

# ***Transformational Learning and Community Development: Early Reflections on Professional and Community Engagement at Macquarie University***

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## **Abstract**

Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) at Macquarie University offers undergraduate students experiential learning opportunities with local, regional, and international partners. In PACE projects, students work toward meeting the partner's organizational goals while they develop their capabilities, learn through the process of engagement, and gain academic credit. This article outlines the context that gave rise to PACE and discusses the rationale behind its establishment. Further, it explores how academic rigor and a strategic approach coupled with a well-integrated governance and organizational structure have been pivotal in addressing challenges. Particular attention is given to PACE International activities managed with Australian Volunteers International. The potential for research related to PACE is also discussed.

## **Introduction**

The idea of universities engaging with communities is not new or novel. They have been doing this in various ways since their inception. That many universities are physically located within communities (town and gown), employ people from the community, and work to benefit that community is taken for granted. The development of the idea and practice of the “engaged university” (Watson, Hollister, Stroud, & Babcock, 2011, p. xxvii) has recently become integrated into discourses around higher education. A “new paradigm,” as Sir David Watson et al. (2011, p. xxvii) have conceptualized the emergence of university civic and community engagement, reflects an advance from models that emphasize liberal education and the development of professional competencies to one in which community engagement takes central stage. In this paradigm, community engagement is conceptualized “not as a separate kind of activity, but as a focus of the institution’s teaching and research, and as a strategy for achieving greater quality and impacts in the institution’s teaching and research” (p. xxvii). Community engagement, however, has proven to be a multifaceted and ambiguous concept that lacks a common definition

in the context of higher education. Watson et al. define community engagement in terms of an emphasis on civic engagement and social responsibility, involving academic units with the aim of strengthening impact on students and the wider community. A key feature is the development and extension of community partnerships. This article outlines the context that gave rise to (PACE) and discusses the rationale behind its establishment. Further, it explores how academic rigor and a strategic approach coupled with a well-integrated governance and organizational structure have been pivotal in addressing challenges. Finally, it demonstrates how such an activity meets two primary objectives of a university, namely research and teaching, through an approach to evaluation that focuses on contributing to scholarship and improvement and development of structures and processes.

Macquarie University has coined the term “PACE” to refer to its initiative in this area. PACE at Macquarie University is a university-wide initiative designed to provide undergraduate students with a distinctive educational experience involving community-based experiential learning opportunities with an array of partners in jointly conceived projects. PACE is designed to strengthen graduate capabilities and develop informed, socially responsible, and engaged global citizens, and to contribute to positive social change locally, regionally, and internationally (see *Macquarie University, 2008b; Macquarie University, 2012d*). Integral to the PACE Initiative is PACE International. Jointly managed by Macquarie University and Australian Volunteers International (AVI), PACE International establishes an international platform for learning by providing experiential learning opportunities for students to work in a range of countries on community development projects of mutual benefit to participants and partners alike (as discussed below). Driven by the university’s founding mission to serve the needs of the community as well as those of its students and a firm commitment to its core values of ethical conduct, open enquiry, creativity, inclusiveness, agility, and excellence (*Macquarie University, 2011*), Macquarie has made a significant financial and strategic commitment in implementing the PACE Initiative.

Arguably, the trend toward greater community engagement in many universities can be seen largely as a response to globalization. In this context, the imperative for universities to address pressing community needs and better prepare graduates is abundantly clear. UNESCO’s appeal for deliberation and action on the part of universities as a response to the Millennium Development Goals supports the importance of this aim (*UNESCO, 2012*). The Australian higher

education sector is a case in point. Social inclusion has become an important element of the government agenda for Australian universities following the Bradley Review (see *Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Universities Australia, 2013*). For Macquarie University, the PACE Initiative is integral to following this agenda through both practice and research (as discussed below). Furthermore, the need for curriculum to respond appropriately to contemporary changes is equally clear. Of particular note in the context of higher education are the rapid expansion of knowledge and the transformation of the workplace into “a knowledge-based, *learning enterprise*” (*Wilson, 2005, p. 49; emphasis in original*); the uptake of new technologies; and the significant presence of international students and migrant academics on campus (see *OECD, 2012*), all of which pose significant opportunities and challenges for universities. In response to such developments Macquarie University undertook a major review of its curriculum and in 2008 released *Review of Academic Programs*, a white paper that set out wide-ranging prescriptions for curriculum renewal, including a graduate capabilities framework and the three pillars of its new curriculum: people, planet, and participation (*Macquarie University, 2008b*). The third pillar, participation, gave rise to the establishment of the PACE Initiative. In December 2008, initial funding from the Federal Government’s Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund provided the financial impetus that made possible the initiative’s formal inauguration in 2009.

