**ABSTRACT**

In recent decades, partnerships between community-based organisations and universities through service learning programs have proliferated, reflected in an equally energetic growth in the research literature on process, evaluation, benefits and lessons learned. As an example of student experiential education through community engagement, service learning’s potential to contribute to students, community partners and university is well recognised, although the research has tended to focus on benefit to students rather than the value in engagement for the community sector. In examining a cross-university Community Engagement Program (CEP) which has successfully facilitated curricular service learning in multiple disciplines and for twenty years at an Australian university – leading to the completion of more than 1,000 community projects – this article aims to describe both a distinct, sustainable model for creating shared value and, through analysis of ten years of evaluation data, define what value is created for community partners and students through this project work. Key components in enabling a shared value approach include: community-initiated projects based on need; a dedicated cross-university program and an assigned engagement coordinator; the engagement of faculty expertise through students with developed skills in appropriately structured courses; and community ownership of outcomes. Ongoing challenges include: scoping ‘student ready’ briefs; managing risk, commitment and workload; designing coursework structures to deliver shared value; and achieving the ‘holy grail’ of transdisciplinarity.

**Keywords**

university-community engagement, service learning, community-based learning, shared value

**‘Useful, usable and used’: Sustaining an Australian model of cross-faculty service learning by concentrating on shared value creation**

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In recent decades, partnerships between community-based organisations and universities through service learning programs have proliferated, with service learning increasingly recognised as a ‘work integrated’ way of learning with enormous benefit; not only for students - producing ‘work-ready’ graduates with an understanding of socially responsible professional practice - but as a means of addressing complex issues, and building bridges between university, community, student and faculty expertise. It is a recognition of the shared value of learning, teaching and knowledge *in context* – that is, ‘useful, usable and used’.

UTS Shopfront Community Program is a dedicated unit that has operated for over 20 years at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. As the longest running cross-faculty community engagement program at an Australian university, today it offers the following services: brokering community-based projects and curricular internships with final year or post-graduate students; recruiting students from any stage of their degree for skilled or unskilled volunteering activity through an extra-curricular, community leadership ‘award’ program; brokering expert volunteering of university staff based on community need; and supporting and publishing academic research with a social purpose.

This article examines the longest running component of the services offered: community-based projects undertaken under academic supervision as part of disciplinary coursework by final year or postgraduate students with local small to medium non-profit organisations. Although this activity has been running for 20 years – leading to the completion of more than 1,000 *pro bono* community projects – the analysis will focus on evaluation data collected over 10 years from 2006 to 2016. Before exploring in detail the processes and stages of the service learning model, a review of the literature provides some guidance to those aspects that underpin best practice service learning. Data analysis sheds light on the value that this program creates for community clients and students, while also highlighting difficulties. The article concludes with some thoughts on key characteristics essential to best practice service learning, as well as challenges and next steps.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent decades, partnerships between community-based organisations and universities have proliferated, with an increasing number of higher education institutions arguing that community engagement should be understood not as an add-on but a core part of higher education’s mission (Holland 2006): a third pillar of equal importance to research and teaching. Certainly, recent research in the US reveals that higher education institutions have implemented a wide variety of programs for ‘curricular and co-curricular student engagement’ (Campus Compact 2015), as universities strive to offer their staff and students an enriched research and learning environment while fulfilling their civic obligations (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett 2000). One of the most widely implemented models is service learning, which, as its name suggests, links a service experience with a civil society organisation with specific curricular outcomes.

There is a substantial body of research demonstrating the benefits of service-learning programs to students, including: the development of critical thinking skills; improved communication skills and self-knowledge; greater civic engagement and political awareness; improved technical and analytical skills; and strengthened ability to work collaboratively (Bringle & Hatcher 2002; Buys & Bursnall 2007; Egeru 2016; Jacoby 2009; Schamber & Mahoney 2008; Steinberg, Hatcher & Bringle 2011). For universities, service learning engagement models create advantages in the form of ‘increased legitimacy’ (Boyle 2004) and enhanced community relations (Eyler et al. 2001). They can also be a response to the increasing criticism that higher education promotes learning which is disconnected from practice, leads to the compartmentalisation of knowledge by discipline, fails to prepare students for work in highly complex environments (Dallimore & Souza 2002) and lacks connection to students’ personal lives, public issues and the wider community (Dumas 2002; Godfrey et al. 2005; Khurana 2010; Papamarcos 2005).

