



Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

AUSTRALIA STUDIES CENTRE

Brisbane, Australia

SEPTEMBER 2015 EVALUATION STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMISSION



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Program Review: Australia Studies Centre

September 2015

Executive Summary

The Student Academic Program Commission (SAPC) of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) visited the Australia Studies Centre (ASC) in Brisbane, Queensland from March 29, 2015 through April 1, 2015. The team consisted of Ms. Wendy Lippert from Messiah College, Dr. Mark Sargent from Westmont College, and Dr. Brock Schroeder from Mount Vernon Nazarene University. The SAPC team was assisted in our visit by CCCU staff member, Ms. Leah Mullen, Assistant Director of Student Programs. Ms. Kimberly Spragg, Program Director, Ms. Heidi Prillwitz, Program Coordinator, and the faculty and staff of Christian Heritage College hosted the SAPC team. The ASC partners with Christian Heritage College (CHC) to deliver the program.

While on site, SAPC conducted a comprehensive review of the curriculum, student life experience, home stays, support services, and internship practicum placements. The review included extensive interviews with the staff of ASC, the administration, faculty and staff of CHC, and the students attending the program. Throughout the review, the SAPC team reviewed documentation provided by ASC and CHC. The documentation included the self-study report, syllabi, curriculum maps, assessment plans, student-work samples, and program handbooks. All documentation verified that the academic and co-curricular plans meet the expectations for an undergraduate program.

The program director provided documentation of the program objectives, with curriculum maps that show how those objectives are met throughout the program. In addition, there is extensive documentation of assessment plans. This includes the documentation that aligns to the grading and assessment standards used by CHC to meet guidelines set by the Australian educational governing and accreditation body. The assessment plans include documentation of closing the loop. There were statements indicating how the course work was modified. The assessment documentation included program and alumni surveys to capture student satisfaction and measuring the ongoing benefits of the program for the alumni.

Finally, the curriculum has a clear set of objectives for the integration of faith and learning. The students who were interviewed gave witness to these efforts. In addition, the students spoke of their regular involvement in CHC campus chapel program and regular attendance at local churches. The academic, co-curricular, and living environment offered students the opportunity to integrate faith with learning and living.

Full Report

I. Mission

The Australian Studies Centre (ASC) launched in February 2004. It was operated in a partnership with the Wesley Institute. The program transitioned to a new partner, Christian Heritage College (CHC), and relocated in the summer of 2014 to the CHC campus in a suburb of Brisbane named Carindale, Queensland. The first group of students arrived in the Spring 2014 semester. According to program director, Kimberly Spragg, "It was with mixed sadness and joy that the ASC moved from Sydney to Brisbane in order to partner with Christian Heritage College (CHC). This meant a change in location, the loss of staff who were unwilling to move, and the rebuilding of precious networks and guest lecturers. However, the variety of majors and the quality of education and of faith integration at CHC was essential in order to preserve a robust and Christ-centered program. [T]he choice to move the program has not only been a good one, it was essential. It has revitalized the program, encouraged the staff, and provided new hope and opportunities for the future."

CHC has proven to be a supportive partner in the delivery of ASC. The administration and faculty of CHC has warmly embraced the ASC staff and students. The ASC staff members have integrated fully into the CHC community and have gained tremendous administrative support from CHC.

Why Australia? The students that attend ASC know that they want to travel abroad. Some expressed concern about traveling abroad. However, Australia is viewed as a location that allows the cultural experience, but has similarities to a North American context. For those that have a desire to do cross-cultural ministry, this program provides a good first step to understanding how to work in a cross-cultural environment. ASC provides students with a chance to experience diversity and see the world from a different perspective. Student expressed that they chose to come because it is Australia. The location draws students.

Since CHC is an international affiliate of the CCCU, the involvement of the principal, Dr. Darren Iseling, will provide a greater exposure of ASC and of CHC. Most Christian educational institutions in Australia were birthed from churches and became bible colleges. However, CHC began as a teacher education college. CHC's development is unprecedented in Australia. CHC started as a response to providing for those attending bible colleges to transfer to complete an undergraduate degree. From its inception, CHC has been a developer of integration of faith and learning in Australia. CHC has had to articulate a definition of Christian education since it is required to accept students from any background, despite an expression of faith. CHC keeps the integration of faith and learning at the core of all its courses in order to educate students in a Christian worldview. The CHC principal, deans and faculty all spoke of the centrality of integration of faith and learning. This provides a seamless Christian educational experience for ASC students from their home campus to Australia.

