Stories from the field...Community Internship Course

University/Institution: Griffith University

Name/title of example of inclusive WIL practice: Community Internship Course

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Key Words: Community engagement, not-for-profit, service learning

Discipline: All disciplines

Overview of example:
This course is inclusive because it is a free-choice elective shell WIL course with that students from any discipline can choose to take. It has a 50 hour volunteering component. It has no GPA requirement for entry. It is particularly attractive for International students who otherwise have inequitable access to other WIL opportunities. It provides students with a strong sense of meaning and purpose by engaging them in service that responds to community needs. Students can “bring their own” placement if they are already an active volunteer or they can select from hundreds of internships which the university has sourced. 200 students enrol in each of the three semesters the course runs in each year – Semester I, Semester II, and Summer making a present annual cohort of over 500 students. Students engage in a mix of on-campus and on-line interactions and are allocated an Academic Advisor who provides academic advice and “pastoral care” throughout the internship. Students need only to have completed the equivalent of the first year of their degree to enrol. Most students are placed singly, but some opportunities are available for group placements.

How are students from diverse backgrounds catered for in this example of inclusive WIL practice? (e.g. special consideration; adjustments; financial assistance; flexibility in assessment; etc)

The university covers any out of pocket expenses the student has, especially in relation to choosing an internship which might involve additional travel costs. Assessment, while structured in a semester timeframe, is adjusted to suit the needs of the community partner and the volunteering opportunity. Each internship is individual so a student’s first assessment is in the form of a learning contract.

3 benefits of this practice?

Most university courses do not provision an opportunity for students to develop a responsiveness to wider community needs. Instead most courses have a singular focus on the career outcomes of the students’ discipline studies. This course enables students to look at “who” they want to be in relation to their role as a citizen in the community. It also engages them with the benefits of WIL as a learning environment.
3 challenges of this practice?
Like all WIL, it is relatively resource intensive. Because it enables students in second year to experience a WIL placement, reliance on tracking students on placement through the Academic Advisors is a critical success factor.

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of this practice?
Extremely effective. Students from a wide range of backgrounds succeed in the course – both in terms of having an access to placement, and in terms of academic success. And of course, community needs also benefit.

What plans are there to improve/further develop and or extend this example of inclusive WIL practice?
Being included in degree programs as recommended and core unit of study, and being expanded to Masters coursework programs.