## Engagement at Macquarie University

Macquarie University, founded in 1964, is a rapidly growing modern university in Sydney, Australia, with over 37,000 students and approximately 2,700 academic staff and professional staff. Its enrollment of approximately 12,500 international students from over 100 countries makes tangible its international ethos. The centrality of learning and teaching is encapsulated in its motto, “And gladly teche” (*Chaucer, ca. 1400*). These factors, coupled with Macquarie’s demonstrable research capability, form a contextual background well-suited to the PACE Initiative.

Macquarie University is a member of the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and Engagement Australia and is an associate member of the International FORUM on Development Service (FORUM), a global network of international volunteering organizations.

## The PACE Initiative

The PACE Initiative aspires to “mutually beneficial learning and engagement” (*Macquarie University, 2012a*). Integral to its purpose is Macquarie University’s aim to provide “a transformative student experience” (*Macquarie University, 2012b*). An institutional commitment to social inclusion and social well-being leads the initiative to embrace students, staff, partners, and the wider community as its beneficiaries. Mediated by an array of partnerships with government, nongovernment, and private sector organizations and community groups, partner activities are designed to meet both the educational needs of individual students and partner objectives. The PACE Initiative has its foundations in a Deweyan conceptualization of learning as an interactive, developmental process through which purposeful action arises out of the interplay of impulses, observations, knowledge, and judgment—in short, experiential learning. (The theoretical underpinnings of the PACE Initiative are the subject of another paper currently under preparation.)

**Table 1. The PACE Mission and Strategic Goals**

<b>PACE Mission</b>	<p>Develop the capability of Macquarie students and staff to actively contribute to the well-being of people and the planet</p> <p>Assist local, regional, and international partners to build their capacity to meet their mission and purpose</p> <p>Establish Macquarie as a leading university for transformative learning and research recognized for excellence in socially inclusive practice and research</p>
<b>Strategic Goals</b>	<p>Utilise PACE units (building blocks in the academic framework) and activities to strengthen graduate and staff capabilities</p> <p>Support partnerships which encourage principles of social and environmental responsibility</p> <p>Develop a continuously improving PACE Initiative that is reflective and converts lessons learnt into practice</p> <p>Demonstrate an effective model for community engagement that contributes to a distinctive international reputation for excellence for Macquarie.</p>

Increased student engagement, higher retention rates, and enhanced career development are also anticipated outcomes of the PACE Initiative.

To implement the broad vision of PACE, which encompasses community engagement for both staff and students, Macquarie University has adopted a two-phase approach. The first phase involves developing governance, infrastructure, and resources to implement PACE for students. The second phase will give greater attention to the development of staff around similar principles as in the implementation of PACE for students.

## **Organizational Approach**

Macquarie University has adopted an organizational approach intended to secure maximal institution-wide impact. By initially assigning responsibility and resourcing for PACE to the portfolio of the deputy vice-chancellor (provost), and more recently to the pro vice-chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Diversity) an academically strong profile for PACE has been firmly established across the university. A robust governance structure has been put in place. The responsibility for oversight of the initiative as a whole is vested in the PACE Board, which comprises representatives from across the university and two members from AVI. The PACE International Management Committee provides overall direction for PACE International with reporting responsibilities for its development, performance, and risk management. Two Senate Committees—the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Standards and Quality Committee—perform key roles regarding policy development and compliance, respectively. PACE is represented through the PACE academic and programs director. A number of its working parties provide key policy and operational support. The evolving nature of the governance structure allows the necessary flexibility to adjust to changing requirements. For instance, two working parties (legal and student enrollment) were dismantled once they had fulfilled their assigned tasks.

A well-conceived organizational structure facilitates efficient implementation, management, and delivery of the initiative. PACE is located in the Learning, Teaching and Diversity portfolio and comprises a PACE “Hub” (led by the PACE academic and programs director) and dedicated academic and administrative positions in each of the faculties. The Office of the Provost facilitates the flow of expertise in policy and resource allocation. Representation of the PACE Hub and faculty-based staff on the PACE Advisory

Committee and Working Parties provides an effective channel for learning in the field to be shared and inform policy development. Furthermore, undergirding this endeavor is the provision of a scholarly research base through the services of the Learning and Teaching Centre PACE Project Team, Faculty-based Academic Directors of PACE, the Senior Lecturer in Academic Development and the Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Service-Learning and Civic Engagement. Figure 1 depicts the organizational structure. Reporting and advisory relationships are indicated by solid and dotted lines, respectively.