II. Program leadership

Observations

Kimberly's 10 years of experience as the program director has provided stability for the program. Also, she has built a healthy and thorough relationship with CHC. Universally, CHC faculty and staff spoke to the qualities of Kimberly and Heidi's leadership. She has built stature for the CCCU in Australia. She has built a curriculum that provides a balanced view of Australian society. She explores issues facing Australia and helps students translate that knowledge to the North American context. This involves transference of ideas for the students to reflect upon how these same issues are faced in North America.

Additionally, Kimberly and Heidi's experience of previously working in the CCCU main offices in Washington D.C. have helped them approach their leadership of the ASC with a larger perspective. They are sensitive to honoring and fulfilling the needs of member campuses, speaking of the desire to increase their connections to the campuses.

Kimberly and Heidi have daily contact with the students. They are attentive to every aspect of the student experience. They set high levels of expectation. They create a culture that is warm and conscientious about their purpose in delivering the ASC program.

CHC provides an academic campus experience for ASC students. The location of CHC in Brisbane provides opportunities for ASC students to access Indigenous Australians, as well as, white Australian culture. A significant number of CHC faculty and staff are involved in the delivery of the program. Kimberly serves as a full faculty member at CHC. She attends faculty meetings and is involved in academic program planning and review. CHC provides administrative support through the offices of the registrar, student counseling services, library services, learning commons, student life activities, and campus worship in chapel. The academic, administrative, and student life support provide a rich campus environment in an Australian context.

Commendations

- Kimberly has the ability to see the big picture, but can drill down to the smallest detail. She can plan ahead and think of risk. Kimberly gives thoughtful reflection to the planning for the ASC experience.
- Heidi takes great care to place and monitor students in their home stays. She is thorough in the selection and review of the home stay experience.
- CHC has been a great partner for the ASC. They have developed a strategic plan and vision to deliver a high quality Christian higher education in Australia. The ASC benefits by being in an environment that is positive and energetic.
- The faculty members of CHC focus on integration of faith and learning. Dr. Iselin, the principal, is committed to keeping integration of faith and learning as a central part of CHC.
- Australian law is strict regarding what international students can and cannot do. Kimberly and Faye Crane, the CHC Academic Registrar, monitor the law and insure that policies align to the law. Further, they overlay the CCCU risk policies with the program policies to align with the Australian law. So, this allows CHC and ASC to have a mutual relationship to monitor and follow risk law and policies. This demonstrates a healthy working relationship between ASC and CHC administration.
- The ASC students have access to all CHC services that are provided for any of the international students. This includes library services and student counseling services.

- CHC provides two sets of transcripts to ASC students. One set of transcripts record the North American grade for use at the student's home campus records and registration office. Another transcript is provided for the student to use in Australia should he or she desire to return to Australia for any further education.

Recommendations

- SAPC recommends that Kimberly work with the CCCU office to fashion a personal professional development plan now that she has formed a well-organized program. By selecting a doctoral program in an academic area of the ASC program would assist her in delivering a deeper, richer experience for students in Australia.

III. Academics/Student Learning Environment

The goals of the ASC program are organized around the concepts of purpose, practice and place. SAPC reviewed the syllabi of the ASC and CHC courses. All of the course descriptions are available on Best Semester web site. CHC provides a syllabus for each course on their school web site. In addition, the curriculum map that Kimberly prepared demonstrated how the program goals are met and assessed through the courses and through the experiences on the trips.

Commendations

- The thematic thread of “purpose, practice and place” for the ASC provides a coherent and compelling framework for the program. Learning goals and experiences are organized effectively around these themes.
- AS 200 and 201 provide a coherent center for the learning experience. The syllabi are crafted well, with clear expectations, assignments and learning objectives. These two classes provide the students a strong sense of belonging within a learning community, and provide them compelling prompts for ongoing conversation and reflection during their time in Australia.
- The class devoted to Aboriginal themes (AS 201) ensures that the program retains a keen moral edge: the material, including the compelling presence of guest speakers, awakens students to important and often complex issues of faith and justice. Aware that the topics will challenge students and occasionally make them uncomfortable, the director succeeds in creating hospitable space for conversation about difficult issues.
- The academic partnership with Christian Heritage College is very solid, distinguished by mutual respect, collaboration, and transparency. All of the CHC staff spoke enthusiastically about the presence of the ASC on their campus, and they are attentive to detail, eager to listen and to resolve challenges, and to collaborate when appropriate. In this light, it is laudable that CHC has invited Kimberly to sit on the main academic committee. The CHC faculty spoke with high admiration for the ASC staff and with high appreciation for the ASC students in their courses and in the chapel services.
- The CHC faculty, along with the ASC staff, are all enthusiastically committed to the Christian mission of their respective programs.
- The CHC catalog does provide students a wide variety of elective options. One of the clear strengths of the program is that students get the opportunity to study, worship and interact alongside Australian students.