Less often explored, however, is the benefit to community organisations (Lester et al. 2005; Grossman 2002). In 1998, Giles and Eyler argued that understanding community impacts of service-learning was one of the top ten unanswered questions in service-learning research – and more recent research would seem to suggest this remains an issue (see, for example, Blouin & Perry 2009; Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001; Stoecker & Tryon 2009; Stoecker 2009). Bortolin (2011) posits this gap in knowledge is due to a general privileging of the university over the community in these types of partnerships, while Stoecker and Tryon (2009, p. 3) suggest this imbalance might stem from service learning’s early focus on ‘illuminat[ing] college students about the real world’. They call attention to the need to ‘transform service learning into a practice that serves communities’, stating that the ‘hallmark of an evolved view of higher learning is the willingness to look at issues from different angles with an open mind and change course where appropriate to ensure the sustainability of the practice’ (Stoecker & Tryon 2009, p. xv; p.5). Others have echoed this call for active and respectful inclusion of community voices as essential for truly ‘transformational learning’ (Sandy & Holland 2006). Indeed, in their definition of service learning, Campus Compact squarely focuses on what they see as the ‘novel and provocative’ goal of service learning: ‘[the] development of civically minded students who possess analytical problem solving abilities and self-identify as community change agents as a direct consequence of their community-based learning experiences’.

In acknowledgement of this gap in knowledge, increasingly, efforts are being made to more respectfully listen and learn from community partners. Sandy & Holland (2006, p. 31), in their research on 99 experienced community partners, begin by asking ‘What do we know, versus what do we assume to know about these “other worlds” with whom we are entwined in the work of service-learning?’ In their US-based research, Stoecker and Tryon (2009) found three main reasons for community participation in service learning: to serve as a centre for student learning; to develop future support for their group or their work; and to forge or strengthen relationships with universities. Students are also the greatest source of immediate and tangible benefits: student labour frees up staff time and increases organisational capacity for new projects; students’ ideas and energy bring fresh perspectives; student commitment to quality outcomes can inspire staff to reflect on their own work; students can introduce (and build confidence to use) new technology. (Cronley, Madden & Davis 2015; Gazley, Littlepage & Bennett 2012; Gerstenblatt 2014).

If the benefits for community organisations can be real and tangible, so too can the risk (Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker & Geschwind 2000). Difficulties can stem from students’ unreliability, lack of professionalism, poor work ethic, lack of preparedness and awareness regarding the community organisation’s mission and population they work with. Community organisations have also noted the disproportionate burden they bear to train and support students, draining their resources and time. Sandy & Holland (2006), among others, note the potentially serious repercussions for community organisations that can result from some of these issues, ranging from being disruptive for staff, to potentially damaging to vulnerable individuals and negatively impacting on the organisation’s ability to do its work (see also Blouin & Perry 2009).

The literature notes time and again that a fundamental aspect of successful service learning is the quality and nature of the relationships that underpin it. Blouin and Perry (2009) state that service learning, when done well, emphasises ‘shared power and shared control’, involving ‘*partners* rather than subjects or recipients’ (p. 131); Godfrey, Illes and Berry (2005) note the crucial importance of ‘reciprocity’, where community organisations work as partners with students and each party contributes knowledge and learns from each other; while Dorado and Giles (2004) highlight the importance of developing committed relationships as a means to ensure long-term viability – and many others concur. (See also Bringle & Hatcher 2002; Kenworthy U’Ren 2008; Kenworthy U’Ren & Peterson 2005).