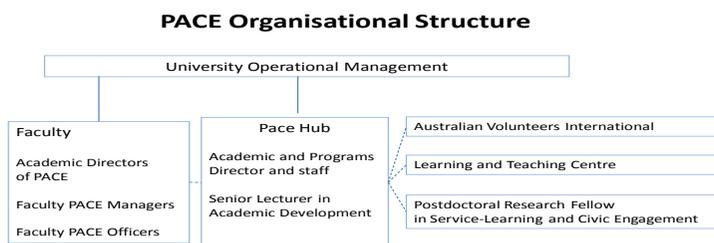


Figure 1. PACE Organizational Structure

The Strategic Plan and the Business Plan were developed in 2009 to guide the development and progress of the initiative. These plans have provided necessary frameworks for setting achievable objectives. To ensure that objectives and financial projections are regularly revised in line with changing circumstances, an annual list of key priorities provides a necessary supplement to the Strategic and Business Plans. To gauge their effectiveness, the Strategic and Business Plans are regularly monitored and reported on through a system of review encompassing the Advisory Committee, the PACE Board, University Committees, Academic Senate, and University Council. A key aim is to integrate PACE operations into the university's overall governance and administrative structures. A number of documents have already been developed effectively to this end, such as the PACE Risk Assessment Handbook, the PACE Ethics Protocol Handbook, Local and Regional Agreement, and Insurance Checklist (*Macquarie University, 2014e*), some of which have informed practice in other parts of the university. Synergies are now actively being pursued between the work of PACE International and the university's wider international activities in the achievement of strategic objectives. A comprehensive

PACE Research and Evaluation Strategy 2012–2016 incorporating a monitoring and evaluation framework with broad coverage both across the Institution and with local, regional, and international partners is currently under development (discussed below).

In tandem with these developments is the design of a communications strategy to promote a culture of professional and community engagement. A range of media are already being utilized, including a dedicated PACE website where all stakeholders can access information and resources (*Macquarie University, 2012d*), a Facebook page, access to a high definition screen in the campus center that provides updates on current PACE offerings, and an array of presentations and faculty documentation. Further, a sponsorship strategy is under consideration to secure the initiative's long-term financial viability. Currently PACE is budgeted through a separate funding allocation within the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching, and Diversity).

## **PACE Profile**

As a reflection of the initiative's priority within the university's curriculum renewal program, Macquarie has implemented an ambitious rollout for PACE: It is being phased in over a 5-year period with over 60% of the average annual undergraduate enrollment involved in 2014. This participation rate will increase to 100% by 2016. The projected number of students enrolled in PACE units in the 2014 academic year is 5,500. The majority of PACE units are undertaken at an advanced stage of a student's degree. Although a number of nonplacement models are being used and trialed, the majority of PACE units adopt the placement model: students assigned to a workplace/partner-based/community-based supervisor during their PACE activity with the unit convenor ensuring academic supervision. The option of Faculty PACE Units, in which students of any discipline may enroll, provides the opportunity for students to work together in interdisciplinary teams as well as individually, relevant to interests and area of expertise. This approach is already bearing fruit. For example, students enrolled in the Faculty PACE Unit Student Leadership in Community Engagement (Faculty of Business and Economics, FOBE300) had the opportunity to create and develop an innovative business idea as part of the Deloitte FASTRACK Innovative Challenge 2012. Macquarie team members were the winners with their innovative idea of a 3D e-commerce supermarket solution (*Macquarie University, 2012c*).

Through legal agreements that set out respective roles of the university, students, and partners, partnerships have been established with more than 900 local, regional, and international organizations across a broad range of sectors in urban, regional, and remote settings in Australia and abroad. Partners engage with PACE on a number of levels. Unit convenors seek their feedback on their PACE experience as part of quality enhancement processes. They are regularly invited to PACE partner events organized at the faculty level that provide a platform for exchange of information and learning and networking opportunities. A proactive approach is taken to engage partners in collaborative research with the university. A repository of information relating to PACE partners is managed through a customer relationship management system (known as “Tracker”). The iParticipate software application provides assistance in matching student, partner, and PACE activity which, as discussed below, is fundamental to ensuring a positive student and partner experience.

Rigorous criteria have been adopted for the accreditation of PACE units with faculty senate approval required through the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Specifically, units must satisfy “community engagement” and “learning and teaching” criteria. Essentially, units must demonstrate community engagement as well as engagement with an ethical partner whose broad aim is consistent with that of the PACE Initiative to promote the well being of people and planet and must involve activities that assist the partner in achieving its objectives. In connection with the Learning and Teaching criteria, units must be undertaken within an academic framework and include a number of components, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Learning and Teaching Accreditation Criteria for PACE Units**

<b>Learning and teaching components required for accreditation</b>
Introduction/orientation
Scaffolding for skill and knowledge development
A PACE activity (minimum 20% experiential component)
Assessment tasks

Mechanisms through which students can reflect, document, evaluate, and/or critically analyze what they have learned

Final wrap-up debrief

*Note. Macquarie University, 2014a.*

PACE units must also demonstrate the ways in which they develop key graduate capabilities (Table 3).