- The CHC process of review is thorough and conscientious, ensuring some clarity and consistency in the standards and required components of the courses. The college administers student evaluations consistently and is not afraid of dropping adjunct faculty who underperform. While the CHC is not distinguished by a strong culture of research and liberal arts inquiry, and views academic work primarily through the lens of professional and applied training, they approach that training with rigor and integrity.
- The grading of student work is also approached with eye toward fairness and consistency, and second readings are occasionally used to recalibrate grades.

Recommendations

- ASC staff would benefit from more extensive conversations about pedagogy and greater awareness of innovations and best practices in learning. The CHC culture is highly oriented to lecture and less alert to other strategies for “engaged” learning. Given that AS 200 and 201 are fit into three-hour blocks, the staff might consider a diversity of ways beyond lecture and response to capture students’ imagination, challenge them, and require full participation and accountability.
- On a similar note, the ASC should consider how it might enrich and diversify the kinds of assignments it gives to students in order to ensure greater accountability for and involvement in their own learning. That might include more attention to primary sources, more collaborative projects, more “flipped” experiences (where information is absorbed outside of class and the class sessions are interactive). For instance, it might include a “signature assignment” (as defined by AAC&U). Are there ways that more of the sense of community at ASC can be built around challenging academic projects that students undertake together?
- Now that ASC has been working with CHC for a few semesters, there is a greater opportunity to identify and steer ASC students toward the strongest professors and classes.
- The ASC could consistently reach beyond CHC faculty for guest lecturers and scholars to enrich the intellectual resources and personal and scholarly voices who contribute to, and care about, the ASC.

IV. Student Life/Learning Environment

ASC and CHC have formed a unique partnership that jointly provides student life support and resources for students studying with ASC. The partnership provides student life benefits for both the students in the Best Semester program as well as those attending the Australian college. Best Semester students have access to resources and activities that would not be possible without the relationship with CHC. ASC students are able to interact with Australian students and faculty, use CHC facilities, and take part in school-sponsored activities. The experience for students enrolled at CHC is enhanced by hosting the ASC students on their campus, providing diversity for the campus and allowing Australian students to interact with and learn alongside students who come from a different culture and who may bring different points-of-view to classroom discussions. Additionally, Best Semester opens the Australian Aboriginal Cultures class to Australian students allowing them to explore their own history and interaction with the indigenous peoples of Australia.

During the site visit, SAPC was shown, through discussions with administrators and students, that this partnership provides students with the support that they need. Moreover, they have created a healthy learning environment in order for students to have a successful semester in Australia.

Christian Heritage College:

1. Facilitates student activities that help students integrate into the culture, foster community, and create friendships with Australian students. Activities such as Coffee Crawls, Red Frogs Australia, Chapel Hangs, staff vs. student volleyball are just a few of the events that the College utilizes to create this environment.
2. Offers counseling services and support to students dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, relationship issues, as well as other at-risk issues and has a protocol to refer students who present more serious mental health issues.
3. Works to encourage spiritual growth not only through faith integrated coursework, but conducts a weekly chapel services (mandatory for ASC students) and invites students to use their gifts as part of the worship team, as prayer partners, and as speakers.
4. Has a library appropriate for the size of the campus community that meets the needs of student scholars and which has adapted to new technologies and resources. There is a nice collection of Australian resource books and E-books are available for all assigned readings. The library also provides quiet study areas and offers conference rooms for students to work on group projects. And there is staff support for writing and proper citing of papers.

