

Working together - The University of Notre Dame Australia, CALM, Local Government and the Community

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Presented at the Australian Association for Environmental Education (WA Chapter) 2nd Annual State Conference Environmental Hope: Education for a Future, October 7-8, 1999, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

ABSTRACT

Why would a State Government department teach units for a university? The Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia (CALM) has forged a partnership with the University of Notre Dame Australia to deliver a number of tertiary units in environmental management. The 'Ecotourism and Heritage Management' and 'Recreation Planning and Management' units provide education and training for undergraduate students, CALM staff and other professional development students from local government, other government agencies such as Kings Park and Whiteman Park, private businesses and individuals. The units are designed to involve and assist local government in developing community education programmes about, for and in the environment. The Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit established the annual 'Footloose in Freo' activities program in which student guides lead interpretive activities for the general public within the City of Fremantle. In 1998 participants in the Recreation Planning and Management unit prepared designs for recreation facilities within the City of Melville's Piney Lakes Reserve. All participants receive a Certificate of Competency in both of these nationally accredited courses and the students get credits towards their university degrees. In addition to providing practical education for the environment, these units provide students with the opportunity to interact with professionals and vice versa, leading to a healthy exchange of ideas, energy and experience. Interaction with local government and the public enables CALM and the university to contribute to a sense of community with active participation within it by these four sectors of the community. Working together, CALM, the University of Notre Dame Australia, local governments and the community create a synergy where effective environmental education is achieved and which generates hope for the future.

1. Introduction

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), which is responsible for the management of natural areas in public ownership within Western Australian and wildlife management throughout the state, has entered into a partnership with the University of Notre Dame Australia to deliver some of the units within their Environmental Studies and Tourism

programmes. CALM involvement with the university started in 1994 with the provision of occasional guest lecturers and involvement in field excursions with the students over a range of units (eg. during visits to national parks and other sites managed by CALM). More recently, however, CALM have taken the responsibility for presenting two units in their entirety: ES/BS181 Ecotourism and Heritage Management and ES280/380 Recreation Planning and Management. In addition to the partnership between these two institutions, the two units directly involve local government and the community.

This paper presents details of the two units and discusses how this partnership contributes towards community leadership and responsibility, represents effective environmental education and offers hope for the future. It also addresses the question: Why would a State Government department teach units for a university?

2. CALM Units at Notre Dame

In order to appreciate the educational benefits of the partnership between CALM and the University of Notre Dame Australia, a brief overview of the two units taught by CALM is provided.

The Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit focuses on interpretation techniques in natural and cultural heritage area management and the business of cultural and ecotourism. Interpretation is defined as a teaching technique, a service and a management tool to support environmental protection and appreciation of our heritage. Subjects include interpretive planning, project design and evaluation as well as the planning, design and presentation of ecotours and other guided interpretive activities. The unit is currently taught by Gil Field, Senior Interpretation Officer from the Visitor Interpretation Services section of CALM in its entirety, but this was not always the case.

In 1996 CALM were contracted to teach a one week intensive workshop within the unit. The intensive training session was a stand alone professional development course which was attended by outsiders to the university (eg. CALM staff, local government recreation officers, private ecotour operators etc.). University students also attended classes before and after the intensive training week and had a number of additional assignments to undertake. The following year, CALM took over the entire responsibility for this unit, but continued the format of a mixture of separate university classes and then a combined intensive training session. The Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit has been conducted by CALM in its entirety from 1997-1999.

This unit established the annual 'Footloose in Freo' activities program as an outcome of the intensive training workshop in which student guides lead their own interpretive activities for the general public. This programme of guided activities is based in and around the local Fremantle environment which offers a wide range of cultural and natural settings. Footloose in Freo is timed to coincide with school and university holidays and is promoted to Fremantle and Perth community members to attend.

A key responsibility of recreation planners and managers is to safeguard parks and recreational

areas in conservation reserves from overuse and/or abuse by visitors. Management is most effective if it is based upon an approach of resource protection from the outset as well as maintenance and restoration. CALM is the major provider of settings for outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in Western Australia. The Recreation Planning and Management unit explores the theory and principles of recreation planning and management using local examples and practices to demonstrate appropriate techniques. The unit is taught by Wayne Schmidt, Programme Coordinator in CALM's Division of Parks, Recreation, Planning and Tourism. Students learn the essential principles and procedures used in planning and management of natural environments for public recreation and tourism including the design, construction and maintenance of recreation areas and facilities; and the latest standards, techniques, products and materials applicable to recreation and tourism planning and management.

Both units are based directly on professional training courses conducted internally for CALM staff. Having run these courses for many years, the number of CALM staff requiring these courses is sometimes too few to warrant offering them each year within the department alone. Integrating the courses with the university system and also making them available to interested community members on a professional development basis generates 'critical mass' in participants. Hence it is cost effective for CALM to run the courses each year given the extra revenue obtained from the students and community participants.

Offering the courses and workshops as professional development opportunities without further obligation to a university program presents an open learning environment. The university is extending environmental education opportunities into the broader community.

The combination of university students (typically young school leavers) with (typically older) practising professionals creates a dynamic learning environment. Professional participants to date have included local government staff (eg. environment and recreation officers), other government agencies such as Kings Park and Whiteman Park, private businesses such as ecotour operators and other interested individuals. The students have plenty of energy and youthful enthusiasm which seems to inspire the older participants, who in turn enjoy sharing their wisdom and experiences with the students. The students get an appreciation of what life is like as an environmentalist in the 'real world' and make useful contacts for future study and work opportunities. Hence the environmental education that results is holistic and cooperative in its approach.

