

3 Mission and identity



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 for its entire diversified and dispersed student body. Its ideal graduates will be highly competent in their chosen fields, 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.

Community engagement

Bradley discussion paper emphasis

This important paper in 2008 discussed in some depth ideas of community engagement which have been incorporated into our University's approach in this area, as follows.

Higher education contributes to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital most directly through its two core functions of teaching and research. Over the last decade national and international commentators have also noted a significant trend among many universities towards a third function, which has been described using a range of terms such as "knowledge transfer", "community service", "community engagement" and "the third stream"...

... The Third Stream is about the interactions between universities and the rest of society... The Science and Technology Policy Research Unit argues that this goes beyond the commercialisation of research. Universities make contributions to government and civil society as well as the private sector, assisting not only with economic performance but also helping to improve quality of life and the effectiveness of public services.

As the *Bradley discussion paper* notes, this important function of universities is now recognised by UK and US classifications to include "community engagement", as well as being an important component of university activity in the Australian National Protocols for Higher Education Processes.



Stand Up and Be Counted, a banner for the Make Poverty History campaign, supported by ACU National students.

Activities towards Mission and identity

AUQA commendation

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2008 reviewed the University for the second time (see page 26). Its report noted that:

“There is a high awareness and shared understanding of the Mission, which gives the inspiration and impetus to the provision of quality learning experiences, including pastoral care for students and a responsive and positive interaction with the wide range of ACU National community partners. There are a number of laudable community engagement activities in which staff and students participate.”

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Informing all undertakings

The Mission informs all the University's undertakings, bringing considerations of ethical and social justice issues into the core activities of both research and student learning.

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

There are numerous ongoing distinctive social justice programs at the University, such as the Karen Refugee Project (see page 39), the Clemente Australia program (see page 39) and the emphasis in both research and teaching on improving educational and health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. There are also a host of student initiatives, awards for Community Engagement (see pages 31 and 43) and public discussion forums.

Specific catalysts

There are, in addition, two specific bodies within the University which are particularly charged with the responsibility of enacting the Mission of the University:

- the Goals Committee, whose aims are to embed the University's Catholic identity into its structures, functions and practices and to address the many challenges of the University's Mission statement
- the Institute for the Advancement of Community Engagement (IACE), with its ongoing programs in areas Beyond Difference, Beyond Disadvantage and Beyond Borders.

serving the common good



Sarah Forgan Doane,
Education graduate and
postgraduate student,
working in Namibia.



Dr Kamran Mofid (4th from left), founder of the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative, at the forum held at the Strathfield Campus, with inter-faith representatives.

Public forums

Most of the following engagements with the community, consistent with the University's Mission, were initiatives of the two driving forces of the Goals Committee and the IACE, which inspired willing participation by ACU National staff, students and the wider world:

- forum at the Melbourne Campus, coordinated by the University's Institute of Legal Studies and Students for Awareness, with keynote addresses by Julian Burnside QC and Phoebe Knowles, on the question "How have the anti-terrorism laws impacted on human rights in Australia?"
- forum at Strathfield on Globalisation for the Common Good with Oxford founder of the initiative, Dr Kamran Mofid, world-renowned globalisation, economics and inter-faith specialist, and representatives of a number of inter-faith, Islamic and Columban Mission centres
- historical studies conference *Childhood Rediscovered*, organised by Professor Margot Hillel OAM and Professor Shurlee Swain, held at the Melbourne Campus
- children's literature conference at Strathfield, hosted in partnership with the Edmund Rice Centre, centring on the values of literature that "speaks of justice", and involving award-winning Australian authors, ACU National students and more than 120 visiting school teachers, librarians and academics
- first international youth forum for the Maronite Church, with 100 global visitors including the Maronite Patriarch and bishops, at the Strathfield Campus
- seventh annual Colloquium of the Golding Centre for Women's History, Theology and Spirituality at the Strathfield Campus
- social justice youth forum for senior secondary school students, held at the Brisbane Campus, with the keynote address being given by Father Chris Riley of the Youth off the Streets program
- Conscientious Objection symposium at the Melbourne Campus, providing an opportunity for reasoned discussion of the Victorian Government's Abortion Law Reform Bill
- VII International Abraham Conference in Central Hall, Melbourne Campus, a collaborative conference organised by the University's Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue, together with the Australian Inter-cultural Society, the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University and its Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology, and the Ecumenical Inter-faith Commission
- a series of public lectures on the theme *One God in a Divided World*, presented by ACU National with Catenians, and international fraternity of Catholic laity, to discuss the road to goodwill from different religious perspectives
- Young Muslims Leadership Program, at the Strathfield Campus
- social justice forums, *Dare to Make a Difference*, presented by Adjunct Professor Robert Fitzgerald on all campuses, as a response to the Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement of 2008
- forum *Calling for Climate Justice*, where Indigenous peoples of Pacific Islands spoke publicly on their experience with rising sea levels, hosted by Strathfield Campus, the University's Institute for Advancing Community Engagement, part of the Pacific Island Partnership, an initiative of the Edmund Rice Centre
- public forums to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – *Transforming Education: a right for people, communities and nations*.

Recognition

The University received an Award for Excellence in Academia from the Australian Intercultural Society, in recognition of the University's contribution to interfaith relations. The award was presented at a Ramadan Iftar dinner in September, hosted at Melbourne's Government House by the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC.

The University, as seen elsewhere in this report, has hosted numerous interfaith conferences, has interfaith staff and courses and has developed a new curriculum for schools to promote interfaith education, all of which were considered as grounds for the award.

ACU National also awards a national prize in the community engagement arena – the Eureka Prize for Research in Ethics (of \$10,000) every year for "serious, intellectual investigation of theoretical or practical ethical issues contributing to the understanding and development of ethical standards". This year the prize went to Garrett Cullity, the author of *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (Oxford University Press), which examines whether, and to what extent, well-to-do individuals are obliged to help others less fortunate.