The ACS's programming complements and augments the established facilities and programming offered by CHC. The ASC:

1. Creates a safe place to wrestle with challenging issues, such as racism which is appropriately highlighted in the Australian Aboriginal Cultures class. The students create a poster which highlights how they will approach civil discourse and it hangs in the classroom as a reminder. Students indicated that they feel comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts.
2. Provides emotional support to students in a variety of ways, including giving students a coupon for a free coffee / tea date with directors anytime they need to talk or just want to touch base.
3. Creates an open, welcoming environment that is conducive to a healthy living and learning environment. The directors are approachable and encourage student interaction with the staff; students can sense that this is genuine. Students linger after class to chat with the directors, and there is a general feeling of mutual respect.
4. Has developed a comprehensive, detailed logistical support system to ensure a successful semester. The directors have well thought-out orientation and protocols that allow the program to run seamlessly. For instance, students are provided with travel passes that allow them to travel to and from campus as well as into the city. The office has students complete travel forms for any independent travel. The staff sends reminders about such things as sunscreen and insect repellent. These few examples show the way the program provides attention to even the smallest detail for student life in Australia.
5. Arranges quality, well vetted homestay experiences with Christian families in the nearby community that allows students an opportunity to further understand Australian culture by witnessing and experiencing it firsthand.
6. Creates interesting student activities that help students gain a better understanding of culture and issues being explored in class. Bringing Indigenous speakers to class and experiential trips to the outback provide excellent contextual learning that augment classroom discussions.

7. Understands the realities of needing to address college student safety issues and takes appropriate steps to keep students safe. It is informative to note that the Christian Heritage College Registrar decided to rethink some of her own safety practices based on Kimberly Spraggs's protocols.

Commendations

While the above demonstrates the strong student life and healthy learning environment created by the ASC director, it is also worth noting the following:

- We affirm the mandatory chapel attendance and encourage continued dialog with Christian Heritage College chaplain about student participation in chapel program and other spiritual formation activities.
- We commend Australia Studies Centre for successfully creating a safe, open, and comfortable atmosphere for students to explore challenging and complicated issues.
- We commend Australia Studies Centre on their comprehensive and well thought-out emergency and crisis management plans.

Recommendation

- We encourage the Australia Studies Centre director to continue to cultivate close relationships and partnership with Christian Heritage College to provide comprehensive services and support for students to grow academically, spiritually, and emotionally in Australia.

V. Program Assessment

The self-study documentation contained a complete curriculum map. This map shows how each program objective, organized around purpose, practice and place, is met through academic coursework and field experiences. In addition, the assessment plan incorporates the grading and assessment system that CHC uses to meet Australian accreditation standards. Kimberly has adapted this information into assessment tables that are commonly used in North American colleges and universities. These assessment tables list the program objectives, where they are met, how they are assessed, the results of the assessment, and the action taken upon review of the results. The curriculum mapping and assessment plans would be acknowledged as surpassing expectations that CCCU member campuses would have for an academic department. This work would be recognizable and acceptable to any regional accreditation body.

Commendations

- CHC has a grade moderating system. Also, they have a system for class evaluations. ASC courses are included in these processes for grading and class evaluations.
- The program has built a comprehensive curriculum map that identifies how the program goals, centered on the three areas of purpose, practice and place, are met throughout the courses. Further, the assessment documents show how courses have been evaluated and, then, changes made to the courses to meet student needs and better fulfill course and program objectives.

Recommendations

- There are very few missing sections of the assessment plan as it relates to some specific courses. We encourage you to continue with your documentation, curriculum mapping, and review of course and program evaluation.
- We recommend that there be continued work in each ASC and CHC course in the use of rubrics designed to measure how students are meeting objectives. This was cited in the self-study, in which it says: “connecting unit outcomes with rubrics and task-specific criteria...”

Conclusion

For this review, SAPC held a site visit to Brisbane, Australia in April 2015 to interview the staff of ASC, faculty and administrators from CHC, ASC students enrolled that semester (Spring 2015), site coordinators for internship practicum placements, and home stay parents. The interviews, along with review of documentation, provided the substance of this report.

The documentation included the self-study report, syllabi, curriculum maps, assessment plans, student-work samples, and program handbooks. All documentation verified that the academic and co-curricular plans meet the expectations for an undergraduate program.

SAPC counts it a privilege to have a first-hand view ASC. This program has the strength of a strong educational partner, solid administrative leadership, and sufficient enrollment. This provides a healthy, vibrant learning experience for students. SAPC encourages the CCCU to capture the strengths of this program in order to enhance the rich learning experience that the students have while spending a semester in Australia.