**Table 3. Accreditation Criteria Relating to Graduate Capabilities for PACE Units**

At least two of the following cognitive capabilities:

- discipline-specific knowledge and skills
- critical, analytical, and integrative thinking
- problem-solving and research capability
- creative and innovative thinking

Two of the following interpersonal and social capabilities:

- effective communication
- engaged ethical local and global citizens
- socially and environmentally active and responsible citizens

One of the following personal capabilities:

- professional and personal judgment and initiative
- commitment to continuous learning

*Note. Macquarie University, 2014a.*

A total of 57 PACE units have thus far been accredited, with PACE embedded in the academic program of over 60% of undergraduate students in 2014.

PACE activities are offered in a number of different formats including but not limited to those listed in Table 4. Although the formats are not mutually exclusive insofar as service-learning and/or work-integrated learning are integral to many of them, they provide a useful categorization to illustrate the diversity of activities available within PACE.

**Table 4. PACE Unit Formats**


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Service-learning by volunteering
Community development projects
Internships and work-integrated learning
Community-based research
Mentoring and peer-assisted learning
Community/industry reference panels with project monitoring
Professional experience with practicums
Field trips with a partnership component
Project- and problem-based learning with a partnership component

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Successful completion of a PACE unit is recorded on students' official transcripts and the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS).

Following the recent approval of a PACE Ethics Protocol application to cover research-based PACE activities in eight PACE units, students enrolled in these units are now able to undertake low-risk human research and quality assurance/service improvement activities as part of their PACE experience (following mandatory research ethics training and the application of Ethics Protocol procedures). This enables them to obtain hands-on research experience working with partners to understand and address community concerns. One example of a university-wide partnership aimed at engaging the university in research and in which the PACE Initiative is a major component is the Macquarie-Ryde Futures Partnership—a 20-year research partnership between Macquarie University and its local government area (the City of Ryde). This partnership, which incorporates the research, learning and teaching, and community service aspirations of the university, opens up a range of mutually beneficial opportunities for student activities across the spectrum of the City of Ryde service areas, including student research with the “capacity for high resolution local studies across a range of fields” (*Howitt et al., 2011, p. 1*). This type of opportunity at the

undergraduate level will facilitate the development of graduate research capability. Furthermore, as Mackaway and Winchester-Seeto (2011) point out, so long as partners are genuinely engaged in design and implementation of research projects, student research can yield valuable information.

## **PACE and Social Inclusion**

As was previously mentioned, Australian universities now have a social inclusion agenda in accord with the Australian government's social inclusion objectives. Although social inclusion has been a core value of Macquarie University since its establishment, the PACE Initiative is a standard-bearer for this strategic priority. As a corollary, "equity of access to resources" is one of the guiding principles of the PACE Initiative. Macquarie's aspiration to "provide opportunities for all students to participate regardless of socio economic status, living circumstances, ethnicity, gender and capacity" (Macquarie University, 2012a) is realized, for example, through two grant schemes, the PACE Student Travel Grant Scheme and PACE Equity Grant Scheme.

A 2013 initiative to promote socially inclusive practice among both students and communities was the funding of two placements for student teachers in the Tiwi Islands, a remote archipelago 80 kilometers off the Australian mainland and home to the Indigenous Wurrumiyanga community. Through classroom interaction, including some one-on-one teaching, the students got to know the Tiwi people and learned about their culture and developed their classroom skills. Through exposure to social issues in the community that affected the school, the students "had to come to grips with the cultural landscape, understanding different ethnic groups within the community" (Adie, 2013, p. 1). The placements also provided much-needed teaching assistance in a region struggling to recruit teachers.

The development of a PACE Disability Action Plan to align with the broader objectives of the university will seek to ensure that PACE activities as far as possible are accessible to students with disabilities with appropriate supervision and support. The PACE unit Working with and Employing People with Disabilities (FOBE 201) introduces students to the issues that confront people with disabilities in the workplace and outlines the value of inclusive employment practices. All PACE activities in the unit involve either working alongside a person or persons with disability in the

workplace or working for organizations that provide services for, or advocate on behalf of, people with disabilities.

## The PACE Model

It will be helpful at this juncture to visually summarize the PACE Initiative. As set out in Figure 2, the PACE Initiative is an integrative model with a number of mutually reinforcing elements. Institutional transformation lies at the heart of PACE, providing the pivot for its primary outcomes in the areas of personal transformation (through the development of graduate capabilities) and community development as shown in the outer layer of the circle. The second layer depicts the operational structure, comprising executive leadership (through the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor in conjunction with AVI), effective governance, resources, partnerships, and risk awareness. The cyclical arrows depict the foundational principles: academic and active learning, research practice, and community engagement. The inner ring depicts the contextual domains underpinning PACE: social inclusion and mutually beneficial learning and engagement.

