1. Proposed Citation
For creating a capstone unit that empowers final year Bachelor of Education (Primary) pre-service teachers to launch their teaching careers

2. Summary of contribution and context
Securing a first job is never easy. However, for pre-service teachers, navigating the credentialing and job-seeking requirements to secure a first teaching position is unexpectedly complex and daunting. Challenges include an Australian landscape with an oversupply of generalist Primary teachers and increased casualisation of the workforce. Currently 27,000 people seek permanent employment with the NSW Department of Education, yet only 2,200 permanent positions are available annually, and 27% of Australian Primary teachers work on a part-time casual basis. With campuses in northern NSW and the southern Gold Coast, SCU’s pre-service teachers are entering the most crowded employment markets in their respective states.

My capstone unit, Transition to Teaching, empowers SCU’s final year BEd (Primary) students to navigate this difficult transition and successfully launch their teaching careers. The curriculum draws on my command of the fields of curriculum design and employability of pre-service teachers, developed through 28 years’ experience in teacher education, and strong working relationships with schools and accreditation/registration bodies. I designed and first delivered Transition to Teaching in 2007. Since then I have delivered it every year to around 140 students across SCU’s three main campuses: Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Gold Coast. Many of my BEd (Primary) students are from low SES backgrounds (31%), the first-in-family to attempt university (64%), are regional or remote (74%), and live and want to continue living in the local area.

The curriculum enables students to reflect on what they learnt in their undergraduate degree and wider experiences, and through a series of learning activities, steps them through the accreditation/registration processes for NSW and Queensland, and prepares them for upcoming employment interviews. The activities lead directly into four authentic assessment items: a teaching portfolio, an application for a real teaching position, a supporting statement, and a mock interview.

To date, the unit has achieved impressive outcomes. Feedback from NSW Department of Education staff who conduct recruitment interviews has been extremely positive. They informally report (formal feedback not permissible) that SCU’s pre-service Primary teachers present themselves more knowledgeably and professionally than most other interviewees. Students are also highly satisfied, consistently rating the unit above the SCU average, as shown in Figure 1. Thank-you emails from graduates, like the following, are effusive:

Transition to Teaching helped me gain a full-time teaching position in a local school. The assignments assisted me to ...

Figure 1: Overall student ratings (/5) for Transition to Teaching

The quality of my curriculum and the experience on which it is based is recognised within SCU, the academic specialism of education, and by education professionals. In 2012 I received a Vice Chancellor’s Citation for sustained leadership in the development, review and renewal of quality teacher education curricula, in 2000 a University Achievement Award for Teaching Excellence for the development of an online first-year foundation studies unit, and in 1989 a NSW Director-General’s Award for Excellence in Education for the curriculum design and delivery of a school-based course for pre-service Primary teachers. Within the School of Education I have been appointed to a range of roles including Course Coordinator for all undergraduate courses, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director

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iii Data is from 2014 Southern Cross University Bachelor of Education (Primary) Annual Course Report.
of Teaching and Learning, Deputy Head of School, Head of School, and leader of three major curriculum renewal projects. Marilyn is without doubt the most experienced and the most capable curriculum designer in the School – an example is her foresight, negotiating skills and energy in redesigning the School’s five combined degrees in its Secondary program, thereby enhancing the employment prospects of graduates and providing an avenue for the retraining of practising teachers to enable them to meet areas of teacher shortage. (Prof. Martin Hayden, Head of Education, SCU, 2009–2014). I am regularly invited by the NSW accreditation body BOSTES, and the Queensland registration body, the Queensland College of Teachers, to participate in working parties and to chair state panels for the accreditation of university courses. The quality of my scholarship has been recognised through a 2015 NSW Department of Education grant project ($110k) for the development of a leadership growth program in NSW public schools, and by the Chair of the School of Education’s External Review, a NSW Director of Public Schools, who in 2013, attested that my understanding of the link between educational theory, professional practice, curriculum design, government regulations and reforms, coupled with her sound understanding and implementation of the School of Education’s and the University’s strategic plan, has been critical to the success of teacher education programs at Southern Cross University.

3. Statement addressing: Curriculum and resources that reflect a command of the field

Philosophical underpinnings

The curriculum and learning design of Transition to Teaching is based on the intersection of my command of the fields of curriculum design and the employability of pre-service teachers, and the underlying principles of my teaching philosophy – that education has the power to transform lives, that teaching should be learner-centred, and that authentic assessment drives student learning⁴. My students have invested four years of their lives and hopes into their studies, and deserve the best opportunity to be work ready and to gain meaningful employment in their chosen field. Therefore, when envisioning my curriculum design I used a Backward Design process where I started with the desired result – that students are empowered to believe in themselves and their capabilities and can demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attributes to gain an employment edge. I then proceeded “backwards” to design rich authentic learning experiences, based in student-focused individual and group-based critical reflections, that prepare students to achieve this goal.

