Dr Sharon Peoples
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Synopsis

Dr Sharon Peoples is the Convenor of Museum Studies at the ANU Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies. She understands that learning about museums cannot be contained within the walls of the University. Sharon has developed unique and authentic learning opportunities that teach and inspire graduate students. She does this by taking advantage of the geographic location of ANU, and forging and maintaining strong relationships with leading national institutions.

Sharon's approach to teaching and supporting student learning

Each museum is a curious world in itself. For some visitors, it is the quiet contemplation of an Indigenous artwork. For others, it is the wild new technologies taking us to worlds beyond the museum walls.

A key part of students' learning experiences at the Centre for Heritage and Museums is our internship program. It is a joy to observe, through reading students' online journals, how the world of museums unfolds each day through their placements.

I supervise students in such a way as to provide a solid pedagogical basis, and allow the development of self-awareness through student's reflection of their own learning engagement.

I have designed and implemented innovative online, intensive and on- and off-campus courses in museums, heritage and museum education studies, responding to the industry by incorporating flexible learning approaches for graduate students.

Museum education is taught online. Here, the emphasis is on andragogy, that is, adult learning. In this program there is emphasis on the process of self-directed learning and as a facilitator I make sure learning is relevant to the student's own workplace, and that assignments are relevant to the industry.

I use a number of creative tools specifically designed to engage students, including exercises that help students comprehend their own learning styles and preferences, processes and intrinsic motivations. This is undertaken through a workshop where time is spent on a short ‘tick the box’ and self-ratings survey.

We continue by discussing the range of different types of learners from visual and spatial learning, to mathematical and logical learning through to intra- and inter-personal learning. This makes students aware that people learn differently and museum learning is diverse.

We reflect on the best and worst learning experiences they have had and what learning in museums and at heritage sites mean. From personal understanding of their own learning, we then apply this to their designs of learning programs and exhibition designs. For the students, this also helps them to choose the assessment task that best matches their learning style. This understanding brings confidence to their abilities as future museum educators.

Back in the classroom, I enjoy the challenge of figuring out how to use each of the national cultural institutions as resources and for the development of curricula. I also integrate the work of ‘local’ world-leading museum and heritage sector colleagues by inviting them to participate in coursework.

“Dr Sharon Peoples is one of our most valued members of staff in terms of her extensive contribution to teaching at both Masters Coursework and HDR level…”

Professor Paul Pickering, supervisor

“This experience is providing me with practical experience and academic insight into what museums collect, why and how this information can be interpreted to a wider audience. Thank you for your kind and positive feedback.”

Student