

Peace and Conflict Resolution in Universities:
*A Case Study of the University of Melbourne's International
Conflict Resolution Centre*

- **How can we provide University students with the opportunity to practice peace and conflict resolution skills?**
- **Is it possible to promote peace education within the University environment?**

**PowerPoint Presentation by
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International Conflict Resolution Centre

- The Centre was established in 1994 to research and disseminate knowledge about the non-violent conflict resolution
- It had an equal emphasis on academic endeavour and practical application
- From the earliest, the Centre was built on the efforts of students and volunteers:
 - Helping to overcome resource constraints
 - Providing a lived experience of peace
 - Modelling creating a peaceful community

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Qualitative Research

- 60 interns identified from 2003-2005
- 40 were contactable with a questionnaire
- 29 responses returned (73% response)
- Respondents reflected a wide range of disciplines, including law, psychology, international relations, philosophy, politics, history, social studies, IT, business and dance
- Only 5 of 29 had significant previous experience in peace or conflict resolution
- Most made a moderate to extensive commitment of time to the Centre

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Intern Motivations

- To learn more about peace/conflict resolution
- To learn practical skills in conflict resolution
- To undertake projects/practical work

- To fulfill personal values
- To be involved in the community
- To undertake interdisciplinary research
- To branch out from pure psychology
- To develop a career in peace/conflict resolution
- To complete a placement requirement

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Internship Activities

- Key elements of internship:
 - Training (cultures of peace, project development and proposal writing plus specific ADR course)
 - Projects (individual or group)
 - Administrative task
 - Flexible on hours/duration
- Activities included:
 - Research
 - Teaching
 - Events
 - Community Engagement
 - Organisational Improvement

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Impact on Participants

- Participants stated that the internship improved:
 - Knowledge of conflict resolution theory/practice (93%)
 - Practical skills in conflict resolution (69%)
 - Practical skills in other areas (97%)
 - Self-confidence (48%)
- 69% felt that the Centre provided opportunities not available elsewhere
- 76% stated that they developed an interest in working further in this field

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Profile: The Exchange Student

- “The ICRC has been one of the highlights of my Melbourne experience. Not only for the fantastic research and learning opportunities... but for the incredible collection of people involved. Not only have I formulated an idea of what direction I’d like to take after my studies, but I have also fostered both

professional and social relationships with people I respect and admire”

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Profile: The Undergraduate

- “It was an energetic and vibrant place where you could gain skills and learn. It was also teaching and running practical projects which was a fabulous contrast to the rest of my Uni experience. The collection of skills that I learnt and practiced at the ICRC, in connection with the marvelous supervision that was offered from staff and peers, helped to develop me both personally and professionally”

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Profile: The Postgraduate

“I am extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with the ICRC. It has had a tremendous impact on my masters work and my life. I have altered most of my study topics so that they can be included in research for the ICRC and I am proud to be a part of an organisation which I feel is making a difference in a world where disputes, miscommunications and misunderstandings are so prevalent.”

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Profile: the Graduate

- “Prior to my internship, despite studying up to Masters level in International Relations, I had felt that I needed more practical experience in mediation and other methods of conflict resolution. The ICRC provided me with this practical knowledge and skills development. Of critical importance, staff enabled me to work with the ICRC while still maintaining my paid work.”

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Learnings: Importance of Practice

- Focus on practice was greatly appreciated
- Students valued general work skills as well as specific ADR skills
 - “My placement was a fantastic experience. I was able to learn so many practical skills and gain so much experience working with so many different projects... I learned what it takes to organise a forum for over 100 people, report writing skills, how to update a website, time-management and organisational skills, just to name a few.”
- Quality of supervision was important

- “During my internship I was provided with the necessary resources, professional supervision and a stimulating amount of trust in my ability to develop and grow”

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Learnings: Importance of Community

- International, intercultural and interdisciplinary contact was valued
- Shared vision was important
- Social relationships were part of the experience
 - “The Centre draws in enthusiastic and brilliant people from all over the world to create an environment of shared vision and activism towards international understanding and world peace.”
- There may be a critical mass needed to achieve a sufficiently energetic atmosphere
 - “Every time I was involved with the ICRC I left inspired and energized. It often refreshed me when I was bogged down with abstract theory and writing for my thesis.”

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Learnings: Importance of Service

- There needs to be a sense of wider community connection and engagement in the program
 - “Its blend of academic research and concrete projects to promote peace in both local communities and in international arenas, coupled with its investment in capacity building for its students and interns, is an admirable example of how universities can and should contribute to the broader societies in which they reside.”

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Challenges to the University

1. Peace education should be experiential but Universities focus more on research and theory:
 - Requires skills training
 - Places less emphasis on research and abstraction
2. Peace education is dependent on pedagogy and teaching environment:
 - Peace education promotes equality and inclusiveness
 - There can be issues around activism and advocacy
3. Peace and conflict resolution is interdisciplinary while Universities are organised by discipline:

- Peace education can be judged as not “fitting” within disciplinary boundaries

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Conclusions

- Internship programs can be effective in providing opportunities for peace practice in Universities
- There are challenges to working in a University context
- The potential for students to gain deep learning makes it worth the effort

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Aims of Higher Education

- “Advocating and upholding fundamental human and civil rights as the only just, sustainable basis for a humane civilisation, and challenging all staff and students to understand and accept their moral responsibilities as educated, informed, tolerant citizens of their own societies and of the wider international community”

University of Melbourne Values Statement