Learning outcomes and assessment

The aim of Transition to Teaching is to assist final year BEd (Primary) students develop and communicate their professional identity to support their transition to the world of teaching. The learning design models how teachers work as professionals by encouraging a blend of individual and joint responsibility and collaboration. Assessment tasks are carefully designed to step students through the complex teacher accreditation (NSW) and registration (Qld) processes as well as prepare them for employment applications and interviews, and are supported by my high expectations for students.

To gain a teaching position, pre-service teachers must navigate a complex series of regulatory challenges defined by each state and territory. In NSW pre-service teachers must first undertake a process through BOSTES to assess their Eligibility for Accreditation as a teacher to teach in NSW schools, then apply to a Teacher Accreditation Authority, for example the NSW Department of Education, which makes the accreditation decision. An optional additional process, in which all my students participate, is the NSW Department’s Graduate Recruitment Program that facilitates recruitment for casual, temporary and permanent positions in NSW public schools. In Queensland the Queensland College of Teachers makes the registration and permission-to-teach decision, while schooling systems, such as the Queensland Department of Education and Training, determine applicants’ suitability to teach in their system. Based near the border, many SCU pre-service teachers complete both processes.

The four authentic assessment tasks in Transition to Teaching, shown in the table, prepare final year pre-service teachers “for highly effective beginning teaching but also provide the foundation for further professional learning and growth”⁵. I emphasise the rationale for each task which motivates students to complete tasks to the best of their ability. Student comments confirm the value of the assessment task to their Transition to Teaching: Thank you Marilyn for a unit where we can ... see the relevance of the assignments. It was ... fantastic to be able to talk to you with all the knowledge you gained over the years. Thank you for treating us as the adults we are and respecting that we are in the final stages of our degree. (Student Feedback, 2010)

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### Assessment Task | Rationale
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**Teaching Portfolio** | • Powerful way to document evidence of teaching achievements, professional growth and aspirations  
• Requires reflective practice, critical evaluation and synthesis of professional learning from other units to provide evidence against the 37 Standard Indicators of the Australian Teacher Standards at Graduate level  
• Portfolio transferable beyond university – that is, forms the basis of the professional portfolio each teacher assembles to document ongoing achievement at higher career stages  
• Showcases skills and knowledge to potential employers

**Teaching Position Application** | • Typical way to apply for an advertised teaching position  
• Requires a well-designed CV, clearly expressed cover letter, statement addressing selection criteria

**Supporting Statement** | • Required by the NSW Department of Education and some other systems. Referred to as a Personal Statement by the Queensland Department of Education

**Mock Interview** | • Interviews are high stakes, and most students have limited experience of professional interviews  
• Students are exposed to a list of realistic interview questions  
• Students collaboratively prepare responses, then each answer one or two questions during a mock interview with their peers and me as panel members

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**Teaching Portfolio**  
In their Teaching Portfolio, students critically reflect on their learning from across their degree then complete the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers template I have designed. Here they identify which of the 37 Standard Indicators they (i) have achieved at the Graduate level, providing evidence to support their claim; and (ii) have not yet achieved, outlining a plan to achieve this area by the end of their studies. Through this process, students create meaning from their previous units by collecting artifacts and preparing detailed reflections. The process orients students to the nature of suitable evidence and how to collect evidence now and as a teacher. Supplemental to the Portfolio, students collect other documents they require for teacher accreditation/registration, for example their professional experience reports, academic transcript, birth certificate, and other certificates relevant to their teaching. **I just said to a fellow student how valuable this first assignment is in helping prepare us for next year. A fantastic idea and structure.** (Email April 2014). The transition from university to teaching is complex, and involves so many confusing steps. **I am so relieved that I have someone [Dr Chaseling] walking me through the steps, especially as I know other graduates who were not so lucky. It is clear that I am not the only person who sees the value in this unit, as there are students attending the classes who aren’t even enrolled in the unit.** (Email, March 2016)

I make explicit how the Portfolio provides a powerful link into teaching careers as it will be used for performance reviews, future job applications, and as careers progress, for full teacher accreditation/registration at the next Australian Professional Standards for Teachers’ career stage, Proficient. One student commented: **Now that I am in the process of gaining my Proficient level of Teacher Accreditation, it seems like familiar ground because I had completed the process with you at the Graduate Teacher level for an assessment task. Your mentoring, advice and knowledge during this unit of study has definitely assisted me to jump-start my teaching career.** (Email, First Year Teacher, March 2016)

