

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Approved	Council
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Responsible Officer	Dean
Author and Role	D Hall (Quality Officer) T O’Hearn (Chair, Strategic Planning Committee) D Speed (Dean)
Related Documents (explicitly cross-referenced)	Student Support and Welfare Policy Work-Integrated Learning Policy
Higher Education Standards (2015)	5.4
National Code (2018) (if directly relevant)	

1. Introduction

Community engagement is a phrase used widely in the higher education sector. It may refer to various activities undertaken by an institution to contribute to dialogue and debate around current issues of importance, in order to provide students with real-life experience in the fields they are studying, to attract potential students, to set up connections between institution and industry, to promote beneficial cultural and artistic pursuits, and to contribute positively to the communities with which stakeholders have particular geographic or other connections or to the wider community.

Community engagement is also increasingly being expected of higher education institutions and forms part of the criteria for recognition as a university or university college, as set out in the Higher Education Standards Panel Consultation Paper (2020).

In view of these considerations, the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD) will develop and implement a meaningful community engagement plan in the context of theological education. In relation to the range of purposes indicated above, this will be seen as part of the preparation of students for service in their churches and the communities in which those churches operate.

2. Purpose

This policy establishes the principles that underlie the community engagement practices of the Sydney College of Divinity. It also sets direction for community engagement activities the Member Institutions and centrally-managed Schools of the SCD may pursue, within the context of their role as providers of Christian theological education: see *Student Support and Welfare Policy* and *Work-Integrated Learning Policy*.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff and students of the Sydney College of Divinity, its Schools, and its Member Institutions.

4. Definitions

Sydney College of Divinity: Reference to ‘Sydney College of Divinity’, ‘SCD’, or ‘College’ in this document assumes reference to its Schools, its individual Member Institutions, and the Office of the Dean, unless otherwise indicated.

Community: A community may be understood to mean an identifiable social grouping that is connected around a shared factor of some kind. Examples include geographical location, language, ethnicity, culture, sub-culture, age, common interest or pursuit, set of beliefs or traditions, and specific identity. For the purpose of this policy, a community will refer to any such group, whether faith-based or secular, with which the College might have, or seek to establish, a relationship that provides opportunities for engagement.

Community Engagement: Community engagement refers to the activities that the College enters into with communities with the broad aim of enhancing the quality of life of those groups. Community engagement also includes the broad outcomes of these activities for the respective communities and the effects the activities have on individual community members and the students and staff involved.

5. Principles

- Sydney College of Divinity's participation in community engagement derives from its mission and values, namely:
 - To promote lifelong learning and reflective practice
 - To prepare leaders who are well-qualified to build the Church
 - To promote a theologically literate Church
 - To serve the wider church as part of its ecumenical identity
 - To show respect and support for the mission and ethos of fellow Christians
 - To show pastoral concern for all people
 - To connect with the wider community and enhance its quality of life
- Community engagement in the context of theological education will have a missional perspective that:
 - Expresses the love of God for all people
 - Represents Christ in and to the world
 - Helps to build bridges between churches and the communities in which they operate
- As the College wishes to learn from the community in order to promote the principles set out above, its community engagement will, as appropriate to the situation, involve both:
 - listening and responding to community voices, and
 - conceiving and providing service to the community

6. Policy

6.1 General

- The Sydney College of Divinity will conduct community engagement activities as part of its mission to enhance the quality of life of those it is in contact with.
- The College will pursue community engagement as part of its aim to build up the church.
- The nature and scope of community engagement activities will be determined by each Member Institution and the SCD Schools and Office of the Dean in the light of resources available to each.
- The College will undertake community engagement activities in the areas of research, learning and teaching, service to the Christian community, and broader public service.
- The College will undertake community engagement with a view to exhibiting community leadership and exemplifying the social responsibility of the church.
- Community engagement activities will be directed to addressing identified community needs, with particular consideration for those related to such things as pastoral care for people's health and wellbeing, justice and equity, alleviation of poverty and its effects, and support in relation to unemployment, marginalization, social isolation, discrimination, and family and household issues.
- Community engagement activities will extend beyond those that serve the specific needs and interests of a particular denomination or faith community and will seek to express an ecumenical spirit, in line with the SCD's ecumenical identity.
- The SCD will produce an annual plan for community engagement activities, and will require the Member Institutions, Schools, and Office of the Dean to report annually about activities undertaken to implement the plan.
- Each Member Institution and School will appoint a suitable person to oversee community engagement activities and liaise with the Office of the Dean.
- The Office of the Dean will appoint a suitable person to oversee the implementation of the community engagement plan, receive annual reports, and support the Strategic Planning Committee in reporting annually to the SCD Council.

6.2 Types of Engagement

- Community engagement activities fall into two broad categories:
 - those that bring members of the community to the institution
 - those in which staff and/or students of the institution go to members of the community
- Examples of activities that bring members of the community to the institution include, but are not limited to:
 - offering the use of facilities
 - public lectures, seminars or workshops
 - hosting conferences
 - running community events
 - presenting artistic or cultural exhibitions
 - public participation in research

- Examples of activities where staff and/or students go to members of the community include, but are not limited to:
 - volunteer community service
 - presence at community events
 - membership of governance bodies, for example, of schools
 - leadership or membership in community project groups
 - Special Religious Education in schools
 - partnership with local church outreach
 - resources, education and training for local churches or groups of churches
- College-based initiatives may also be directed towards community engagement. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - research projects
 - work-integrated learning programs
 - running dedicated centres that address current issues
 - student mentoring programs using, for example, volunteer students, retired pastors or missionaries
 - mission trips

6.3 *Community Engagement Plan*

- The SCD Community Engagement Plan will be designed for use on an annual basis, including the requirement of an annual report.
- Responsibility for the design and implementation of the annual Plan will lie, in governance terms, with the Strategic Planning Committee and, in management terms, with the Office of the Dean.
- The Plan will ask Member Institutions and Schools to undertake a range of activities each year commensurate with capacity and opportunity, in line with the principles and guidelines set out in this policy.
- Activities will be drawn from four main areas:
 - use of college facilities
 - presence in the community
 - service to the wider church
 - college-based initiatives
 Member Institutions and Schools are also encouraged to develop their own unique community engagement initiatives relevant to their particular faith community or in line with their particular vision and mission, while remaining consistent with the intent of this policy.
- The Member Institution or School annual report on community engagement activity in relation to the goals of the SCD Community Engagement Plan will be presented to the Office of the Dean by the first week of December of each year.
- The annual report will show:
 - details of community engagement activities undertaken
 - an explanation of how the activities constitute community engagement
 - an explanation of how the activities address identified community needs
 - a description of key outcomes arising from the activities
 - examples of feedback from those involved in the activities (participants and/or recipients)
- The Office of the Dean, in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee, will review the individual annual reports and the Strategic Planning Committee will provide a report to the SCD Council at its first meeting in the following year.

7. **Related Documents**

Student Welfare and Support Policy
Work-Integrated Learning Policy

8. **Monitoring and Review**

- This policy will be reviewed every five years.
- This policy may be amended as necessary.
- Reviews of this policy will take into account current practice in the higher education sector, benchmarking with SCD partners, feedback from community engagement activities, and consultation, if needed, with people having expertise in the field.