Mission statement

Australian Catholic University shares with universities worldwide a commitment to quality in teaching, research and service. It aspires to be a community characterised by free inquiry and academic integrity.

The University’s inspiration, located within 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition, summons it to attend to all that is of concern to human beings. It brings a distinctive spiritual perspective to the common tasks of higher education.

Through fostering and advancing knowledge in education, health, commerce, the humanities, the sciences and technologies, and the creative arts, Australian Catholic University seeks to make a specific contribution to its local, national and international communities.

The University explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service. In its endeavours, it is guided by a fundamental concern for justice and equity, and for the dignity of all human beings.

Australian Catholic University has a primary responsibility to provide excellent higher education to its entire diversified and dispersed student body. Its ideal graduates will be highly competent in their chosen fields and ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life and a commitment to serving the common good.

Directorate and institutes to enact Mission

- The Directorate of Identity and Mission, established in 2009 with Stephen Lawrence as Director, has oversight of campus ministry to students and staff, and provides a focus for the University’s identity and Mission.
- The directorate was established in response to the call for diversification in the Bradley Review, which recommended a “third stream” of university activity, beyond the core functions of teaching and research.
- The Institute for Catholic Identity and Mission was also established during the year, with Director Associate Professor Patrick McArdle leading development of a core curriculum to articulate the University’s Catholic identity and Mission and collaborating with other Catholic institutions on related theoretical and practical questions.
- The Centre for Indigenous Education and Research was launched in 2009, coordinating all campus Indigenous educational activities, services, research partnerships and engagement with Indigenous communities (see page 33).
- The Public Policy Institute, also launched during 2009 under Director Professor Scott Prasser, is based in Canberra and aims to inform public policy from a basis of ethics, faith, human rights, the dignity of human life and community engagement.
- The Goals Committee works to embed the University’s Catholic identity into its structures and practices, and to address the challenges of the University’s Mission statement.
- The Institute for Advancing Community Engagement runs numerous ongoing programs in the broad areas of Beyond Difference, Beyond Disadvantage and Beyond Borders.
Mission in undertakings

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) 2008 review commended the University on its “high awareness and shared understanding of the Mission”.

ACU strives to have its Mission inform all its undertakings, bringing consideration of ethical and social justice issues into its core activities of research and student learning.

ACU research centres, founded on concerns relating to quality of life for all communities and individuals, are detailed on page 44, and student involvement in community and social justice activities is discussed on page 32.

There are also numerous ongoing distinctive social justice programs at the University, including:

- Thai–Burma Border refugee program (see page 39)
- Clemente Australia program (see right and page 33)
- Community Futures project, supporting refugees in tertiary education
- Community Engagement awards to students and staff (see pages 31 and 43) and for the University in general (see right)
- research in areas of human concern
- focus on improving education and health of Indigenous Australians
- several student initiatives for social justice
- public discussion forums (see page 19).

Community engagement

The Bradley Review noted that “community engagement” has become the term employed by UK and US universities for the important function of collaboration and “interactions between universities and the rest of society … helping to improve quality of life”.

At ACU, the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement coordinates numerous projects, working with faculties, staff, students and community partners. Most activities are voluntary, but some are part of academic course requirements.

In 2009, these included, in the Beyond Today program, the following:

**Beyond Borders**
- East Timor capacity-building project in education, health and wellbeing, including a student cultural exchange program
- Thai–Burma Border program, offering university courses to refugees from this area
- nursing students working and fundraising for Vanuatu health care agencies
- educational leadership programs supporting schools with disadvantaged children in Mauritius

**Beyond Disadvantage**
- Clemente Australia program in eight centres across Australia, whereby ACU offered tertiary education to 120 disadvantaged, often homeless, students
- Homework Clubs, in which children from disadvantaged, low socioeconomic status (SES) or refugee backgrounds improved their literacy and numeracy skills through tutoring by ACU students (The Melbourne Campus Homework Club at Atherton Gardens won a 2009 Community Engagement award from the Vice-Chancellor.)
- Justice Pathways Project, which encouraged Indigenous students to enter justice careers in Queensland
- The Institute of Child Protection Studies, a partnership between the Canberra Campus and the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, which continued to work for improvement in policy and practice in the care of children

