PACE Evaluation
STUDENT AND PARTNER FINDINGS
Our story

Macquarie University’s multi-award-winning Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) program provides undergraduate students with hands-on professional experience as part of their degree. Based on the principles of reciprocity and collaboration, PACE connects students, partners and University staff in mutually beneficial collaborations that contribute to social impact and innovation, while supporting graduate employability through industry connections, knowledge exchange and professional experience.

The institution-wide implementation of the PACE program is unprecedented in the Australian University work-integrated learning context. Initiated in 2009, PACE’s strategic vision is to connect all undergraduate students, partners and University staff in mutually beneficial learning and relationships that contribute to social impact and innovation. By establishing long-term relationships, the program aims to provide engagement opportunities with partner organisations locally, regionally, and internationally.

As of 2020, the program has worked with over 3,000 partners across industry, government, and not-for-profit sectors, providing professional engagement opportunities for students individually or in groups, online, on campus, or at the partner organisation. PACE activities involve a wide range of local, regional and international partners and vary in length, location, whether they are disciplinary or interdisciplinary, and the sourcing and sector distribution of partners. PACE activities are offered in a variety of formats and delivery methods to adapt to partner needs, student lifestyles, and to meet the academic requirements of undergraduate courses. Some of these modes of delivery include semi-structured internships, formal practicums, remote or virtual projects, on-campus industry projects, peer-assisted learning or other forms of mentoring.

The PACE program is guided by nine principles: ethical practice, partnership and reciprocity, social responsibility, sound pedagogy, recognition of and respect for diverse ways of doing, being and knowing, whole person learning, knowledge generation and dissemination, transparency, and equity of access to resources.

KEY INTENDED OUTCOMES OF PACE:
1. Students have enhanced employability and active citizenship outcomes and a positive experience of PACE
2. Macquarie University has strong engagement with and contributes to the capacity of its partner organisations
3. PACE contributes to Macquarie University being recognised for its culture of transformative learning in a research-enriched environment

"With PACE, students apply knowledge and skills learned through their studies to the real world, enabling them to develop their attributes, skills and knowledge that our workforce and communities need. Every undergraduate student at Macquarie gets to have the same opportunity for great experiences."

Lindie Clark  PACE ACADEMIC AND PROGRAMS DIRECTOR
Evaluating our approach

The PACE Evaluation project, begun in 2017, assesses the impact and effectiveness of the PACE program for students, partners, the University, and the community more broadly.

THE EVALUATION WAS DESIGNED TO:
• Ensure that PACE was accountable to internal and external stakeholders by producing credible evidence on outcomes for students, partners, the University, and the broader community.
• Establish collaborative and reflective learning processes that can be used to continuously enhance and develop the PACE program.
• Develop sustainable evaluation activities by embedding data collection tools and processes into PACE program delivery.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS
The evaluation project considered both the processes (how well the program is being implemented) and the outcomes (what impact the program is having) of PACE. It focused on five high level questions:

1. How much did the PACE program do?
2. How effectively is PACE being implemented?
3. What are the critical program components and barriers?
4. To what extent does PACE contribute to outcomes for students, partners, the University and the wider community?
5. Who benefits most from PACE and in what circumstances?

To answer these questions, data was collected from 2016-2019 using a multiphase mixed methods approach. Data was collected through program operations (e.g., enrolments, PACE activity details); PACE Student Surveys, Graduate Outcomes Surveys; PACE Partner Survey; PACE staff workshop and interviews; PACE partner and student case studies; and most significant change stories.

Overall, the evaluation provides strong evidence for the effectiveness and impact of the PACE program for students and partners. Feedback provided by students and partners is valuable information that will be used to enhance the program through quality assurance, program improvement, and development. The full report can be accessed on the TEACH webpage.

This booklet provides an overview of the evaluation findings for two key stakeholders in the PACE program: students and partners.

1. HOW MUCH DID THE PACE PROGRAM DO?
Following institution-wide implementation of the PACE program in 2016, this question examines how many students and partners are engaged in the PACE program, how many PACE activities have been completed, and the characteristics of PACE activities.

2. HOW EFFECTIVELY IS PACE BEING IMPLEMENTED?
Drawing on student, partner, and University stakeholder feedback, this question assesses how effectively the program is being implemented using three evaluation criteria: program experience, professional and community engagement, and learning and teaching.

3. WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND BARRIERS?
This question identifies program components that are critical to ensuring that the PACE program is effective and sustainable at scale, as well as the main barriers to program implementation, by analysing student survey data and interviews and workshops with University stakeholders.

4. TO WHAT EXTENT DOES PACE CONTRIBUTE TO OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS, PARTNERS, THE UNIVERSITY, AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY?
This question assesses the effectiveness of the PACE program in terms outcomes for students, graduates, partners, the University and the community.

5. WHO BENEFITS MOST FROM PACE AND IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES?
This question explores if there were any differences in outcomes and experiences comparing different student groups and PACE experiences.
Key facts about PACE

Program data demonstrates that the PACE program is providing the scope, scale and diversity of experiences required to support all students to undertake a professional experience as part of their undergraduate degree. As the program reached full implementation across the whole University and student enrollments increased, group activities and different modes of work-integrated learning (e.g., virtual activities, campus-based activities) became increasingly important.

22,669
Enrolments in PACE units from 2016-2018

42%
Of students enrolled in more than one PACE unit in 2016-2018

246
PACE International activities completed in 2016-2018

4,972
PACE activities completed in 2016-2018

54%
Of PACE students undertook a university-based activity in 2016-2018

36%
Of PACE students undertook an internship in 2016-2018

Our students

All Macquarie undergraduate students complete a PACE unit as part of their degree, typically during their third or fourth year of study.

From Session 2, 2017 to Session 3, 2018, all students enrolled in participating PACE units were invited to complete a survey before and after doing their PACE activity. The survey measured their motivations, previous employment experience, perceptions of their PACE experience, and the impact of PACE across three areas: career readiness, active citizenship, and networking outcomes.

- 2,660 students completed a survey before their PACE activity
- 1,834 students completed a survey after their PACE activity
- 1,205 students completed both surveys

This was a 30% response rate of all student enrolments and a 37% rate of student enrolments for the units who participated in the survey. While response rates varied within Faculties and across individual PACE units, the survey sample is comparable to all student enrolments in PACE units.

“It’s the practical, hands-on experience in what you’re studying. You can go through a whole degree, get out the other end, apply for a job, get the job, and you might hate it. But if you have the chance while you’re at university to do PACE there is a chance to actually see what it’s like, see what it means to work for these places, to work for different people, to just be on a workplace, and you should take that.”

PACE STUDENT
There is strong evidence that students are highly satisfied with the PACE program and their overall experience.

- 87% of students agreed that it is valuable to do PACE as part of their degree
- 86% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall PACE experience
- 80% agreed that PACE had enhanced their experience at University
- 69% agreed their PACE activity was in an area of professional interest

The key aspects that influence students’ satisfaction and outcomes with the PACE program are:

- Unit structure, content, and academic support
- Induction to the PACE activity
- Partner preparation
- Their PACE activity being in an area of professional interest

WHAT WERE STUDENTS’ GOALS FOR PACE?

Among the 2,666 students who completed a pre-survey, the vast majority (87%) hoped to progress into full-time employment upon graduation. The majority (83%) also hoped to make a difference in the community.

Most students had prior work experience; however, only 36% had done most or all of their work in an area of professional interest.

This indicates the importance of the PACE program in terms of providing undergraduate students an opportunity to engage in the professional area in which they would like to work in the future.

The capabilities students rated as the most important to develop through PACE were:

- Gaining professional experience, skills or knowledge (87%)
- Developing and/or applying discipline specific knowledge or skills (83%)
- Exploring possible career options (79%)
- Expanding professional networks (77%)
- Clarifying career goals (74%)

WHAT DID STUDENTS LEARN THROUGH PACE?