This article hopes to shed some light on how the above ideals of mutuality and respect can be realised by presenting in detail an Australian service learning program in an urban city, developed in one institution over 20 years involving multiple faculties and a wide range of locally-based community organisations. It is also hoped that by describing the model, accompanied by an analysis of data from 2006–2016, this article will contribute to answering a persistent critique of service learning research, which is that, even as it attempts to include community voices and perspectives, it struggles to reflect the variety of service learning activities, disciplines involved, and the range of community partners participating (Blouin & Perry 2009, p. 123; citing Furco 2003).

**THE PROGRAM: CONCENTRATING ON SHARED VALUE CREATION**

The service learning activity reported here on is a university-wide program where final year or post-graduate students undertake *pro bono* disciplinary-based projects as part of their coursework and under academic supervision. Projects are initiated by small to medium (SME) local, non-profit organisations in response to their own needs. The university has around 44,500 enrolments in undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and research degrees in the disciplinary fields of analytics and data science; business; communication; design, architecture and building; education, engineering; health (not including medicine); information technology; international studies; law; and science. The analysis covers the period from 2006 to 2016: Figure 1 shows a distribution of projects across the community sector by social mission, and Figure 2 shows a breakdown of project type by discipline.



**Figure 1: Projects by sector, 2006–2016**



**Figure 2: Community project by discipline, 2006–2106**

From the outset, this service learning program responded to community-driven needs. This is an important distinction to make, as it distinguishes this CEP-facilitated service learning from professional practicums or internships. In those programs, periods of guided workplace-learning experiences with working professionals are built into degrees such as medicine and health, social work and teaching. They are typically mandatory for entire course cohorts, and external partners are likely to see ‘serving as a centre for student learning’ (Stoecker & Tryon 2009) as part of their ongoing mission. Instead, in this model, community groups, as the initiators of projects, are viewed by both the CEP and the clients themselves as partners, not ‘subjects or recipients’, or mentors or ‘co-teachers’ required to provide professional disciplinary guidance. As one community partner commented, ‘primarily we were relying on the advanced skills of the students and their teacher to bring it all together’. This orientation has an impact on the aims of the service learning, too, in that a key objective of the program is to support sustainability in community partners through delivering discrete projects based on their own self-identified need and internal lack of skills and resources to otherwise undertake the project. Students are not directly engaged learning ‘at the counter’ of professional service delivery, but instead create value by applying ‘faculty expertise’ (Calleson, Jordan & Seifer, 2005, p. 318). That is, students are akin to external ‘consultants’ working in response to a specific project brief, providing coverage across organisational capability gaps. As shown in Figure 2, above, the common organisational skills/capability gaps in the local SME non-profit sector where they seek support through student coursework projects include design, research, communications, business planning, financial management, governance, and the development of new technological infrastructure.

Following is a detailed breakdown of the process and key elements of the service learning program – as it is now, after 20 years’ practice, reflection and adjustment. Each year insights and lessons learned are used to develop further improvements to the CEP, which are subsequently piloted and embedded in the process.

**Table 1: Description of coursework community projects process and elements**

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| **Stage 1: Pre-semester Project initiation**  |
| **Call for project applications** | Via the Shopfront website, our networks, social media channel etc..we call for applications from local not for profits to submit projects based on their need.  |
| **Project scoping**  | The community engagement program (CEP) assists client organisations to focus the project and clarify goals. The CEP provides continuity with communities, allowing larger, multi-disciplinary projects to be defined, planned, broken down and completed across disciplines and over time. |
| **Project breakdown**  | The CEP facilitation ensures that projects are student-ready and manageable usually within a 12-week semester timeline and that students, academic supervisors and community organisations clearly understand the schedule, roles andresponsibilities. |
| **Development of brief** | The CEP project coordinator helps clients fill in a project brief to assist them with developing the aims of the project, clarifying their needs, target audiences, and resources available for the project (e.g., time commitment, personnel/expertise to assist the students). |
| **Selection of projects based on specific criteria** | The CEP coordinator and the academic supervisor of each course review relevant project applications and select projects based on the following criteria: a) the ability of the client to work with and support the students at that timeb) the significance of the project to the client organisationc) the nature of the client organisation (with priority given to issues of social justice and access)d) the degree of interest the project has for students. |
| **On-campus client briefing** | Clients are invited to the university for a client briefing before commencement of the project. As many see universities as ‘closed’ institutions, this invitation can bridge many cultural and social barriers. |

