Community Studies

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Flexible Learning Area

COMMUNITY STUDIES

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Community Studies is one of the few subjects that allow students to select an area of interest and design their own program, either for a semester or a year, thus making it one of the most flexible subjects within the SACE. This means that a wide range of students from all sectors of education are able to participate and become successful by focussing on their individual learning style and preferred method of presentation of work. Many students who have had limited success in the more traditional subjects, which usually have prescribed content and assessment, are able to provide evidence of in-depth learning and community involvement in a topic or activity of their own choosing. For many students this subject is a means by which they can achieve their three Stage 2, 2-unit sequences at a satisfactory level and therefore successfully complete their SACE requirements.

In 2010, students could choose either a 1-unit or 2-unit option in any of twelve areas of study, as either a Group 1 subject (Arts, Humanities, Social and Cultural Studies), or a Group 2 subject (Mathematics, Science and Technology). This equated to 72 different possible codes for the subject, with students being able to study up to four units within the same area of study, provided that they did not use the same code or material twice. Any two 1-unit Community Studies could be combined to form a 2-unit sequence, as they all come from the same Curriculum Statement. Students were able to count up to 14 units of Community Studies towards their SACE, as long as six units were at Stage 2 level, and that at least two of these Stage 2 units were from Group 1 and at least two were from Group 2.

There was a great variety of evidence, provided for moderation, to demonstrate students' learning and involvement in a wide range of Community Activities. Generally most folios provided evidence for all sections of the contract, however, some folios contained limited evidence of individual student work. If students were able to produce an approvable contract, with sufficient detail and plans to meet the time and group requirements of the subject, and then provide evidence for all sections of the contract, they achieved success. The evidence provided should have clearly documented the community involvement and the community contact, both of which needed to be from outside the school community, and involve a significant time commitment.

Many students have developed increasing ICT skills and are using a wide range of current technology to present their work. Teachers and students need to be aware that moderators only have access to standard technology and software. Students may need to think about alternative ways of providing evidence if they have used sophisticated software or a web-based application, as these may not be available during moderation. Teachers are asked to check the Learning Area Manual regarding submission of non-written work, or contact the SACE Board with any queries.

The number of Merit nominations has continued to rise. Teachers need to ensure that students are nominated for merit on the yellow result sheet. Moderators are not able to nominate for Merit so, unfortunately, there were some examples of outstanding work that had not been nominated, and therefore could not be considered. To be awarded a Merit the evidence provided for *all* sections of the

contract should be outstanding, not just a final product. The reflections provided by successful nominees demonstrated analysis and depth of thought.

It was encouraging to see that a number of students with a disability or learning difficulty were able to obtain a Merit by having an individual contract that was challenging and achievable for them, and by being able to provide outstanding evidence that all requirements had been met.

Conversion from another subject can work well for some students if the conversion undertaken results in a contract that allows students to demonstrate success against the criteria. Therefore, the conversion needs to give students enough time to carry out a Community Activity, a Presentation, and a Reflection, usually before the end of Term 3. All the criteria for Community Studies need to be met, and these are usually quite different from the subject previously studied. All work completed in the previous subject needs to be incorporated into both the contract and the folio of evidence. Successful students generally made a link between the subject work already completed, the community activity, and the chosen area of study. Teachers need to ensure that all work is assessed using the criteria for judging performance for Community Studies, and that students are able to discuss the links across both subjects in their reflection.

This year a significant number of Group 2 contracts were not approved initially because the mathematics, science or technology focus was not evident. Simply using technology or a spreadsheet does not provide a sufficient focus or challenge for the student, unless they have had very little experience in this area – which is generally not the situation for an average Year 12 student. Students need to be learning new software or technological skills, scientific theory or extending their mathematical knowledge to develop new skills to meet the Group 2 requirements. Generally, if students have a detailed contract, with emphasis on Group 2 and they provide evidence for all sections of the contract, they are able to be successful.

Teachers and students who were familiar with the Curriculum Statement and the Flexible Learning Programs Manual generally had no problems ensuring that all the criteria and requirements of the subject were met, that all deadlines were adhered to, and that work was packaged appropriately for moderation. The most successful students were generally those whose teachers had carefully scaffolded their activities.

Many schools had enrolled students incorrectly on DATEX and did not realise that the code on the yellow results sheet and the student work did not match. It is very helpful to moderators if the teacher's name entered into DATEX matches the teacher's name and signature on the result sheet. Each teacher is asked to use a separate white bag to pack their work, and it would be appreciated if all result sheets from a single teacher could be submitted together. It is essential that each student who has a result has submitted a folio of evidence. Teachers also need to check that the result given to the student on the yellow results sheet matches the result on the student achievement sheet in the folio of evidence.