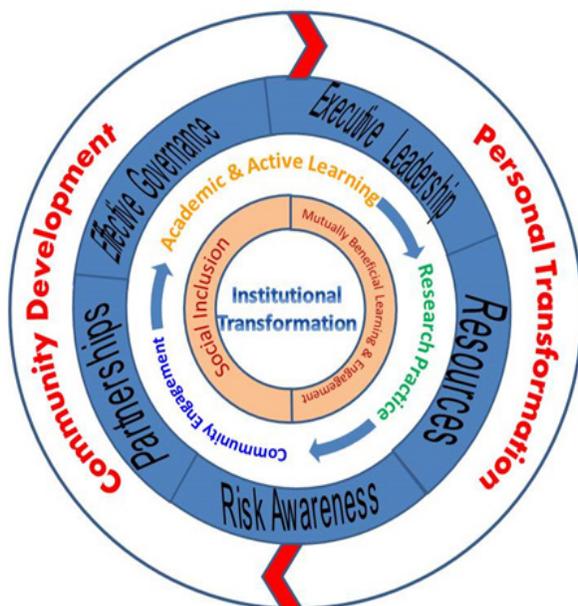


Figure 2. The PACE model

## PACE International

The partnership model between Macquarie University and AVI charts new territory in the Australian higher education landscape. The Macquarie University–Australian Volunteers International Collaboration Agreement 2011–2013 was the first of its kind in this sphere of activity: that is, a “whole-of-university” approach between an Australian university and a major not-for-profit organization. Through this partnership Macquarie University is able to significantly broaden its vista for PACE by providing a range of international opportunities drawing on AVI’s extensive expertise in the international development arena. AVI’s experience with international partnerships and risk assessment protocols is of particular benefit in this undertaking.

Discussions between Macquarie University and AVI began in late 2007. Throughout 2008, the two institutions worked together to consider the question raised in the green paper *Review of Academic Programs*: “What do students require to be successful global citizens?” (Macquarie University, 2008a, p. 3). The partnership with AVI (initially referred to as the Global Futures Program) was launched on May 4, 2008. It is worthy of note that prior to the signing of the agreement in 2010, pilot projects (jointly conceived) were run in eight countries with 120 student participants. These provided a proof of concept phase culminating in the initial agreement. The Macquarie University–Australian Volunteers International Collaboration Agreement 2014–2015 is now in operation.

PACE International aims are congruent with the overarching aims of PACE as defined in its mission as set out above. Working with AVI partners in Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, and Peru, students experience daily life and work in a developing community. Consistent with the sustainability objectives of AVI, projects are designed within a framework of mutual benefit and social engagement. Projects have adopted the piloted model of a group experience rather than individual placements as an approach appropriate for undergraduate students visiting unfamiliar territories.

PACE International projects are often multidisciplinary (where feasible), thus providing students with a valuable opportunity to work and apply their classroom learning in multidisciplinary teams. In some projects students can elect to participate on a cocurricular basis. To date, over 400 students have participated in PACE International projects in 10 countries with 20 partners. Although PACE International Projects are generally offered in situ, a remote

engagement project with an NGO in Lebanon was piloted in 2012 (International Communication Campaigns, ICOM 2012). This project provided a unique opportunity for students to use online communication technologies to develop a communication campaign based on a project brief defined by the NGO to promote the rights of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Because the nature of this project offers accessibility, financial, and global preparedness advantages, the pilot will be expanded in 2014.

A small number of international activities fall outside the scope of PACE International. These involve individual students working on individual projects.

### **PACE Research and Evaluation Strategy 2014–2016 Green Paper**

Macquarie University seeks to gauge progress toward its strategic goals and paramount aspiration for PACE: “mutually beneficial learning and engagement” (*Macquarie University, 2014c*). The PACE Research and Evaluation Strategy 2014–2016 will be directed to this end through engagement with its stakeholder communities, namely students, partners, Macquarie University, AVI, and the wider community. The PACE Research and Evaluation Strategy 2014–2016 Green Paper (*Macquarie University, 2014c*) has been developed as a consultative document. It seeks to provide a comprehensive strategic framework within which a range of PACE-related research and evaluation projects can be undertaken for the purposes of:

- continuous program improvement,
- program development,
- justification and accountability,
- knowledge generation and exchange, and
- knowledge dissemination (*Macquarie University, 2014c*)

Aligned with the university’s mission to “be a significant contributor to the nation’s social, environmental, cultural, economic and commercial well-being” (*Macquarie University, 2012d*), the Research and Evaluation Strategy will provide a cogent conception of what needs to be accomplished by 2016 within the parameters of PACE-related research and evaluation. Macquarie University has adopted the following working definition of PACE-related research and evaluation:

