

ACU

# alum

## Issue 11 2018

### 02

#### Announcing our winners

Nursing refugees in Sudan, counselling Papua New Guinea's most vulnerable youth, an unexpected academic career, and helping rural town communities... these are our Alumni Award winners.

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#### The Gunners' secret weapon

Meet the Australian sports science innovator having a major impact on world soccer.

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#### America's blind spot

Why does tighter gun control continue to elude the United States?





#### **EDITOR**

Caitlin Ganter

#### **EDITORIAL TEAM**

Christina Sexton

Kristy Porter

#### **PUBLISHER**

Alisse Grafitti

#### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Bonnie (Binbin) Liang

Nigel Muganaua

Parsley Creative

#### **CONTRIBUTOR**

Menios Constantinou

#### **GOT A STORY?**

[content@acu.edu.au](mailto:content@acu.edu.au)

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#### **COVER:**

ACU graduate and Alumni Award winner Caitlin Little is making a difference in the desert, working on the frontline of health care as a paramedic in Alice Springs.

#### **COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:**

Bonnie (Binbin) Liang

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# Nursing beyond borders

Author: Christina Sexton

Nurse Christine Shanahan has worked the wards of Sydney's hospitals, but she's also treated sexual violence victims in Sudan, diagnosed diseases from a tin shed in Timor, opened a pharmacy in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, and nursed her way around a series of Australian outback hospitals.

Christine began her nursing training when she was a teenager, but it took her another 29 years to finish what she started.

"The dream never wavered," she said.

It was after her three children completed high school and university that she was finally ready to enrol in a Bachelor of Nursing for herself.

"I was worried I was too old and couldn't hack it," she admitted. "I thought maths and chemistry were beyond me. But I did really well academically and surprised myself – and everybody else."

After graduating and refining her practice in Sydney hospitals, Christine and her husband Michael, an internal medicine doctor, were both keen to volunteer their skills and give back to those in need. The pair joined Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), which is a non-government organisation that sends health care workers into conflict and medical epidemic zones.

Soon after, they were on their way to Turkmenistan. "I had no idea where it was," Christine said. "When I realised it was a post-war country in the former Soviet Union, I knew things would be different."

Thrown straight into the deep end, Christine's work in Turkmenistan centered on treating the country's tuberculosis epidemic.

"I knew very little about the disease because you just don't see it in Australia," she said.

But she learnt quickly and ended up starting a pharmacy and training more than 600 local doctors and nurses in how to deliver the tuberculosis therapy known as DOTS (Direct Observed Treatment, Short Course).

"They were like sponges. They were so grateful to learn and absorb everything."

After briefly returning home to Sydney, Christine and Michael were soon off again, this time to Darfur in Sudan.