THE CONTRACT OF WORK

Students who realised that the establishment of a viable, individual contract of work was a crucial part of the subject, and ensured that it had sufficient detail, followed a logical sequence of events, and met the time and group requirements of the subject, were able to obtain a successful result. Moderators checked each individual contract

to ensure that it had sufficient detail to allow the student scope for success. Many contracts needed to be re-submitted before approval was given. The main reasons for asking students to re-submit were:

– lack of detail in planning to meet the time requirement
– insufficient planning of adequate Group 2 activities
– lack of individuality
– lack of clarity about how evidence would be provided.

Community Studies requires an individual contract from each student, so even when students are working together, the contracts cannot be identical. Each student should emphasise their individual involvement in any group or class activity. For teachers and students who wish to carry-out group activities, it may be more appropriate to consider subjects such as Integrated Learning which has one Learning and Assessment Plan for the whole group.

It is essential that contracts give details of the activity within the community, as the variety and range of activities undertaken in Community Studies can be quite extensive. This activity should be undertaken outside of the school community, with a nominated community contact person who is able to provide on-going mentoring and feedback. This person also needs to be from outside the school community. In the case of some NEP students or in certain circumstances, the school can negotiate with the SACE Board for the activity and the community contact to be school-based, but all students are encouraged to go beyond the school even when that can be quite challenging.

When converting from other subjects, both teachers and students need to be aware that details of what has been completed in the previous subject should be included in the contract, and students have to be able to provide evidence of this in their folio. Some students left their conversions too late to allow them sufficient time to complete the aspects of the subject that are unique to Community Studies. For students to receive a Satisfactory Achievement, they should have attempted everything within an approved contract. If sections were missing, students could only receive a Recorded Achievement. In some situations the contracts were only received for approval at the SACE Board either just prior to moderation, or they were included with student material in the white bag; generally these folios had limited chance of success.

Teachers and students are reminded that, if for any reason, sections of the contract need to be changed or replaced due to unexpected circumstances, changes are possible as long as the change has been verified by the teacher, and all aspects of the course are covered. The evidence provided should match the contract, or amended contract. Entries in the folio and reflection should reflect this change.

Task 1: Deciding on your community activity

Students who were already involved in some form of community activity, either through a sporting or cultural club, musical group, part-time work or hobby, generally found it easier to decide on a community activity; then to find a link with a community contact, and work out what sort of product or evidence would be used to demonstrate their learning and involvement. Students who had limited involvement in anything beyond school or home found this more of a challenge. A discussion about skills and abilities, likes and dislikes, and interests, can often trigger an idea. Students who find the wider community a challenge could perhaps work as a small group and provide

support to each other; however they need to ensure that they each have their own contract with an individual focus and that their evidence folios are unique.

Task 2: Preparing for your community activity

Students who decided on their activity early in the year had sufficient time to research the activity, contact their community mentor, and establish how best to prepare for their involvement. Schools with a large number of Community Studies students often had a variety of structured activities to help students develop skills that would be of value when working within the community. These included a range of communication skills, both written and oral, practical skills to help with the development of a final product, and technological skills to help with multimedia presentations and productions. Some students had to develop their research skills, and for some students, analysis, reflection and evaluation skills needed to be developed and refined.

A vast amount of information, which is easily accessible with modern technology, allows students to research their activity and contact their mentors even if they are quite removed geographically from relevant contacts or experts in the field. School librarians, teachers and other community resource people are generally more than willing to help students with this research process. It is important that students acknowledge and analyse any research material in their evidence and link it to the community activity, rather than just include copious downloads without any references.

Generally, students who completed a practical or technical activity were able to provide more evidence of developing skills in this section, while students who converted from another subject late in the year often had limited evidence of preparing for their community activity.

Task 3: Carrying out your community activity

Most students were able to provide ample evidence that they were involved in a wide range of community activities. These included involvement in coaching, training and playing for the full range of sporting clubs within the local community, or at a higher state level. Many students volunteered their services to help senior citizens, the Australian Red Cross, St John Ambulance Cadets, the CFS, SES and a range of charities. Many chose an activity related to their preferred career options, participating in work experience, attending training courses and/or TAFE courses, and a range of performance activities (dance, drama, singing or playing musical instruments) either through community groups, or on a smaller scale with bands of peers. Some students pursued environmental interests, worked with animals, or cared for others. The variety of activities undertaken is to be commended.

Although most students were able to provide evidence of significant community involvement, there were some folios which contained little, if any, evidence of involvement in the community beyond the school. This was particularly the case when students converted from another subject and did not allow sufficient time to become involved in a community activity, and therefore collect appropriate evidence. The community activity needs to be more than just a single contact with a community person, or going shopping for materials or supplies to make a product or prepare for an event.

Task 4: Getting feedback from your community

The students who organised their community contact early in the process were able to provide evidence of on-going involvement and feedback. By obtaining feedback several times during the activity, students were able to act on the advice given, and therefore improve the quality of their learning. Some students found the task of finding a relevant community contact a difficult exercise, and many needed considerable guidance to do this, particularly when they were faced with several knockbacks. Some students found it a real challenge to find the confidence to approach people whom they had never met. Those who were able to face this challenge often commented on how their communication skills had improved.

