

# BRINGING CREATIVITY TO THE FOREFRONT

Three Massey University academics are challenging contemporary issues through a slightly different lens than usual. Associate Professor Elspeth Tilley, Associate Professor Angie Farrow and Dr Rand Hazou have introduced a new course where students incorporate creative writing, multimedia practice and theatre to raise awareness of social justice matters.



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From developing community theatre projects with refugees and asylum seekers, to producing creative videos that raise awareness of the Smokefree campaign, *Creativity for the Community* combines the diverse experiences and academic backgrounds of Dr Tilley, Dr Farrow and Dr Hazou.

“We’ve all studied and researched a lot of creative community outlets, looking at how things like theatre and expression can be used as a social tool to impact on local people. The course has allowed us to assemble that knowledge and share it with our students in a really empowering way,” says Dr Farrow, from Massey’s School of English and Media Studies in Manawatū.

*Creativity for the Community* is the only course of its kind in New Zealand where students can gain academic credit for creative interdisciplinary community projects. It is designed to give the students a sense of freedom as they learn to look at things through new perspectives.

“The course is all about letting our students have their say. They choose what themes they want to focus on and we are here to support them through the process.



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We encourage them to step outside the status quo and think differently about things," says Dr Tilley from Massey's School of English and Media Studies in Wellington.

In 2015, the students of the programme focussed their projects on raising awareness about rape, dementia and recycling. Students on the Auckland campus in Albany worked alongside residents at local retirement village, Aria Gardens.

Jon Amesbury, the manager of Aria Gardens, says the project was "hugely positive."

"The residents who took part felt really empowered because they were part of creative projects that recognised their lives and experiences, which increases their self-worth."

Mr Amesbury says the project and partnership with Massey University is unique. He would like to see similar creative projects and partnerships developed more widely as the elderly population rapidly increases and issues such as social isolation, grief, sexuality, depression and anxiety they experience need to be addressed and understood.

Dr Hazou, Dr Tilley and Dr Farrow designed the paper to develop students' capacities as adaptive, engaged and responsible citizens.

"We want to produce students who can use creative skills to engage with problems they see around them. The group creative projects allow students to develop important teamwork and communication skills that help them to become "work ready and world ready"," says Dr Hazou.

"As well as enabling them to do something creative about a cause that they care about, such experiential learning classes give students excellent skills in higher-order thinking, multi-layered decision-making, problem-solving, risk management, teamwork and group organising skills," says Dr Tilley from Massey's School of English and Media Studies in Wellington.

*Associate Professor Angie Farrow is a playwright who has written numerous plays for theatre and radio. She specialises in community theatre and experimental theatre and many of her plays have won national and international prizes. Her work is regularly performed both in New Zealand and overseas. She teaches theatre, public speaking and creative processes. She is particularly interested in rapport and the way performers and audiences connect through text, body, voice, and breath.*

*Associate Professor Elspeth Tilley has been teaching communication in Australia and New Zealand since 2001, including classes in communication theory, research methods, and creative communication. She combines professional communication experience (in journalism and public relations) with particular research interests in communication for social justice. An experienced theatre practitioner, she also publishes in top theatre journals on aspects of performance theory and theatre as a communication tool for social change. In 2015 she was the New Zealand facilitator for Climate Change Theatre Action, producing and directing four new plays as part of Artcop21, the global cultural programmes of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change.*

*Dr Rand Hazou is an Australian/Palestinian academic and theatre facilitator. In 2004 Rand was commissioned by the UNDP to travel to the Occupied Territories in Palestine to work as a theatre consultant running workshops for Palestinian youths. In 2009 Rand was awarded a PhD in Theatre and Drama at La Trobe University. His thesis examined the latest wave of political theatre in Australia dealing with Asylum Seekers and Refugees. In 2011 Rand was awarded a Cultural Leadership Skills Development Grant from the Australia Council for the Arts to develop The Tarakat|Harakat Project, involving a series of theatre-related initiatives between Australia and Palestine.*