

# When Community Suddenly “Closes”

Student perspectives of alternative community engagement tasks during COVID-19 disruptions

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5 October 2021, ACU and DePaul Conference on  
Community Engagement and Service-Learning

## Intro and presentation aims

- **My position within the university & the work of ACU Engagement**
- **10 minutes presenting.** Aspects of student survey results related to alternative tasks
- **10 minutes discussion.** Discussion questions will include:
  1. What **examples** do you have of pivoting into meaningful alternative community engagement experiences when placements were suspended?
  2. What **institutional supports** are needed to facilitate 'pivoting' into meaningful alternative community experiences?
  3. What **partnership qualities/dynamics** are needed to create these experiences?
  4. What is the best way to **capture student and community experience** of placements? How did others do this throughout the pandemic? Any interesting feedback?

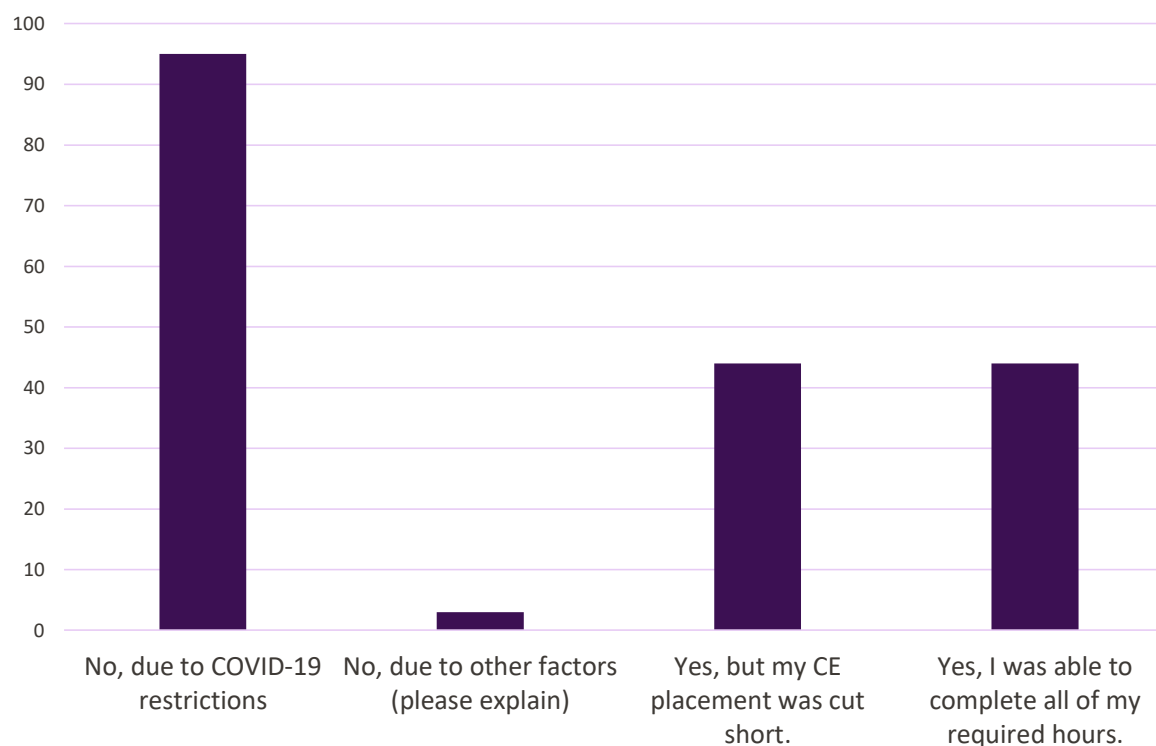
## Context: ACU's Community Engagement Units

- A 'distinctive' component of an ACU education (*ACU Strategic Plan 2020-2023*), community engagement-embedded units form the third component of ACU's Core Curriculum
- Around 20 community engagement (CE) units (courses) in 2020 that require placement hours
- CE units are a compulsory part of most undergraduate course requirements
  - Across its many disciplinary areas, **65 different undergraduate courses** (degrees) at ACU require some form of engagement in the community.
- Systematic evaluation of these units still in its infancy, pre/post placement survey began in 2019