For many students, the only community feedback received from their contact person was at their final presentation at the end of the year when it was too late to act upon any advice given. Some students who had approached a contact early in the year, and then invited them to their presentation at the end of the year, found that circumstances had changed and that the person was no longer available. The ideal situation is for the community contact to provide advice and feedback throughout the year, which will allow the student to act on the advice to improve their learning. If this person is also able to attend the final presentation, their feedback could reflect on the personal growth and development of the student over the year.

Students are reminded that if they need to change the name of their community contact, this updated information should be entered and signed off on the approved contract, and explained in the reflection.

Task 5: Undertaking your community presentation

The community presentation was approached by schools in a number of different ways. The most commonly used method was for students to present their learning and their final product to their peers, their teacher and other invited guests including, if possible, the community contact. Students need to provide evidence of the presentation. Many used PowerPoint to show the community involvement and what they had learned from it; some discussed their final product and how it had been developed; other students provided a photographic display with captions, and some students demonstrated a website or blog they had constructed.

It is a requirement of the course that students obtain feedback from their audience. Many students use the standard SACE Board feedback forms, while others designed their own so that it specifically addressed the features of their final product and/or learning, thus giving them more material to use in their reflection. Because individual presentations can be quite time-consuming for schools that have a large number of Community Studies students, some schools arranged a Community Studies Expo spanning an afternoon and/or an evening. Students were rostered for their presentation at a particular time and they invited their peers, parents, other teachers and their community contact. Students were able to get feedback from those who saw their presentations.

There were a few students who did not include any evidence of a presentation and gave no explanation of why it was missing, so they had no chance of receiving a Satisfactory Achievement. Schools that allow students to convert to Community Studies at a late stage in the year should ensure there is sufficient time for the students to complete all aspects of the contract, including the presentation, otherwise they will have a limited chance of success.

Task 6: Reflecting on your learning

Reflection and evaluation are important criteria for Stage 2 subjects, so it is essential that students are taught the difference between recount and reflection, and how to evaluate. The questions given on page 14 of the Curriculum Statement help students to reflect, and those students and schools that use these are generally able to produce a sound reflection. Some students merely recount what they have done, which is already documented in the folio and has been demonstrated in the presentation. Some students were confused about the difference between the presentation and reflection and often used the same evidence for both.

Most students prefer to present their reflection in written form even though there is the opportunity to use a variety of presentation methods, depending on preferred learning styles. Students aiming for a merit need to ensure that they reflect in-depth on all sections of the contract, and not just the community activity or final product. They need to emphasise what they have learnt, what personal and practical skills they have developed, and how they have improved because of their work in Community Studies. A key aspect of the reflection is how the students have responded to feedback along the way, and how what they have learnt could be of use to them in the future. If students have made a change in their contract, this needs to be documented, signed off and explained in the reflection. By presenting the reflection in written form students have the opportunity to draft the work and obtain feedback from their teacher or community contact before completing their final copy.

Students who elect to present the reflection in oral, visual or multi-modal formats need to ensure that they provide evidence of the content of the reflection, and not just a checklist. The evidence could be an audio or visual recording, cue cards or notes used for an oral, a printout of slides or recording of a multi-media presentation. Each student needs to have evidence of their own individual responses and not just a class recording, where individuals are not identified. For students with special needs, it is appropriate for the teacher to make notes of the discussion that has occurred.

Task 7: Keeping evidence of your activities and learning

Students need to be made aware early of the importance of keeping evidence in a variety of forms for every step of the process. It is essential that the signed, approved contract is included in the folio as this is the basis for marking and moderation processes. Many students had an unsigned copy of a contract, but it was impossible to tell if it was the contract that had been approved by the moderator. If the contract has had to be adjusted after the approval, any changes needed to be signed off by the teacher.

Students who had a detailed step-by-step contract were able to ensure they had evidence for every step of the process and were able to check this off as tasks were completed. Students then used the steps to organise their evidence, making it easy to verify. The use of technology to provide evidence was significantly increased. Captioned photos were in abundant supply, CDs and DVDs were used to record discussions and orals, and there were also PowerPoint presentations, videos, and efforts at film-making. Downloaded materials were annotated and highlighted to stress important aspects. A variety of artwork and photography, showing developing skills, along with a range of maps and diagrams, was also included. Brochures and pamphlets collected and printouts of emails sent and received all added to the variety of evidence. It is becoming increasingly difficult to verify work saved on audio tapes, and schools are asked to restrict audio evidence to CDs and DVDs.

Printing off a large amount of information is not evidence of research. Students need to collate and analyse the information collected and comment on its relevance to their study. Students who have converted from other subjects and included that work in their contract should provide evidence of all the work completed in that subject. It can include formative work, notes taken, worksheets, and sketches.

It was very much appreciated by the moderators when folios contained the approved contract and were organised into the relevant sections. As stated earlier, white moderation bags need to packed by individual teachers, and it is helpful if all the yellow results sheets from that teacher are together, and the student checklist and student achievement sheet are included in each student folio.

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