3. Community Leadership

As visible and well respected educational institutions universities have an important social purpose in addition to educational objectives. Orr (1992) and Dyer (1997) argue that universities should be leaders that set a good example by promoting environmentally responsible behaviour and helping to improve local and regional communities. This is akin to eco-tourism; 'nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education and is managed to be ecologically sustainable' (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1994).

The location of the Notre Dame campus in the heart of the City of Fremantle permits tremendous

interaction with the local community and its many cultural and environmental attractions. The campus is not one precinct as with most other universities but is spread across numerous historic buildings in a number of streets of the west end of Fremantle. The students are part of the town's character, the university part of its profile and the units discussed here are carried out in the local environment. They are part of the vibrant culture of Fremantle. CALM have located two offices on the Notre Dame campus (Marine Conservation Branch and Aboriginal Tourism, Education and Training Unit) as well as CALM's 'WA Naturally' shop. The shop is an ideal starting point for the annual Footloose in Freo program of guided activities with the public. The student's commitment to educating the participants about the rich environment of Fremantle can be gleaned from the brochure used to promote their presentations (University of Notre Dame Australia and CALM 1998):

- Art Attack - a trek around Fremantle, learning about the history of the architectural changes of historical buildings which are now housing art studios and galleries.
- Freo's Bit 'O Bush - immerse your senses in the wonders of the natural bush, from nature's symphony through to becoming closely acquainted with the natural environment through special activities.
- Tales of a Town - hear the stories, scandals, sagas and myths that will challenge your perception of Fremantle as a jolly seaside town. Take a gentle stroll back in time and enjoy Freo's folklore.
- Cray Culture - do you like fishing? boats? quirky Freo history? Then join us on a walk around the Fishing Boat Harbour, looking behind the scenes at boats, discussing the marine environment, fishing and Freo.

While the university is an established member of the Fremantle community, why should CALM locate offices and a shop on campus and become involved in community education programmes in areas other than those managed by CALM? It is consistent with the community support objectives established in CALM's Corporate Plan (undated) to 'improve community knowledge and support of CALM's activities' and to 'partner with agencies and groups with similar interests'. Community relations are critical to the longevity of government corporations striving to provide community services while promoting community values. Environmental education and heritage interpretation are key strategies in protecting our heritage through enriching community appreciation, understanding and support. Maximising the experience and building the relationship should generate care that ensures a minimum of impact (CALM, in press). CALM has taken its community relations role *onto the campus* to work with young (future) decision-makers and *onto the street* to interface with our constituents.

The two units, in particular the Recreation Planning and Management unit, also establish a partnership with Local Government. This is an extension beyond community education into cooperative community management. For example during the 1998 offering of the Recreation Planning and Management unit a partnership was forged with the City of Melville who were in the process of planning the development of Piney Lakes Reserve with a visitor centre, car parks, walk trails and other recreational facilities. The major task for participants in the unit was to

prepare designs for recreation facilities within the reserve. These were presented to the City of Melville in a formal showcase of the student's work at the end of the unit.

4. Effective Environmental Education

The objectives of environmental education are well established by international and national commentators alike (eg. UNESCO-UNEP 1975, Greenall Gough 1990, Environment Australia 1999). Effective environmental education can be summarised as that which meets the "four A's":

- **awareness** of and sensitivity to the environment;
- **attitudes** - acquiring social values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation to participate in its protection and management;
- **abilities** - knowledge of the total environment including skills for critically evaluating and solving environmental problems; and
- **action** - developing a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems and becoming sufficiently empowered to take action to solve these.

The two CALM units meet all of these objectives as the following examples demonstrate. One way **awareness** of the environment occurs in the Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit is through a 'tuning in' exercise (see CALM 1998a for details) conducted during a visit to The Hills Forest Activity Centre. Developing **attitudes** of concern for the environment are consistent with CALM's core nature conservation objective to conserve ecosystems and natural habitats throughout Western Australia (CALM 1998b). Students take **action** by developing recreation management plans for parks and reserves and by guiding ecotours with the public. In the process they develop a wide range of practical skills and **abilities** which are assessed in accordance with state and nationally certified competency outcomes (State Training Board of WA 1997, Australian National Training Authority 1998). Successful participants all receive a Certificate of Competency; a feature which is particularly attractive to students seeking employment in these fields when they graduate as it provides a sense of 'value-adding' to their degree qualification.

5. Environmental Hope

Newman (1986) suggests that an approach to environmental education which emphasises hope rather than leaving students with a sense of despair is likely to be more effective in empowering the students to take action for the environment. A positive approach is adopted in the environmental units taught at University of Notre Dame Australia by focussing on practical solutions to environmental problems with the aim of creating a sense of hope in students.

Tertiary students spend much of their time undertaking independent assignments upon which much of their assessment is based (typically 50-70% at the University of Notre Dame Australia with the balance provided by examinations). While assignments are largely used to test students'

knowledge, they can be designed to promote education for the environment by applying knowledge to the development and advancement of solutions to a real-life problem or situation wherever possible. Both CALM units are very applied and take place in the community (eg. the Footloose in Freo activity program), giving the students an active role in educating the community for the environment and generating hope for the future.

6. Conclusion

Environmental education at the University of Notre Dame Australia has been strengthened through partnerships with CALM, local government and the community. It is a synergistic partnership with benefits for each of the four stakeholders as well as the students and the local environment.

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