Faculty/School		Hours	Faculty/School		Hours		
Faculty of Health Sciences			Faculty of Education and Arts				
School of Allied Health	Occupational Therapy	OTHY201	25	National School of Education	EDFX140	35	
		OTHY204	25		EDFX173	35	
		OTHY403	30		EDFX267	70	
	Speech Pathology	SPHY207	40	National School of Arts	HUMA330	70	
	Social work	SWTP316	30		HUMA331	Project based	
		SWTP627	15				
School of Behavioural and Health Sciences	Psychology	PSYC310	100	Faculty of Law and Business			
	Public Health	PUBH222	80	Peter Faber Business School	Business	BIPX202	35-70
	Bio-med Science	HLSC301	80		LAWP100	80	
	Nutrition Science	NUTR305	30	Thomas More Law School	Law	LAWP200	80
School of Nursing, Midwifery & Paramedicine	Paramedicine	PARA321	20		LAWP300	80	
	Midwifery	MIDW351	40				

## Survey: Were you able to do any CE placement hours this semester?

- 186 survey respondents (granting consent for research purposes)
  - 95 could not complete any placement hours
  - 44 completed all placement hours
  - 44 completed some hours, but placement was cut short
  - 3 could not complete due to other factors
- Represented disciplines of occupational therapy, midwifery, paramedicine and humanities



## Responses to community placement disruptions

Forged ahead with placements – In person or online

Combined placement hours + alternative task

Completed alternative task only

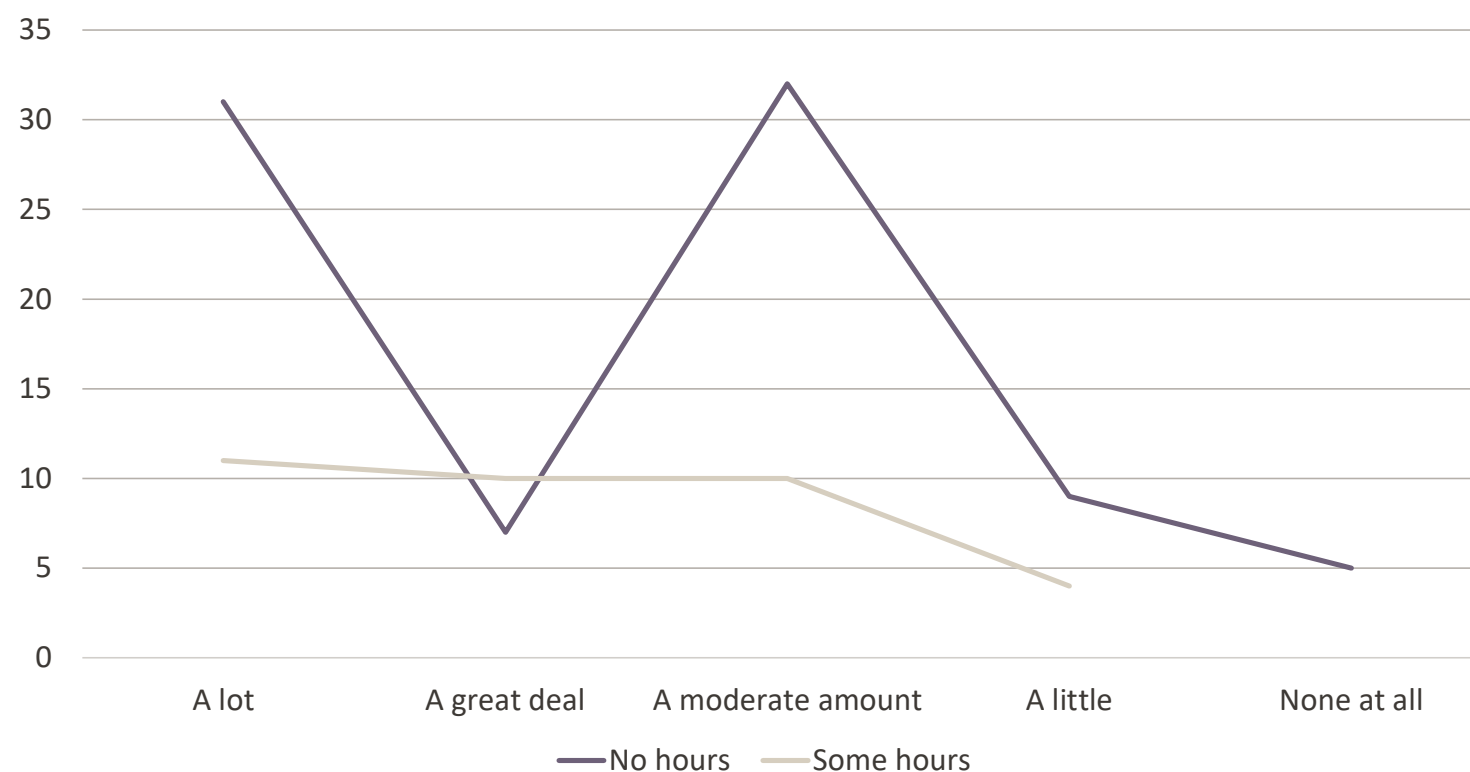
Placements/CE experience forfeited altogether