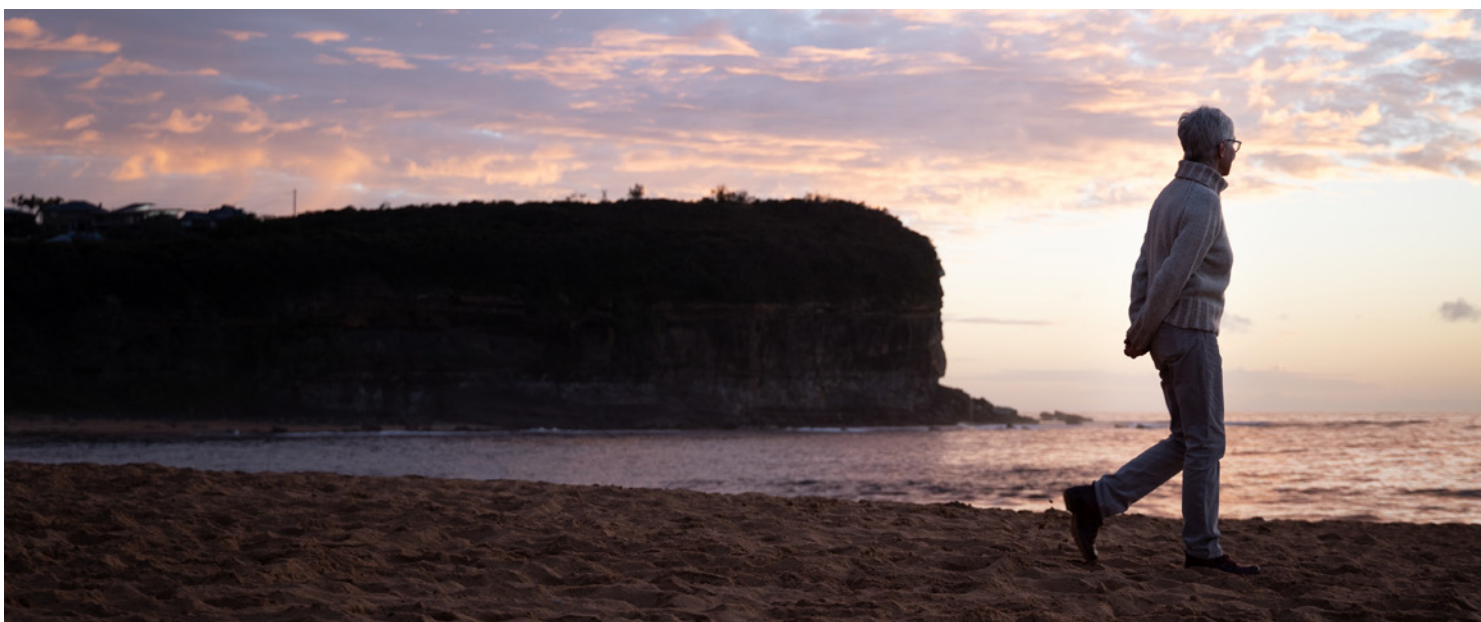
"The country was in crisis and refugees were pouring in to escape the ethnic cleansing and genocide," said Christine. "Admittedly, we didn't know how dangerous it was going to be. But our own kids were grown and independent and we decided we could risk it."

They were initially sent to Sudan's Kalma Camp to open an acute emergency feeding centre for severely malnourished young children.

"The kids were all wasted away. It was the worst of the worst," she recalled.

"The conditions were appalling and babies were dying in front of us every day. We were also treating girls for venereal disease who had been raped repeatedly by soldiers. It was all incredibly distressing. You had to turn off most of the time."

This was nursing like Christine had never experienced before and her responsibilities went far beyond traditional care.





“We organised the building of latrines and digging bore water wells,” she said. “We hired local staff and taught them how they could try to save the children’s lives. We also ran clinics every day. I’d be there looking down throats and listening to chests.”

Once the mission concluded, settling back into Sydney life proved equally challenging for Christine. “It was a huge shock,” she said. “I couldn’t go back to ordinary nursing and I didn’t work for two years. You can’t shake it off. Those kids were the same age as my grandchildren.”

It took time to process how Sudan had got under her skin, and it was only after a casual conversation with her psychologist daughter-in-law that Christine saw things in a new light.

“I told her that sometimes I’d dream about those children and wake up thinking maybe if I had done something different with this kid or that kid, the outcome would’ve been different. She said to me, ‘Christine, that’s PTSD’. I had no idea.”

After taking time to heal, eventually Christine was ready for a new challenge and spent the next three years working intermittently with mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients in outback hospitals.

“I was thrown back into intense, fast nursing,” Christine said. “You’re very protected in Sydney, so when something’s hard it’s easy to say, ‘Oh, let the clinical nurse specialist do it’, but in the rural hospitals it was more a case of ‘Tag. You’re it!’, so you have to figure it out.”

Leaving the outback behind, Christine and Michael again returned to Sydney and a new door opened for Christine into palliative care. While initially hesitant to take the job, she soon discovered she had found her calling.

“You gain such an understanding of life, death and suffering, which enriches your own life,” she said. “It’s not joyous, but if you can help patients and their loved ones find some peace, it’s an amazing experience.”

Next stop for the couple was a short trip to Timor Leste. “Once again, I did a bit of everything,” Christine said. “In Timor, three or four times a week we’d charge up mountain roads you’d never drive on in Australia. People who couldn’t afford to travel to the city would walk to us from miles around and we’d set up shop in a village, church or someone’s home.”

Nursing from mountainside tin sheds came with considerable challenges. “There was no way to lie patients down most of the time and examine them properly,” she said. “It was mostly chest and ear infections, and everyone had scabies with no running water to wash your hands.”