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| **Stage 2: Project process, tools and support** |
| **Development of project management timeline** | Students are expected to manage their project effectively, to develop clear individual roles and responsibilities if they are working in a team, keep minutes of client meetings, and use online systems for communication and document development. Community clients are asked to commit to the students’ coursework assessment timeline and make available (a minimum of) two hours per week to support the student work. |
| **Initial client-student meeting** | The project’s CEP coordinator attends the first meeting between student(s) and community client to ensure that the final project scoped meets the client needs, fits the student skill sets and is manageable within the semester time frame. |
| **Project scoping** | The project ‘scope’ or ‘plan’ document is prepared by all students/student teams as the agreed plan for actions and deliverables and is signed-off both by the academic supervisor and community client. |
| **Project monitoring** | The project’s CEP coordinator monitors progress and relationships during the semester. The student team is asked to update the client, academic and CEP coordinator regularly about the progress of their work. |
| **Formal assessment** | Formal assessment is spread over the semester, and includes the establishment by students of their goals and objectives for their project; these become benchmarks for the final assessment. |
| **Feedback** | Frequent feedback (both formal and informal) is provided by the academic supervisor, the CEP coordinator and the client. Such extensive feedback maintains student motivation and responsiveness while enabling students’ autonomy. |

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| **Stage 3: Project delivery and finalisation** |
| **Professional presentations** | Students usually present their project to their community client, the academic supervisor and CEP coordinator during a final presentation session. Students are usually assessed on the professionalism of this presentation, which should include explanation of the process, presentation of the final outcomes, handover of knowledge, and any implementation plan. |
| **Final assessment and review** | Project reports/designs/digital production/plans represent the major coursework assessment. They are evaluated by faculty (not the CEP) based on their practical value, evidence of original thinking, and design and delivery. This includes an assessment whether the recommendations are a sound and innovative response to the issue, the quality of method, and the usability of the outcomes.  |
| **Community ownership of outcomes** | The university classifies the student projects as commissioned research and the results and IP are transferred to the community partner. In some cases shared IP is negotiated and structured – most often around academic publication of results. |
| **Communication of value created for the university** | Information on the completed projects is communicated by the CEP for inclusion in the university’s quality reporting, such as annual report, social justice report, and disciplinary-based reports, for example the report to the United Nations on the Implementation of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME). Information about specific projects is shared with university communication offices and is regularly featured in internal and external media. |
| **Ongoing partnership between community client and university** | Final projects very often recommend and/or handover the basis of follow-on projects in a different disciplinary area (for example, a research report becomes the basis of law reform campaign; or a strategic plan leads to branding design; or a community consultation leads to funded, commissioned research). The CEP maintains the relationship management with the community partner and stewardship through the university and to broader external expertise and input.  |

**Project initiation stage:** In this first stage, the focus is on ensuring there is a real need and real commitment from the community client to the students’ work and the project timeline. Only those projects which ‘would not otherwise go ahead’ due to internal resource gaps are undertaken. This ensures *pro bono* student projects are not replacing paid work (and, potentially, employment for university graduates). Currently around 75 per cent of projects submitted go ahead within a year of submission, across a range of organisations. This diversity of client base adds interest for the students, as they see their peers work on other projects, and demands versatility across the student cohort in their approach to planning for different clients and target audiences. Also in this project initiation stage, the CEP can work with individual course coordinators on tailored designs that may include course requirements for: group work or individual student projects; intensive block teaching, weekly classroom sessions or blended learning modes; and single semester or year-long courses. In addition, when working with courses to build in service learning, the CEP has learned to require that the service learning project component has a weighting of a minimum of 60 per cent (but preferably closer to 100 per cent) of the course mark to ensure adequate focus on the specific project brief and greater depth of student engagement, necessary for delivering value to the community client.

