



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Community Project Work in Architecture

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Broad discipline area:
Architecture

Year level:

- Fourth year undergraduate design studio core course (2007)
- Year One postgraduate design studio course (Master of Architecture 2008)

TRN strategy:

Design learning activities informed by

- Mutuality between university and community
- Student developed learning outcomes
- Contemporary topical research issues
- Advancing performance, innovation and best practice approach to national and state legislative acts
- Build small scale research activities into undergraduate assignments

Teaching and learning context:

- Design studio
- Service learning
- Field trips
- Community consultations
- Reflective learning
- Public exhibition

Brief description of the initiative:

This senior lecturer is trialling a new approach to community-based design projects in the Architecture Program by working in association with **FBEOutTHERE!**, which through service learning, facilitates relationships with communities. With the real prospect of a selected project being constructed, students are asked to design an 'ageing in place' independent living accommodation project. This project responds to needs identified by a social enterprise group that provide community services for people experiencing multiple intellectual disabilities (service users) in rural New South Wales. With an emphasis on enhancing service users' quality of life, students

undertake this task by firstly engaging with the literature, interviewing the service users and staff and visiting the service users' homes to understand their spatial needs and experiences for domestic well being. Only after the students have reviewed and evaluated the interviews, home visits and literature are they able to commence the design element of their projects, the progress of which is discussed regularly with the community.

In this strategy of mutuality students design with an inquiry evidence based approach, responsive to community needs. In addition, students keep reflective journals as part of this subject, which are intended to help them think about the research findings, their interaction with the service users and their needs, and how these impact upon their design approach to the project. Exhibiting the completed student designs in the town allows for community feedback on the designs and facilitates discussion about design approaches that best meet their needs. Students receive individual written community feedback about their designs and this collectively informs the interdisciplinary site and context research phase of the project with Faculty Landscape Architecture students. The Senior Lecturer also provides the students with guidance and feedback during studio classes.

In 2007, 16 students selected this studio project, *Rural Community Wellbeing Enhanced through Design* from a range of design project offerings in the Year 4 core subjects, ARCH 1401 + 1402 Architectural Design Studio in the Bachelor of Architecture program. Students work in groups to undertake the literature and context /site research phase of the project. They conduct the service user interviews and home visits in pairs. These findings are shared through studio presentations and documented in web folders on the Faculty server. Students undertake the project design individually, informed by shared investigations as well as progressive design studio interaction. All students participate in the assessment process providing verbal and written formative feedback.

Students evaluated this course in 2007 using the University's standard instruments and provided qualitative reflections in an online survey. They indicated that this course encouraged them to be self-directed in their learning. In meeting their identified learning outcomes, such as 'learn how to use their theoretical knowledge to develop a feasible project' students perceived this course was effective. Some comments included:

"This design studio was able to narrow the gap between architect–user interaction and understanding. It was very useful and inspiring to be able to communicate closely with a community group. Instead of always designing in an idealistic manner, we are forced to design creatively to balance out between the ideal and the reality."

"...to work on an option which honestly attended to the issues we faced This sense of responsibility meant that to the best of my ability I searched for a solution that was backed through research, and not just one I assumed would work."

For further details:

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Handout/Teaching materials:

Students are assessed as follows:

Assignment 1: <i>Research review + evidence in Design Brief Development</i>	<i>formative feedback.</i>
Assignment 2: <i>Concept Design + developed Brief</i>	25%
Assignment 3: <i>Design Development</i>	55%
Assignment 4: <i>Reflective Journal + Report</i>	20%

Further materials, eg, course outline, provided upon request.