PACE-related research and evaluation involves inquiry conducted on (1) the curriculum and pedagogy of pro-

fessional and community engagement in learning and teaching; (2) the way in which PACE has been conceived, developed and implemented at Macquarie, and (3) the impact on and experience of PACE on and for Macquarie students, partner organisations, staff, the University as an institution, AVI and the wider community. (*Macquarie University, 2014c, p. 12*)

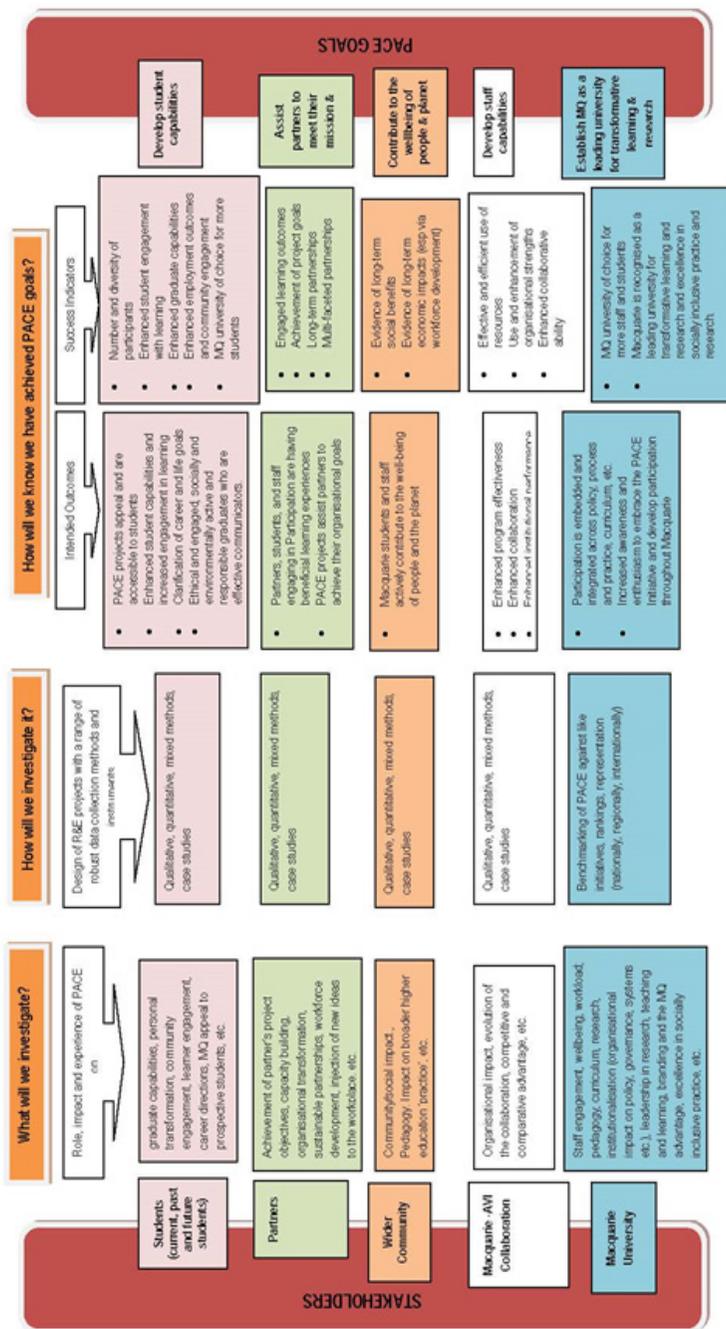
Additionally, the Research and Evaluation Strategy is aligned with Macquarie University's Quality Enhancement Framework, which defines quality enhancement as "a systematic, future directed, continuous cycle of goal setting, planning, managing and reviewing, within an appropriate governance framework and aimed at transformation" (2012f).

The Research and Evaluation Strategy is undergirded by a number of principles, including:

1. the centrality of the co-production of knowledge involving students, partners, the University, and the community
2. the need to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with ethical protocols
3. the need for democratic practices of research and evaluation
4. the benefits of collaborative agreement on strategic priorities for areas of focus for research and evaluation
5. the desirability of planning, coordinating and consolidating research and evaluation activities among stakeholders to maximise impact. (*Macquarie University, 2014c, p. 10*)

The Research and Development Strategy is being developed collaboratively, with feedback sought from across the university community and progressively from partner organizations as the strategy is implemented. Integral to this process is an internal check on the alignment of intended outcomes, success indicators, and PACE goals. Figure 3 outlines proposed research and evaluation foci. The Research and Evaluation Strategy will also address the overall efficacy of the initiative.