**Project underway:** In stage 2, the focus shifts somewhat from the client to the student: a key part of this stage is to ensure optimal student learning and delivery of good-quality outcomes. In undertaking these projects, ‘students apply previously learned topics to an unstructured problem [and]…seek out and learn methodological techniques on an as-needed basis’ (Gorman, 2011, p. 565). Particularly in the early weeks, assessment and discussion occurs between students, the academic supervisor and the CEP coordinator to identify if any additional expert or professional practice input and/or skills development sessions (such as cultural awareness training or presentation skills workshops) is needed. This closes any knowledge and skill gaps and supports good performance. With some courses, volunteer industry coaches are also recruited (usually as part of corporate social responsibility programs) to provide guidance on professional practice for students. Interaction between client and students can occur through site visits, university-based meetings, skype, email and telephone. These interactions create opportunities for the students to share what they have learnt in their degree and demonstrate they can apply their knowledge and skills appropriately when interacting with external parties. This also sees knowledge and skills transferred to the community client. In return, community clients transfer their professional knowledge on the non-profit sector and their social mission. For the majority of students, this is their first engagement with the non-profit sector and these specific social issues. As professional practice, students usually sign confidentiality agreements allowing client organisations to seek support for the most relevant issues, including issues that are sensitive or confidential.

**Project delivery:** In this stage, students present the final outcome (research report, design, plan, digital production etc…) to clients, their peers, the CEP and faculty. This represents the major coursework assessment. Students are also often assessed on their presentation skills as part of final presentations to community clients. Students are often enthused to support their community clients in an implementation phase outside their coursework, and many students have gone on to become volunteers or board members with their client organisation.

**EVIDENCE FOR THE SUCCESS OF A SHARED VALUE FOCUS**

Qualitative researchers argue that study of a single case can not only provide insight into practice but also, where it offers unusual access to a specific area of interest, it can have exemplary value (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2014; Thomas 2011). The program reported on in this article represents such a case of ‘unusual access’ because the author has worked on its development and delivery for many years and used this participant observation alongside extensive survey data and course materials and documents collected over this extended period of time to analyse and reflect on the elements of the program that facilitate its delivery of value to community organisations and students/faculty. For the purposes of this article, quantitative data was gathered from student and community client evaluations of 458 projects completed between first semester 2006 to the end of second semester 2016. At the end of every semester a customised online survey is sent to students and community organisations to evaluate their experience. This survey sits alongside other evaluation processes including project tracking and troubleshooting during the semester, and telephone or face-to-face community client feedback at the conclusion of every project. In each of the surveys (for students and community clients) a five point Likert-type scale with (1) being strongly disagree and (5) being strongly agree was used (see also Snell et al. 2015).

In the customised student survey, students are asked to indicate their level of agreement with ten statements about the quality and significance of their learning experiences as well as open-ended questions asking them to provide additional reflections on their experiences including what elements of the community project they found most or least helpful. From 2006 to the end of 2016, 594 custom surveys have been completed by students: a response rate of 35.5 per cent of the total student population of 1671.

The community client survey undertaken asks the client representative to indicate their agreement or disagreement with seven statements related to their experience with the student coursework project, the quality of students’ work, the opportunity for knowledge exchange with the university, the usefulness of the project for their organisation, and whether they would work with the CEP again, and includes additional open-ended questions to reflect on the worst and best parts of their experience and suggest ways to improve the engagement. From 2006 to the end of 2016, 275 community client surveys have been completed, 65.7 per cent of the total number of 418 community clients who have participated in coursework projects. This evaluation sits alongside the community program’s client management and troubleshooting process during the project, so the program team is kept aware of all clients’ experience throughout the semester*.* (Note that the number of projects completed during those ten years (458) is greater than the number of clients (418) as, with 12 projects, clients worked with four or five different student teams over the semester, each co-contributing their specific project work to a larger project outcome. In these cases, these clients completed only one evaluation.)

