

CARRICK INSTITUTE : DISCIPLINE BASED INITIATIVES



Work Integrated Learning : A national framework for initiatives to support best practice

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Vignette title and details	The production of undergraduate and graduate paramedic degree programs, a university and industry partnership.
Discipline	Paramedical Science
Employment sector	Ambulance
Student numbers	60
Optional/compulsory	The work integrated learning program is not optional.
Credit bearing	It is a credit bearing component of the degree programs
Assessment	The work integrated learning program is assessed by journal and review with on road tutors accompanied by competency tests.
Payment	The students gain entry to the program by becoming employed as student ambulance officers or equivalent. In most cases this employment is deferred for the first year of study. From the beginning of second year the students are in paid employment while studying and completing their on road practicum. Their pay increases as they move through the various stages to and beyond graduation.
Number of staff involved	10 secondments 40 work place mentors
Weblink	http://www.snmpm.ecu.edu.au/courses/paramedical/ http://www.ecu.edu.au/ http://www.ambulance.net.au/content.asp?id=187
Key Words	Paramedic; practicum; work ready;

Overview

The BSc Paramedical Science at ECU has been running since 2004 and was the first paramedic degree program to gain provisional accreditation from the profession's governing bodies through a site visits. The ECU program is extraordinary in a number of ways but the most exclusive feature of the program is the extensive use of work integrated learning. With ECU a Student Ambulance officer will graduate having 4,160 hours of paid, assessed, on road experience. This is eight times the average for Australian Universities.

Structure of program

Paramedical programs take one of two forms:

1. Pre – Employment - The typical University course where as many students as possible are given entry to the course and once they graduate compete for a small pool of available jobs.
2. Post-Employment – Where the students compete for employment suitability before undertaking their degree. Once accepted for employment they then gain entry to University and are guaranteed employment once they are ready to go on road.

By adopting the latter model ECU does not create a false expectation of employment in any of the students. The structure of the program benefits both the employer and the University through five channels.

- i. **Engagement in Course Design** The ambulance service were involved in course design, the process helps to develop programs that are relevant, contemporary and valued by the community and industry. Important elements of ECU's mission and vision are supported when course design involves ambulance service in strategic ways.
- ii. **Engagement in Course Delivery** When ambulance service personnel are employed as teachers, mentors and on road tutors, students' knowledge, skills and attitudes can be enhanced. At the same time the ambulance service can learn from their university experience.
- iii. **Engagement through Course Products** Paramedic students in the course will often develop services and/or products which facilitate the operation of emergency services. When students undertake such activities, learning is enhanced in a many ways. There is relevance and authenticity in the learning experience and the product is of tangible benefits to others.
- iv. **Engagement Through Workplace Integrated Learning** Giving students the opportunity to learn through participation in a workplace on road provides many learning opportunities denied in classroom settings. On road placements and practica are used to help students develop their capacity to apply their knowledge and to streamline the transition from university to the workplace. Critical to sustainable workplace-integrated programs is creating opportunities that ensure those in the workplace are advantaged by the student placement and that the relationship is mutually beneficial.
- v. **Engagement Through Service Activities** The Paramedic students often provide services and support to members of the external community through activities that sit outside their formal coursework. Known under such expressions as civics, community service and service learning, these activities involve students (and staff) being active members of university groups, clubs and organisations which provide services that help to improve the lives of others. Different forms of engagement return varying levels of benefit to the students, the ambulance service and the university. Some forms are limited while others can yield quite expansive returns.

Special features

In the program once a student has been selected they are invited to a colloquium of all students where their experiences are shared. After this initial exposure first year non practicum students are teamed with second year mentoring students who are on road and who share their work experiences with their mentored.

Future work

One difficulty has been that the rate at which the University works does not align with the ambulance service, a solution has been to introduce multiple semesters to reduce the student work load and spread it over the working year. Similarly the requirement of the university CMS for a two year lead in to the introduction or changing of the program, limits our ability to respond to market forces. This problem is to some extent relieved by creative writing and planning of units.

Additional Insights

The most important factor in operating our work integrated learning program is the mutual respect and commitment of the University and the ambulance authority in WA.