La Trobe University Mildura: Paula

Why do I think the Mildura campus is a great pace to study? Well, I guess there’s the obvious reasons like it’s cheaper than going to the city, you know, students can stay at home with their families. They can live at home. There are smaller classes, and that’s the sort of thing that’s talked about quite a lot, but what I think makes a great difference is the relationships that you’re able to have with the lecturers. Because we have smaller classes the lecturers get to know you, they get to challenge you, they get to speak with you and talk with you. And like most rural communities the staff at Mildura campus are innovative, they’re creative; they have to be, like rural communities have to be because we don’t have the resources, we often don’t have the things that are available in the big city so we have to learn how to do things in a very creative way. And I think that makes a great difference to our teaching methodology and to the outcome for students.

What do I enjoy most about teaching at the Mildura campus? Look it’s hard to say, but I think one of the things that I really enjoy is with the students. The students bring an enormous amount of skills and resilience along to the classrooms; and often they don’t even recognise it. You know, we have students who come from farming communities where they have suffered from drought, nor the rain has destroyed the crop, or the locusts have eaten away all of their profits. And the students don’t realise what kind of strengths this gives them, and they bring that into the classroom.

Social work today, I think one of the exciting things is we are teaching students about how to be social workers of the future. We don’t even know what the future problems are going to be. For example, when I studied social work 25 year ago, there was no such thing as cyber bullying, or social networking. We didn’t know those things were going to happen. We don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. We can predict some things like climate change and the impact that’s going to have, we can talk about great populations of people moving across borders in different countries, and perhaps infringements on human rights. The advances in technology are absolutely enormous, that’s going to impact on families and communities and create all sorts of social problems as well as benefits. So one of the things that we’re doing now is teaching very much for the future.