

## Community Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT) at University of Sydney

### Rationale

'Engaged Enquiry' is a major organisational value that frames the Strategic Plan 2011-2015. By this we mean that the University is a place where "ideas, both new and old, are learned, tested, challenged and modified" and the connections between research and education are encouraged. As a core value of the University, the notion of engaged enquiry applies to everyone and to all aspects of our work, especially to our commitment that our teaching and research activities should, in large part, address and be informed by questions and issues of importance to communities in our local, regional and global contexts.

Therefore, a key strategic initiative is to increase the opportunities for all students to explore knowledge and develop the skills of enquiry through a diverse array of experiential and applied activities which we call Community Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT). These activities take students out of the classroom to learn through partnership projects with business, industry, government, education, non-government and community organisations. CELT is linked to other strategic initiatives intended to strengthen our relationships with communities (including Indigenous, regional, metropolitan and international), and attracting and retaining students from diverse backgrounds. This includes engaging our students within and across disciplines, with professional and disciplinary communities, with Australian society, and as citizens within the global community.

### Thinking about CELT in curriculum

There are a variety of established models for integrating CELT in the curriculum. As a framework for thinking about the purpose and form of CELT, we might consider curriculum in the following ways:

1. There is a familiar and common aspect of curriculum which is about **content**. Community Engaged Learning and Teaching means that community based, external sources of knowledge, research and application examples are included in curricular content. Often this content provides students with examples of the application of knowledge and concepts.
2. There is a second dimension to curriculum which is about **teaching and learning processes**. Community engaged teaching and learning means that students are learning through experiential interaction with information and expertise derived from sources external to academia. They are engaged in interactive and experiential processes that connect their discipline to its external contexts of application, interpretation and adaptation. CELT is implemented through well-known established learning processes such as, but not limited to internships, practica, clinical rotations, field studies, academic service learning, work integrated learning, and other models of experiential learning.
3. Community engaged learning and teaching also means that our curriculum identifies and assesses relevant **student learning outcomes** that reflect the impact of engaged and experiential learning processes on student learning and development. In the context of Sydney these sorts of outcomes would be linked to goals and outcomes relating to social inclusion, professional preparation, knowledge of Indigenous culture, and understanding of global issues and cultures.
4. There is a fourth dimension to curriculum which recognises that learning is shaped by more than what happens in class – it is about the what is learnt through the **broader experience of learning** as a member of the university community and as a member of the wider community be it local, regional or global. In this aspect, our implementation of an intentional agenda of CELT strategies will enhance our ability to connect our students and staff with contemporary issues and challenges.

These different elements of students' experience of CELT are all important, and each can be achieved in ways that are suited to disciplinary cultures, to different stages of student learning and development, and to areas of research interest (in other words, RELT can inform and be integrated with CELT).

### **What might CELT look like in your discipline?**

CELT is not necessarily about involving every undergraduate student in off-campus experiential learning activities, nor should we offer engaged activities for their own sake. Like any pedagogy, CELT should be used where application, observation, and/or experience of knowledge in action will ensure the learning and development of our students.

A core CELT strategy is teaching and assessing students using active and inquiry based pedagogies that connect content to practical and contemporary issues and situations. An effective CELT strategy often includes making staff (and senior student) engagement with external communities more 'visible' to undergraduates. This often takes the form of guest speakers or real case problems drawn from external situations or topics. Another effective strategy involves including opportunities for first year students to have short term interactions with relevant external sites of practice or research as part of their curriculum. First year experience often focuses on exposing students to fundamental skills and values relevant to the discipline such as communications, team work, time management, and introductory methods or techniques. In later years the engagement of undergraduate students in research can be more complex and challenging – presenting opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies and explore complex projects and issues that enhance the integration of all they have learned. In this regard, CELT can often be melded with RELT; these are often complementary activities in the context of 'engaged enquiry.'

The focus of these CELT strategies is on teaching and learning activities that also align with the University's expressed goal to be more engaged with and responsive to communities and 'big questions' facing Australia and the globe. While there will likely be a predictable array of forms that CELT will take, it will look different in different disciplines because of the different research and practice issues unique to each disciplinary culture and external relationships developed by specific faculty.