Figure 3. Snapshot of PACE Research and Evaluation Foci from a Stakeholder Perspective



Source: Macquarie University, 2014c, p. 14.

Consistent with the ethic of social inclusivity underpinning PACE and a democratic approach to the practice of research, careful consideration will be given to the object of inquiry, which is regarded as integral to both the process and the outcome of inquiry.

It is anticipated that collaborative research and evaluation projects engaging a spectrum of different stakeholders will be undertaken. A range of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods will be employed in the collection of data, accommodating the diverse objects of inquiry such as partner evaluations, course evaluations, academic program reviews, graduate destination surveys, employer surveys, student portfolios, and student feedback. Benchmarking of PACE against like initiatives is also envisaged. The quality assurance mechanisms are developing commensurate with the development of the initiative; for example, a student evaluation questionnaire, the Learner Experience of PACE survey (LEP), was piloted in 2011 and has since been more widely implemented. Preliminary reports narrate the initiative's progress toward its strategic goals. A discussion of research findings will be the subject of another article in planning.

A central focus of the Research and Evaluation Strategy will be the assembling of a library of evidence on PACE as a whole.

## Some Considerations

In the course of our research a number of considerations in relation to the PACE Initiative have surfaced.

**The quality of the experiential learning activity.** The quality of the experiential learning activity is clearly important. It is crucial that students synthesize unit content and PACE activities in learning outcomes. To this end, the teacher (unit convenor) has an important role in helping students understand the reciprocal relationship between the PACE activity, the development of graduate capabilities (both cognitive and affective), and community development. As Rhoads (1998) affirms, "Helping students to connect theory to action is a necessary component of liberatory forms of pedagogy" (p. 45; see also Freire, 1970). Arbab (1993) further elaborates: "Helping others and helping oneself become two aspects of one process; service unites the fulfilment of individual potential with the advancement of society and ensures the integrity of one's sense of moral purpose" (p. 9). In this regard, priority is placed on tailoring PACE activities to students' individual needs while meeting partner aspirations to ensure that students benefit to the

extent possible from their activities, taking into account their prior experience, backgrounds, and career aspirations.

**Administrator support.** The sheer volume and diversity of students pose challenges for PACE administrators. Many student background factors—skill set; educational, cultural, and language backgrounds; geographical location; and preferred sector and career—are all therefore important. Meeting requirements for students with special needs is an ongoing commitment.

**Reflective practices.** Embedding the practice of reflection in learning and teaching resources, unit evaluations, and assessment is essential. Reflection allows a more thorough consolidation of experience and more clearly defines in students' minds the meaning and value of engagement for both themselves and the wider community in all its various expressions, whether in relation to practical discipline-based knowledge, addressing community needs, or even understanding broader questions for which the human mind seeks answers, such as one's relationship to society.

**Social context.** The social context of the PACE activity is also an important consideration. As Lave and Wenger (1991) observe, "In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice—as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). Discussing Lave and Wenger's approach, Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, and Unwin (2005) emphasize this point: "Learner identity is viewed as being embedded in the context in which the individual is 'co-participating'" (p. 50). In this respect, a critical perspective is necessary to ensure that students are helped to understand social challenges and structural inequalities and encouraged to view themselves as agents of social change (see Mitchell, 2008). A case in point is the PACE International project in Peru with the partner Peru's Challenge. Aware that the project involves students accompanying social workers as they visit local families in impoverished communities in the Cusco region, care has been taken to frame the activity not as "poverty tourism" but rather as "exposure visits" to avoid the development of paternalistic attitudes and to foster an understanding of individual global responsibility. A longitudinal study is planned to evaluate the effectiveness of such an approach and identify best practices and lessons learned.

Further, returning to our definition of PACE, it is vital that PACE activities be jointly conceived by the university (unit convenors) and partners since the active involvement of partners in

the identification of the area of engagement and the design of the PACE activity ensures “more powerful learning contexts for students while also producing more positive outcomes for community members and organisations” (*Crabtree, 2008, p. 24*).

## **PACE-Related Research**

Despite the prominence of civic and community engagement in the modern university, scholarly research on the effects of service-learning on pedagogy and student learning remains limited (see *Keen & Hall, 2009*). The body of research on work-integrated learning is more established, with numerous studies documenting the student learning outcomes, but gaps remain in approaches to evaluation (see *Smith, 2012*). Furthermore, there is a surprising dearth of scholarly research on partner perspectives on community engagement (see *Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009*). We therefore turn to the question of whether the PACE Initiative can provide a springboard from which to further explore the parameters of this area of investigation.