CAREER READINESS

There is strong evidence that PACE is having a positive impact on students’ career readiness, with 77% of students agreeing that PACE had improved their employability. Following their PACE activities, 95% of students reported that their ability to communicate appropriately with people from different levels of management and their ability to take responsibility and be accountable for professional practice, actions and decisions had improved.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

PACE is having a substantial impact on students’ citizenship with statistically significant increases in their citizenship competencies, such as their ability to evaluate their personal practices and their ability to address social, environmental or sustainability issues in their field of study or profession. At the end of PACE students were most confident in this domain, with over 86% of students agreeing with each element of active citizenship. A high proportion of students also reported that PACE had provided them with opportunities to develop their citizenship competencies. In turn, students’ rating of the overall impact of PACE on their citizenship competencies was slightly higher than that of career readiness competencies.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

There is strong evidence that PACE is enhancing students’ professional networks with statistically significant increases in job seeking confidence, including professional networks. However, compared to other professional skill domains, at the end of PACE a smaller proportion of students agreed that they felt confident using their professional network to seek work (68%) or that they were actively using their professional networks (65%). At the end of PACE, 61 per cent of students and graduates agreed that PACE had enhanced their networks.

PACE EXPERIENCES AND STUDENT GROUPS

The evaluation also explored whether there were differences in student self-reported outcomes and satisfaction when comparing different types of PACE experiences and student groups.

Students who completed an internship rated the impact of PACE on Career Readiness, Citizenship and Employability significantly higher than students who did a University-based activity, and reported greater satisfaction with the PACE program overall.

Students who completed a small PACE unit (<40 enrolments) rated the Impact of PACE and Student Satisfaction items significantly higher than students who complete a large unit.

When comparing outcomes among equity and diversity student groups, there were no significant differences in how students rated the impact of PACE, satisfaction, or their employability. However, statistical testing was limited due the small sample sizes of these groups.
One of the goals of PACE is to provide students opportunities to apply knowledge and skills developed through their University studies and to explore future career options. After completing their PACE activity, a large majority of students agreed/strongly agreed that there was an opportunity for them to apply the skills, knowledge or theories they had learnt at university (86%).

The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that PACE had helped them to:

- Develop the ability to work as a team member (83%)
- Develop awareness of ethical principles and issues (81%)
- Develop discipline specific knowledge, skills and abilities (77%)
- Gain professional experience, skills or knowledge (77%)
- Develop reflective practice skills (74%)
- Make a positive contribution to community (73%)

**GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

Whilst not a direct aim of the program, it is important to understand whether, and how, PACE impacts employment trends for Macquarie graduates. The staged implementation of the PACE program provided an opportunity to compare employment outcomes among students who completed PACE during their undergraduate degree, and students did not complete PACE. This analysis uses data collected through the QILT Graduate Outcomes Survey and the Macquarie Graduate Destination Survey.

Statistical analysis shows that there is strong evidence that PACE is having a positive impact on graduate employment. From 2016-18, graduates who completed PACE were significantly more likely to be in full-time employment (PACE 86%, non-PACE 77%) and overall employment (PACE 95%, non-PACE 90%).

Twelve months after course completion PACE graduates were also significantly more likely than non-PACE graduates to report that their employment was related to their degree (PACE 67%, non-PACE 42%) and that their qualification had prepared them for employment (PACE 64%, non-PACE 49%) from 2016-18. In some case students were directly employed by their PACE partner (13% at the end of PACE, 7% four months after graduation and 10% twelve months after graduation).

Interestingly, graduates who did multiple PACE units were significantly more likely to be in full-time employment at both four and twelve months after course completion compared to students who did one PACE unit, as well as the non-PACE cohort.

“I truly believe in the magic of PACE and the ability to connect the world of students, stakeholders and the wider community for the benefit of all. These opportunities allow for students to start networking in their area of study – to connect with like-minded, passionate individuals and organisations who can support their dreams and open doors that no university degree alone could offer.”

PACE STUDENT

“If it hadn’t been for PACE, I would never have known about the disability industry. PACE introduced me to an entire career path that I never even knew was an option. To this day, I highly value my placement experience and I’m extremely grateful for the variety of opportunities that I gained as a result…PACE can be described as nothing short of life changing, as it defined my career and I am extremely fortunate to continue working with PACE to create these moments for future students.”

PACE STUDENT
Partner perspectives

From high-rise buildings in Australia’s CBDs, community practices in rural towns, and social enterprises around the world, the PACE program would not exist without the contribution of our diverse community of over 3,000 partners from local, regional, and international spheres.

A random sample of PACE partners were invited to complete a PACE partner survey at the end of their PACE activity from Session 2, 2018 to Session 2, 2019. The survey measured partners’ overall satisfaction with the PACE program, motivations and outcomes, student competencies and partners’ experiences of program processes.

