increase the use of solar PV panels within Alice Springs. Students analysed potential company structures and created a feasibility study for ALEC to enter the market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orange Local</td>
<td>Orange, NSW</td>
<td>Created a business plan for the long term success of an</td>
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Aboriginal Land Council (OLALC) Nursery | Indigenous owned nursery enterprise. Through contracts with local mining companies, education activities, and the sale of seedlings, the commercial venture is better placed to survive once grant funding expires.

Hunter Valley Cheese Co. | Pokolbin, NSW | Analysed the growth strategy of a premier cheese manufacturer in the Hunter Valley region. Students provided recommendations on lease arrangements, operations, and educational activities.

**TIMING**

Projects coincide with the university calendar with four intakes per year:

1. **Summer Session** 5 weeks 19th January start date
2. **Semester 1** 13 weeks 29th February start date
3. **Winter Session** 5 weeks 27th June start date
4. **Semester 2** 13 weeks 25th July start date

**PROCESS & EXPECTATIONS**

Students will spend 5-7 days on-site with the entrepreneur (or project sponsor) during the middle of the semester. The RARE Program funds transport and accommodation costs for students. The cost to the enterprise is $0. However, it is expected the entrepreneur (or project sponsor) set aside time while the student is visiting to make introductions with stakeholders, set up meetings, and make themself generally available to answer inquiries. Once students return to Sydney, they will work with the entrepreneur and ask follow-up questions via phone/email. At the end of the semester a final deliverable is submitted to the project sponsor and a phone call is set up to review recommendations with the RARE Coordinator.

RARE is not suitable for all remote and rural enterprises. The criteria for RARE projects include:

- A real need for support, that the Program can realistically provide
- Feasible business idea with benefits for the community; commercial, social or both
- Strong leadership and vision with someone on the ground driving the daily operations and business development
- Suitable timeframe for project delivery and student learning
- Willingness to engage in a long-term partnership
- An enterprise representative who is available to engage with students and staff for planning and review of projects

**NEXT STEPS**

RARE staff and the enterprise scope projects, which typically involve staff planning visits to the community. Projects will need to be achievable with a single university semester; however, subsequent and on-going projects can be planned with new students taking over at the start of each new semester.

1. Complete ‘RARE-New Project Brief’ and email to RARE Coordinator (Melanie Feeney)
2. RARE Coordinator will call to schedule phone or on-site interview
3. Create project scope with RARE Coordinator and select start date

RARE CONSULTING

RARE has the capacity to deliver value beyond that achievable by student projects and placements. Our close engagement with remote and rural enterprise and their communities has highlighted the need for context specific business development, learning and support. In response, RARE is also able to offer fee-for-service consulting assistance from the Entrepreneurship & Innovation Program within the University of Sydney Business School.

Our consulting approach is one of collaboration and assistance encompassing the same RARE mission of two-way learning. Our aim is to ensure ownership is retained within the organization and that community and enterprise stakeholders are continuously involved, developing their knowledge and confidence in the outcomes created through the engagement.

CONTACT US

If you would like to learn more about the RARE Program or would like student support for your activities, please contact us:

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