**Value for Students**

Evaluation evidence shows that the students’ service learning experiences contributed to their professional and personal development with 89 per cent of the total cohort agreeing that the work was relevant to their professional development and 87 per cent agreeing that the work was relevant to their personal development. Further, 90 per cent of students would recommend the experience of doing a community coursework project to other students. (See Table 2 for this summary from student evaluations.)

INSERT TABLE 2

Asked why they would recommend this experience, students focused on the value of applying learned skills in a ‘real’ setting coupled with the value of doing something useful, as summarised by the following two comments from students:

*It gives the student actual work experience and a great feeling of accomplishment, that their work is actually going to be used. The project was great overall teaching me so many things, and the fact my work was appreciated for such a great cause made it all the more worthwhile.*

*I would recommend all students to do a community project before entering the workforce because valuable lessons are learnt in regards to skills, dealing with a crisis and learning how to ask questions to get correct information from the community group. It also taught me how to become independent and apply what I have learnt over the years to this project.*

Table 3, below, summarises the value the students’ perceived they had gained from their experience. The primary value was in the ‘real world’ application of disciplinary knowledge with an external client while working towards an outcome that was genuinely needed and would be used. As one student reflected about her team’s work:

*It was about helping not-for-profit organisations to be able to provide better services to people who are in need of their support. The fulfilment of seeing them satisfied with the recommendations that we have provided was worth all the challenges we have experienced in this project.*

It is clear that the students’ experience acts as a gateway to professional practice – marking a change in the service learning participant’s self-view from ‘student’ to ‘independent professional’. As one student commented, ‘The best thing was the autonomy and empowerment provided that enabled me to complete the work as a trusted professional.’ New skills and knowledge learned and (where it occurred) the experience of collaborating as a member of a team were also valued. In addition, given the context of ‘service’, they valued the social good of their contribution of skills and their enhanced understanding of the mission behind the organisation, alongside gaining an understanding of non-profit organisations in general. For one student, the experience, ‘was a personal growth of understanding [of] how I can contribute to society. Furthermore I saw a development in my interpersonal skills as I dealt with numerous people whom I otherwise would never have met.’ Graduates reported that they were able to use their project experience in job interviews to both demonstrate professional practice and serve as evidence of their social responsibility (an attribute increasingly sought by local employers).

INSERT TABLE 3 AROUND HERE

**Value for Community Partners**

Ninety seven per cent of community clients agreed that the project was of value to their organisation, 98 per cent would recommend the experience to other organisations, and 99 per cent agreed that that they would work with the CEP and the university again. When asked why they would recommend working with the CEP, comments included:

*I found the process a little more focused and productive than other student placements I have had, in part because it was a very specialist field of expertise in which I have very little experience. So for me [what] was really valuable was to develop new aspects of the work we do here through a different lens.*

*This is a quality program bringing academic and industry rigor as well as the students’ experience, skills and expertise to bear on real life issues for organisations that could not otherwise afford this level of assistance.*

In terms of the role the CEP plays in supporting the initiation of projects and ongoing project management, 93 per cent of community clients agreed that the CEP Coordinator assisted in defining the project and scope. One client commented, ‘the process forced [our organisation] to present a very focused research brief. This really helped us to prioritise our needs.’ Ninety seven per cent agreed they had adequate avenues for contact throughout the project, with one client commenting on the importance of the CEP’s role in being ‘proactive in moving the project forward and ensuring all parties are “in sync”’, in order to ensure a quality outcome. (For the summary of community responses, see Table 4.)

Cronley et al. in their 2015 study on motivations for community partners to engage in service learning found that the desire for increased organizational capacity emerged as one of the strongest motivators for participating in service-learning partnerships. Table 5 provides insight into what community organisations most specifically valued about the student coursework projects.