Among the 352 partners who completed a survey, 81% had supervised an internship in the past, while 41% were engaging with PACE for the first time and 30% had been involved for more than 2 years.

Partners were from a range of different organisation types:
- 37% classified their organisation as a company;
- 15% government;
- 25% other public sector;
- 21% NGOs.

Partner perspectives

PARTNER MOTIVATIONS

As PACE is based on reciprocity and mutually beneficial outcomes, partners were asked about their motivations for participating in the program. Partners described their main motivations for participating in the program as the opportunity to:

• Gain support for organisational projects;
• Provide professional opportunities and industry insights for students, to support them to become job ready;
• Access fresh ideas and insights, the latest discipline knowledge and/or specialist skills;
• Provide mentoring and/or professional development for organisational staff through the supervision of PACE students;
• Involve students in research to “encourage a future generation of scholars”;
• Use PACE as a talent or employment pipeline; and
• Develop and maintain connections with the University.

STUDENT COMPETENCIES

Partners rated Macquarie students highly. The majority agreed that students were prepared for the activity (84%), had the required knowledge and skills (83%), and were motivated to engage and learn (84%). PACE students are providing critical support for key projects and are producing a range of tangible outputs. Partners agreed that PACE student/s demonstrated:

• Good teamwork and collaboration skills (91%)
• Flexibility to work in changing environments (91%)
• Ability to manage multiple or changing priorities (83%)
• Effective communication skills (88%)
• Readiness to commence work in field or discipline (86%)
• Ability to apply ethical practice in a professional setting (86%)

PARTNER SUPERVISION

PACE is excelling in terms of student supervision and/or partner contact. Students agreed they had received adequate support from their supervisor (85%) and that their supervisor made constructive suggestions for improving their work (84%). Partners reported that they had provided students with regular feedback (88%) and the investment of time was worthwhile (88%).

“PACE interns made a real measurable impact on the lives of our clients.”

PACE PARTNER

PROGRAM PROCESSES

The majority of partners agreed they had received sufficient information about the PACE program from staff (86%) and they had a clear understanding of what was expected of them as a PACE partner (85%).
Outcomes for partners

There is strong evidence that PACE has effectively sourced, developed and managed a wide range of partnerships to provide students with high-quality PACE activities. Partners who participated in the survey were very satisfied with their overall experience with the PACE program:

- 93% agreed they would recommend engaging with a PACE student
- 84% agreed that they would like to continue engaging with PACE students in future
- 93% were somewhat or extremely satisfied with the outcomes achieved by the student(s) during the PACE activity
- 86% agreed the PACE activity was mutually beneficial to the organisation and to the student

BENEFITS FOR PARTNERS

Partners reported to a great or moderate extent that students were supporting key projects (84%) and producing a range of tangible outputs. Students were also providing critical support to community organisations and working directly with local communities.

Partners also reported to a great or moderate extent that PACE had provided them with an opportunity to make a positive community impact (85%), to give back to the industry/profession (81%) and to engage with the university sector (80%). To a lesser extent partners reported that access to current disciplinary or professional knowledge (57%), professional development opportunities for the supervisor (55%), and access to potential future employees (64%) were a benefit of the PACE program. Thus, there is strong evidence that PACE is contributing to mutually beneficial outcomes for partners and the community more broadly.

“The PACE students broke down the task and showed us impressive results with minimal guidance. We can now use this work to drive future outcomes for our company.”

PACE PARTNER

Next steps for PACE

This evaluation provides strong evidence for the effectiveness and impact of the PACE program for students and partners. Feedback provided by students and partners in the surveys is valuable information that will be used to enhance the program. Moving forward, the PACE program will take the following actions.

**ACTION 1**
Continue to provide all undergraduates with an opportunity to undertake a professional experience as part of their degree.

**ACTION 2**
Look at ways to further increase students’ career readiness and professional networks.

**ACTION 3**
Provide further opportunities for students to undertake a PACE activity in an area of professional interest and/or disciplinary area wherever possible.

**ACTION 4**
Support the development of PACE activities with clear objectives, roles and responsibilities.

**ACTION 5**
Work closely with partners to ensure that PACE activities provide mutually beneficial outcomes for partner organisations, students and the community more broadly.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about the PACE Evaluation please access the TEACH website or contact the team directly at pace.research@mq.edu.au.