**Teaching Position Application**  
Many students have never previously prepared a written application. Yet a written application, including the addressing of selection criteria with embedded evidence to support claims made, is standard practice for teachers as they apply for positions or promotions. For this assessment task, students develop a CV, prepare a cover letter, and learn how to write a statement addressing selection criteria. Through this they learn the soft skills of job differentiating (conveying the unique elements they bring to a position), writing in a new style, analysing selection criteria, and providing appropriate evidence. Preparing this application provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their broader life experience such as non-teaching work, volunteer work, or parenting. Students build self-confidence and a sense of achievement by identifying the relevance of their experiences. For example, volunteerism or work in retail sales that students may not consider relevant, has provided experience in communicating with and understanding a wide range of people, as well as appropriate presentation.
Supporting Statement
A two-page Supporting Statement is required by the NSW Department of Education at interview, and a 500-word Personal Statement by the Queensland Department of Education. These documents provide a way for students to “market” themselves at interview. The Statement provides opportunities for students to outline why they want to be a teacher, link their previous work and life experience with the role of a teacher, and provide examples of their achievement of Australian Teacher Standards. To develop content, students work in small groups to prepare their statements, then discuss within their tutorial group. Similarly to the written application, students practise the soft skills of writing concisely in an unfamiliar writing style, critically and collaboratively reflecting, and imagining how to present themselves in a new and relevant way.

Mock Interview
To prepare for their interviews, I provide students with a list of likely questions. Students from across the three SCU campuses work online in groups to provide dot-point responses and share these with each other. Students then each take part in a mock interview with their peers and me as the panel and observers. This develops their ability to think and talk spontaneously and gain interview experience and self-confidence. As well, they practise the soft skills valued in the employment market including professionalism, communication, active listening, problem solving, critical thinking and providing positive feedback and encouragement. Invariably, NSW Department of Education scheduling means a number of students undertake their interviews during the course of the unit, and their reports to the class add depth to the authenticity of the experience. Actual interview questions confirm or are added to the list, ensuring it is comprehensive and reflects current interview practice. For example, in 2010, one student reported she was asked “How do students learn?” This seemingly simple, but actually complex question, was an important addition to the list of questions as it requires students to synthesise four years’ study into a short answer. The effectiveness of the interview preparation is confirmed by students, with one student stating: I enjoyed the interview. It went very quickly and was not intimidating at all. It was exactly as expected, your practice questions and bits of advice were spot-on. I was extremely well-prepared, so thank you. (Email June 2007).

Conclusion
Overall, Transition to Teaching’s reputation has spread beyond BEd (Primary) students. Each tutorial attracts between two and eight non-enrolled students who audit the class in addition to their existing full study load. Some choose to submit the assignments. I’m an Early Childhood student and have attended all the Transition to Teaching tutorials. The unit has been an absolute blessing in disguise, definitely one of the most valuable units I’ve undertaken at university. I’ve encouraged my fellow early childhood students to join the classes to gain an extensive knowledge and in-depth understanding of how to transition into the teaching world (Email April 2016). I am early childhood and not ‘officially’ enrolled in this unit, how would you like me to submit the assignment to you? (Email March 2016). I receive many emails from students who have successfully commenced their teaching careers, and am invited by colleagues in other education degrees to provide guest lectures.

In a recent review of the unit, Dr David Townsend (previously academic at University of Lethbridge, Alberta, and currently consultant for three Alberta school districts), noted the strength of the learning design and relevance to students: ... I am impressed with the overall clarity of the unit, its user-friendliness, and the thoroughness with which you have highlighted appropriate resources, and their appropriate use. Moreover, I applaud you for the way you have melded expectations of individual responsibility, joint responsibility, and collaboration into the writing assignment and the interview simulation. All your students will get valuable experience through having to apply for a “real” job, having to participate in a “real” interview, and receiving structured feedback specific to their efforts in both instances. ... I can imagine a great majority of students would see this as one of the most helpful units in their whole program.

My greatest pleasure is hearing from students who have developed successful teaching careers. The graduate below left school in Year 11, was first-in-her-family to attempt university and celebrated her 50th birthday during her final practicum. As a result of her Graduate Recruitment Interview, she was offered a permanent teaching position with the NSW Department of Education and in 2016 gained full accreditation in NSW as a Proficient teacher. Marilyn is a tireless advocate for, and is enthusiastic in, motivating students to excel in the world beyond university. She shows a genuine interest in the advancement of practitioners of the teaching profession, far in excess of what you would expect of an academic. Marilyn’s advice in preparing me for my NSW Department of Education interview was invaluable. I sincerely believe that I would not have gained a Targeted Graduate position, and secured a full-time permanent teaching position without her advice, input and encouragement. (SCU graduate, 2014)