To be true to Macquarie University’s commitment to “mutually beneficial learning and engagement,” PACE-related research will by definition need to engage student, academic, and partner perspectives. The scope of the initiative yields ample opportunities to pursue this imperative in largely unexplored territories. Possible areas of research include:

- the impact of PACE units on the development of graduate capabilities;
- the impact of PACE units on pedagogy, such as embedding the practice of reflection in PACE units and the adoption of interdisciplinary approaches to learning;
- the relationship between the local/international dimension of various manifestations of ‘learning through participation’ (LTP, a term coined to cover service-learning, work-integrated learning, and other areas of experiential learning (*Winchester-Seeto, Mackaway, Coulson, & Harvey, 2010, p. 68*) and student orientations of global citizenship;
- partner perspectives on engagement with PACE;
- the impact of PACE on partner objectives and community building;

- the relationship between student learning (through PACE units) and community building;
- the role of academic staff and partners in the design and implementation of PACE units;
- the impact of PACE on Macquarie University as an institution;
- the impact of PACE on the career pathways of PACE students.

Researching the impact of any university-community engagement initiative presents challenges in the definition of the unit of analysis itself, the design of effective research tools, the conducting of rigorous analysis of qualitative data, and the appropriate dissemination of findings to multiple stakeholders. As Sir David Watson et al. (2011) comment, “The methodological barriers to answering these questions are daunting, but this should not keep us from working harder and more systematically to assess impacts” (p. 255).

The Learning and Teaching Centre PACE Project Team has created a rich bank of resources in PACE-related research to assist staff as they take on the challenges of a new teaching model in the areas of assessment, student feedback, and reflective practice (Macquarie University, 2014b). A number of major projects have already been completed; for example, an overview of the literature on assessment of student learning in experience-based education (see Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto, Coulson, & Harvey, 2011; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2010) and the role of the host supervisor responsible for university students on placement (see Rowe, Mackaway, & Winchester-Seeto, 2012). A major project recently completed is an Office of Learning and Teaching Commissioned Project involving a consortium of universities on the impact of Work Integrated Learning on student work readiness. The Learning and Teaching Centre also oversees the PACE Community of Practice, which provides a regular forum for staff to consult on issues, discuss research, and share learning.

Macquarie University has embarked on a number of initiatives to support and promote opportunities for PACE-related research. One is the PACE Development Grant Scheme, which has been established to further the achievement of PACE objectives pursuant to the PACE Strategic Goals around partner development and partner relationship building and modes of delivery of PACE units and activities. Funded projects include:

- the development of a Partnership Management Plan for Multiple Students through an evaluation of cur-

rent partnerships hosting large numbers of psychology students,

- research on the experience of international students in the PACE Initiative to evaluate nonplacement approaches to community engagement, and
- an evaluation of the PACE relationship with the City of Ryde through the Macquarie-Ryde Futures Partnership to develop effective relationships with high-volume local partners.

In order to both better understand the role of partners in the design and implementation of projects and contribute to the theorizing of university-community partnerships, which is in its formative stages, a number of projects have commenced or are in planning. For instance, at an international workshop for PACE International Partners in Bangkok convened by AVI in April 2013, Macquarie University researchers held interviews and focus groups with partners as part of PACE International: Partner Perspectives Project, a systematic study intended primarily to utilize partner feedback and insights to enhance program effectiveness.

A full list of PACE-related research 2012–2014 is available through the PACE website (*Macquarie University, 2014b*). Examples of such research projects include the Workload Project, designed to investigate the staff workload challenges inherent in implementing the PACE Initiative. Findings from surveying a spectrum of staff perspectives will inform an appropriate workload model for PACE and contribute to the broader research base on the topic. Other projects with potentially broad application are Choosing Ethical Partners, which explores important questions relating to the ethical parameters guiding the selection of PACE partners, and PACE Ethics Protocol, which is currently developing a PACE Indigenous Protocol.

## Conclusion

The PACE Initiative opens up new vistas of practice and research in university and community engagement in which to champion its ambitious goals in the arenas of transformative learning and community development. The stage is set. The objective now is to establish a robust PACE research and evaluation strategy that will enable Macquarie University to develop an evidence base that will provide clarity and specificity in this complex multivariate environment. Answers will emerge for a range of questions, such as: Are

anticipated benefits to key stakeholders—students, the university, partners, and the wider community—indeed accruing in the areas of student learning, civic engagement, capacity building, and community development? Is PACE International an effective model for meeting both the student learning objectives of Macquarie University and the development objectives of its international partners? What are the lessons learned? What is best practice? Are there transferable lessons? The promulgation of examples of best practice and transferable lessons will be instrumental insofar as they will encourage other universities to learn from Macquarie's activities at this new frontier.

As the PACE Initiative gains further momentum and continues to both reflect on experience and adapt to change in light of changing circumstances, it is hoped that Macquarie University will be well positioned to demonstrate a range of features of this new frontier and offer an effective institutional model for community engagement.

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