**Beyond Differences**
- Young Muslim Leadership program, promoting peace and shared understanding
- World Religions Face-to-Face program, bringing students of different religions together to promote understanding
- Community Engagement academic course units
- staff Community Engagement visits to the Philippines, the University of Bethlehem and elsewhere in the Middle East
- partnership with Catholic organisations for international development, with a current focus on the Pacific and East Timor

The University explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service.
Homework Club helps disadvantaged children.
Public forums

Consistent with its Mission, the University hosted and took part in many forums involving staff, students and the wider world. These included the following:

- Mission and Identity Colloquium in Church-based Organisations (Melbourne Campus)
- launch of Social Justice Statement of Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (Strathfield Campus)
- Social Justice forums on Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne campuses
- national student retreat, Building a Life Grounded in Hope, led by Bishop Julian Porteous
- events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the death of Blessed Mary MacKillop, including lectures, Brisbane dramatic presentation and Melbourne concert
- Asia-Pacific Education Conference of the Ursuline Sisters
- presentations at the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne
- annual Lenten Lecture (Melbourne Campus), by Bishop Tim Costelloe SDV
- Wednesday lecture series run by the School of Philosophy at Melbourne Campus on morality, law and politics in Gaza
- annual Aquinas Lecture (Brisbane Campus) – speaker Professor Anthony Kelly on the topic ‘Catholic identity lost and found’
- annual Aquinas Lecture (Ballarat Campus) – speaker Rev Tim Costello on the topic ‘A new politics for the planet – governance in an age of globalisation’
- Bioethics Colloquium (Melbourne Campus), on the care of the ageing and the end of life
- Muslim–Christian Relations conference (Melbourne Campus)
- sixth National Symposium on Religious Education (North Sydney Campus)
- Learning, Teaching and Social Justice in Higher Education symposium (Melbourne Campus)

• Business Sustainability Forum (Brisbane Campus)
• Globalisation and the Church conference (North Sydney Campus)
• Social Work seminars (Canberra Campus) on such topics as the role of social work in bushfire recovery, work–family balance, foster carers and child welfare practice
• forums of the ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies
• Health Promoting Schools Association presentation was made to ACU Conference (Strathfield Campus) and ACU school of education seminar “because of its engagement with Muslims in the most positive and constructive way”.
• Young Muslim Leaders event, Institute for Advancing Community Engagement (IACE) with La Trobe University
• annual Aquinas Lecture (Brisbane Campus) – speaker Rev Tim Costelloe on the topic ‘A new politics for the planet – governance in an age of globalisation’
• Bioethics Colloquium (Melbourne Campus), on the care of the ageing and the end of life
• Muslim–Christian Relations conference (Melbourne Campus)
• sixth National Symposium on Religious Education (North Sydney Campus)
• Learning, Teaching and Social Justice in Higher Education symposium (Melbourne Campus)

Recognition

During 2009, Australian Catholic University was recognised for its work in the wider community:

- Sydney’s Al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development presented the University (Strathfield Campus) with a graffiti artwork inspired by Arthur Stace of the ‘Eternity’ signatures. The centre’s director, Imam Afroz Ali, said the presentation was made to ACU “because of its engagement with Muslims in the most positive and constructive way’.
- The Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction gave an award of recognition to the University’s Master of Arts (Theology) course for its Spirituality and Pastoral Ministry specialisation, which is studied by students from many different denominations.

Eureka Prize winner

Every year, the University sponsors a national prize (of $10,000) in the area of community engagement – the Eureka Prize for Research in Ethics, for “serious, intellectual investigation of theoretical or practical ethical issues contributing to the understanding and development of ethical standards”.

In 2009 the prize went to Dr Neil Levy, a world leader in the newly established field of neuroethics, who holds positions at Melbourne and Oxford universities. In his thesis, Dr Levy argued that the use of pharmaceutical drugs, such as antidepressants and Ritalin, should not detract from an individual’s identity.