## Types of alternative tasks performed in lieu of placement

- Engaging various media and readings about different communities and cultures
- Continuity of care experiences & simulations
- Interviews with community
- Literature review on a community engagement topic
- Written task (reflective essay)



## How much did the alternative task increase CE understanding?



## Why did it (or didn't it) increase understanding of community engagement?

### POSITIVE

- Increased knowledge and awareness of community
- Growth in understanding
- Variety of topics
- Opportunity for reflection
- Introspection – own prejudices, stereotypes

I feel that even though I was unable to engage face to face in the community, I was still able to develop my cultural capability by doing these activities and increasing my knowledge.

I enjoyed following different individuals' stories and different scenarios that I may have not experienced within one community engagement.

I learnt about so many different cultures and social groups. It helped me change my views on stereotypes and societal norms places on specific cultures and groups within society.



## Why did it (or didn't it) increase understanding of community engagement?

### NEGATIVE

- That it wasn't in person
- Already knowledgeable
- Took too much time
- Too broad
- Task not interesting

Because it is so different to actually be able to engage and work with people rather than just looking online... it's just not the same.

I never got to interact with the low SES population so my understanding was based from the lived experience of the current volunteers.

I feel that having the opportunity to participate in a face to face manner would be more beneficial, however, completing these activities has definitely made an impact.

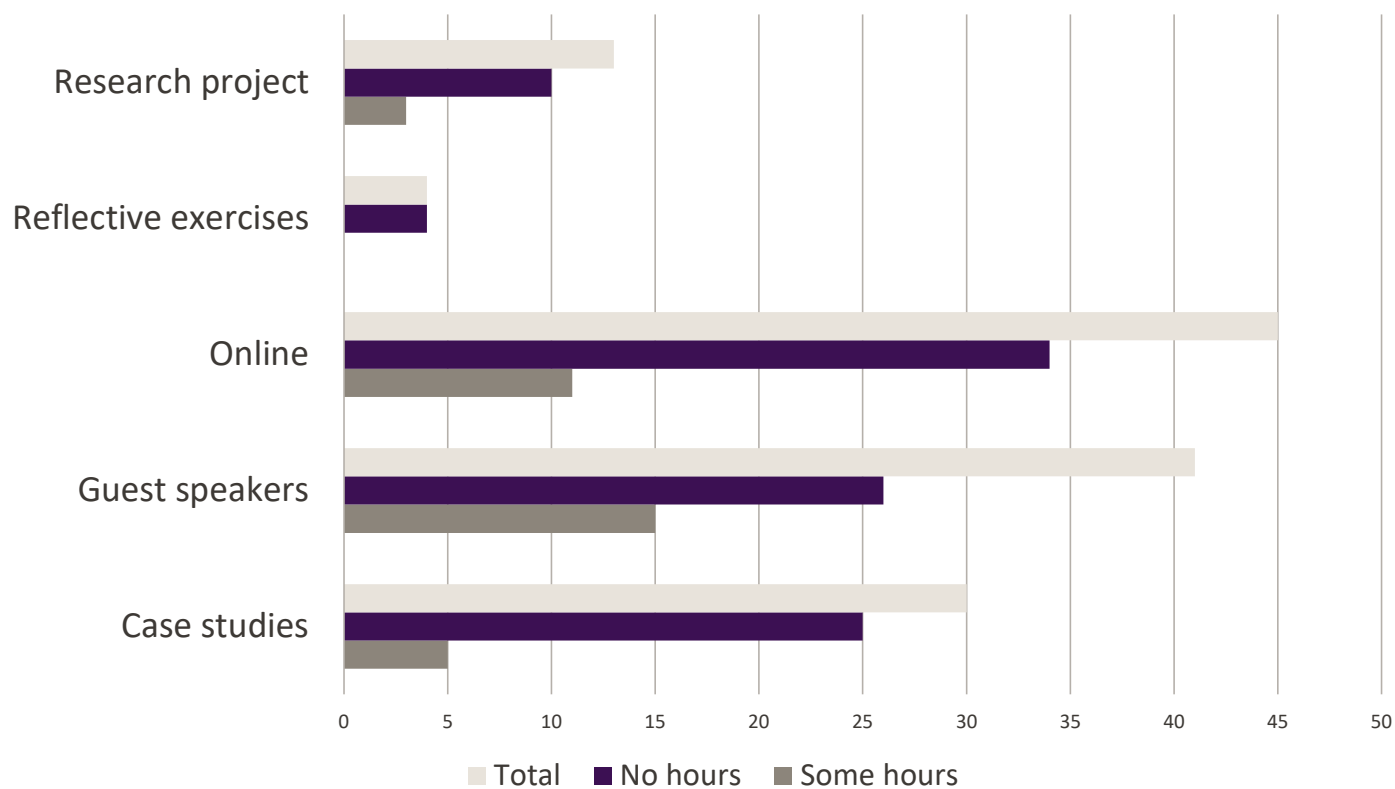
## Alternative task: Why did or did not increase understanding of CE