For one third of the community organisations the primary value was in the delivery of an outcome that could be used. This ‘useful, usable and used’ value is also reflected in the next four top responses, where application of the outcomes provided a new strategic direction (18%), improved service delivery (15%), or enhanced the organisation’s profile (6%) or professional reputation (6%). A sub-group of types of project submitted to the CEP are where organisations want to examine the feasibility of a new direction or social enterprise activity, or develop prototypes for new services or infrastructure – now usually around digital platforms. The value in this sub-set of projects is reflected in the evaluations, where five per cent of organisations appreciated the opportunity to prototype new services/products/infrastructure and assess and determine their feasibility pre-investment. For one client the value came through:

*Fresh thinking. Critical evaluation. An external view of the organisation. A logical, well presented report. As requested, the students also completed a ‘plain english’ version of the presentation for our members (not university educated). A well thought out actionable report that will make a difference to our organisation.*

INSERT TABLES 4 & 5 AROUND HERE

**DISCUSSION**

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from both students and community clients demonstrates the real potential that best-practice service learning programs can offer. Based on my own hands-on experience, as well as reflection and analysis of the data, I argue that this distinct model of curricular service learning is a responsive and sustainable program because it’s starting point is the vital need for specific contextual knowledge of community groups’ motivations and requirements. Such an attitude helps to ensure that the CEP is community-facing. Deliberately built into the program at various points are opportunities to learn. ‘What do we know, versus what do we assume to know about these “other worlds”?’, as posed by Sandy & Holland (2006). Student learning opportunities are then built around this key primary understanding. Furthermore, the facilitated nature of the program ensures that communication channels, processes and evaluation are appropriate, detailed and responsive. While others have suggested communication is a four-way cycle, in this model, communication is considered and varied depending on the stage of the process. Twenty years ‘deep’ experience delivering shared value – within the constraint of rigid semester timelines - have identified key principles and touch points to ensure successful outcomes that include: one CEP Coordinator as the relationship manager who is present at the first student-community meeting to manage scope; students’ developing a project plan/scope of agreed deliverables and a timeline; students attending meetings ‘on-site’ at the client organisation; ongoing communications between students, client, academic supervisor and CEP coordinator; a scheduled mid-point, in-class project troubleshooting session; delivery of draft outcomes for client review prior to final presentations; and opportunities to ‘rehearse’ student teamwork presentations.

From both personal observation and feedback, it is clear that community clients are very aware of the two-way knowledge exchange occurring. Data shows that 89 per cent of community clients agreed that the projects provided the opportunity for skills and knowledge transfer to both their own organisation and to the students (see Table 4). Reflecting that the nature of this service learning model is *not* one where community partners have the capacity to act as mentors/co-teachers in students’ disciplinary fields, community clients saw their main contribution to student knowledge was in building their understanding of the specific social mission of the organisation (and this is reflected in student evaluations) and the broader non-profit sector, alongside enhancing professional practice, client management and research skills. The key knowledge transfer to community partners – as reflected in the literature - was a greater understanding of new technologies. What is new here was the transferred value of an enhanced organisational capacity to use new design thinking, business planning and research methods. It is clear that the ‘expert, external consultant’ nature of these projects – with student often applying new theoretical knowledge from outside the client’s own disciplinary background – is itself a driver of organisational development. (See Figures 3 and 4 for a summary of the top five skills community clients perceive were exchanged.)