Student who completed **no placement hours** appreciated the *increased understanding* and *variety of topics*

Students who completed **some placement hours** highlighted the *variety of topics*

	No hours			Some hours		
	None at all/ A little	Moderate amount	A great deal/ A lot	None at all/ A little	Moderate amount	A great deal/ A lot
<b>Positive</b>						
Connected to lived experiences						
Enjoyable						
Increased knowledge, awareness						
Insight						
Forced Introspection (own prejudice, stereotypes)						
Prompted questioning and new thinking						
Purposeful, deep task						
Reflection						
Reflexivity						
Self-lead, self-paced						
Starting from scratch						
Transformative						
Understanding						
Variety of topics						
<b>Negative</b>						
Already knowledgeable						
Community not responsive						
Task burdensome on community						
Task not interesting						
Task not planned well						
Too broad						
Took much time						
Wished for in-person, hands-on						

## How could the alternative task been enhanced?



## How could the alternative task been enhanced?

Option	Some hours	No hours	Total
Case studies	5	25	30
Guest speakers	<u>15</u>	26	41
Online placement	11	<u>34</u>	45
Reflective exercises	0	4	4
Research project	3	10	13

**Design and delivery:** Ensure it's not repetitive; more "intentional direction" needed

**Give choice:** Give multiple task options

**Expand what counts as CE:** Accept current, personal community engagement as an alternative

**Ensure it fits with the values and spirit of community engagement/service-learning:**

We needed to be able to give back in some way to the organisation we conducted interviews with. Without a mutually beneficial relationship being built, there is no true community engagement

## Primary observations... so far

- Students still longed for a 'real' community engagement experience
- Students who did some hours in community like the variety provided by the alternative task
- Students who did not do any hours in the community felt their understanding of CE was expanded
- Students who did complete some hours in the community felt that guest speakers would have enhanced their alternative experience
- Students who did not do any in the community felt that some sort of online/virtual CE opportunity would have enhanced their alternative experience
- Even those who completed shortened/abbreviated placement hours in the community came away with a positive disposition towards CE
- More questions than answers about how to support community-engaged units to develop meaningful alternative or additional tasks...

## Discussion questions

What examples do you have of pivoting into meaningful alternative community engagement experiences when placements were suspended?

What institutional supports are needed to facilitate 'pivoting' into meaningful alternative community experiences?

What do lecturers (or faculty) need to create and support these opportunities?

What can a centralised CE team or centre do to support/facilitate?

What partnership qualities/dynamics are needed to create these experiences effectively?

What is the best way to capture student and community experience of CE placements?

How did others do this throughout the pandemic? Any interesting feedback?