However, of course, this program has not always run as it should, or achieved the results hoped for. As part of the post-project evaluation, community clients were asked what they liked least about their projects – Table 7 summarises their top 13 responses. While the overall quality of the experience working with the CEP processes is reflected by the fact that 44.5 per cent of respondents said there was ‘nothing’ they did not like, issues raised include community partners wanting projects to run over a longer time period than the semester schedule allows, or wanting more support to be provided post-project for implementation. As one client commented, ‘The short timeframe was difficult when doing something which requires a lot of consultation with our team.’ While for another, the ‘short deadlines towards the end meant quick decisions [had] to be made – rather than slower, more considered decisions.’ Project management issues included (in order) poor communications during the project, conflicts around scheduling and personnel availability, confusion during the initial project scoping phase, and a lack of clarity around timelines and requirement. One client commented, ‘At some stages the project felt a little rushed and client communications were not as comprehensive as they could have been (in an ideal world).’ While for another client, ‘The timing was not ideal…It was important to hit the ground running to fit into the university timetable.’ Clients’ own time constraints to contribute to the project were also a concern. For one client, ‘The pressure of supervising three students and my other work commitments made this project extremely difficult – I was so time poor and felt that I let the students down.’ In terms of outcomes, the students’ lack of depth in their understanding of the problem led to naive or shallow solutions to the client’s problem, and their lack of commitment also led to poorer quality outcomes. CEP responses to these issues include:

* Ensuring substantial weighting of the course mark and time allocated during semester for the project so students have time and motivation to embed themselves in the project to safeguard against ‘off the shelf’ or naive outcomes
* Managing client expectations, tracking and communicating project failure rates, and ensuring all projects continue to be delivered *pro bono*
* With some subjects, where the student cohort may have a lesser capacity to produce successful outcomes, working with a one-to-many/client-student team engagement scenario
* Failure procedures that usually activate mid-project to ensure that community partners have the choice to not continue committing resources to a project unlikely to produce an outcome of value for them

Other, more structural and institutional challenges faced by the program over the past two decades have included: maintaining an embedded commitment to community engagement against a backdrop of changes in senior management and strategic planning; scoping ‘student ready’ briefs with community partners that fit inflexible semester timelines; managing risk, commitment and workload; designing and refining coursework structures to deliver shared value; and achieving the ‘holy grail’ of transdisciplinarity – working across entrenched disciplinary/faculty silos to deliver community projects requiring inputs from multiple disciplines – currently done by scoping projects into ‘phases’ over time and across disciplinary fields with students involved in the ‘handover’.

One recent challenge that has emerged for the CEP is other, nearby universities now realising the value of service learning offerings as an important component for delivering ‘work-integrated, employment-ready graduates’ and resourcing new programs accordingly. Into the future, a more crowded marketplace for community clients may impact on the CEP, while providing greater opportunities for the community organisations to ‘pick and choose’ and create value to their communities through engagement with multiple, local CEP programs.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

From many years of delivering the shared value of ‘useful, usable and used’ projects, I offer the following seven components that underpin the success and sustainability of our model of coursework service learning:

1. Projects are initiated by SME not-for-profit organisations based on community needs, their own skills gaps, and their capacity to commit to a curriculum timeline
2. Utilises an across-the-whole university community engagement program with ethics and risk management structures in place (including failure procedures) for stability of relationship management through the university
3. A CEP Coordinator is assigned to individual projects and specific courses to facilitate relationship and project management from scoping to finalisation
4. Engages with final year and postgraduate students with developed disciplinary skills
5. University courses offering service learning are structured, timed and weighted to ensure adequate depth of student engagement and commitment
6. Disciplinary guidance is provided by suitable academic supervisors and (where necessary) through sourcing and connecting other faculty or external experts into specific projects or even courses
7. Community ownership of outcomes or structures are in place for sharing of Intellectual Property (IP)

Recent program expansion at UTS Shopfront saw the introduction of a co-curricular student volunteering program UTS SOUL Award in 2014. Alongside non-skilled and short term volunteering activity in the community sector, SOUL has enabled voluntary disciplinary internships to take place out of semester – with timelines more suited to the schedules of community need - and it has made the forming of transdisciplinary student volunteer teams to address community need easier; but without the framework of regular, academic supervision and the motivator of a ‘mark’ at project’s end for students. With this, and new initiatives at the university around formalised academic volunteering and a university-wide Social Justice Framework, we will continue to concentrate deeply on creating shared value with the community sector.

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