Now back in Sydney with her next adventure to be determined, Christine’s had time to reflect on what it takes for those dreaming of following in her footsteps.

“You must be willing to get your hands dirty. You have to know how to live rough and accept harsh conditions,” she said. “In Sudan and Timor our shower was a bucket of cold rain water, and it’s always hard to find trustworthy food. Then in Turkmenistan, the weather was so extreme – we had 50-degree heat and a snowy winter.”

However, she still believes there’s plenty of challenging opportunities for nurses closer to home. “Working in central Australia will build your resilience. Get as many skills as you can and put your hand up for every procedure.”

In spite of the immense challenges Christine has overcome since she first arrived at ACU as a nervous student who was scared she wouldn’t make it through her degree, she lives with no regrets. “Absolutely none,” she said. “It was all worth it.”

*Christine graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing from ACU.*

**Alumni Awards 2018  
winner: Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
Community Award**



# The accidental academic

Author: Christina Sexton

“I never thought it would go this far,” is how Ruby Warber wryly describes her unexpected academic career. With two masters degrees now under her belt, a possible PhD on the horizon, and two prestigious, highly competitive academic scholarships to her name, Ruby’s success seems limitless.

Growing up in rural Western Australia as a descendent of the Noongar people, Ruby never had grand career plans beyond simply getting a job she liked.

“My mum told me I had to go to university, but I always backflipped about what I was going to study,” she said. “I held a lot of different jobs during high school doing things I didn’t particularly want to do. All I wanted was a job that I liked going to. Luckily, I have that now.”

Ruby has spent a number of years working for the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in a range of social work and psychology roles. And it was while working at VAHS that she managed to fit in a Master of Psychology (Clinical) at ACU. Her initial aim was to qualify as a clinician to work with the Aboriginal community and close the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

With this focus in mind, she began working for VAHS in a social worker role while studying part-time.

“I was mostly working with people a lot older than me who had so many profound issues,” she said. “I think they took one look at me and thought, ‘No way, you’re too young!’. But it’s so hard to help someone once problems have been going on for 20 years. I started to see how things can start small and really snowball. I wish someone had reached out to give them the support they deserved when they were younger.”

Ruby realised she was more drawn to working with younger clients. “With teenagers, it’s easier to bring creative energy to their therapy, which is still

tricky as you’re also trying to help them,” she said. “Adolescence can really be a make or break time.”

In spite of the challenges of making work and study fit together, Ruby has always understood the importance of giving back to her community.

“Growing up in a rural area, I feel pretty lucky to have achieved the things I have,” she said. “However, I grew up with people who are just as smart and hard-working, and sometimes it can be a bit of luck. I would’ve always wanted to give back, but this is particularly why I want to work with my own Aboriginal community.”

At ACU, Ruby saw her chance to do just that and got involved in a tutoring program through the Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Higher Education Unit on the Melbourne Campus.

“I was working with students who were studying youth work, sociology or psychology,” she said. “But it quickly went beyond just reading over essays and became more of a mentoring role. Even when I left ACU, I continued on with the program and it kept me linked to the team at Jim-baa-yer who have been so incredibly supportive.”

Ruby has also spent time visiting a Victorian women’s prison to deliver psychoeducational workshops, as well as presenting sex education programs at a local high school. Known as ‘Deadly Sexy Health’, the program was created for Indigenous students after Ruby realised through her work at VAHS just how important reproductive health issues and sexuality are in adolescence.

“I was so impressed when some of the teenage girls at the school stayed back during their lunch break to ask us even more questions,” she said.

Before Ruby returns to her work at VAHS, she’s been busy completing her second masters degree at The London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK, with help from the prestigious Roberta Sykes Education Foundation Scholarship and the Chevening Scholarship.

“I really enjoyed my work as a psychologist in Australia, but it was very much about working behind closed doors,” she said. “If I want to enact change on a larger scale, then I need to learn more about health policy. My work in London has really opened my eyes to the global context of Indigenous health.”

While she has plans to continue working with Indigenous youth, for Ruby it looks like more research and a PhD is in her near future.

“Before I came to London, I just wanted to focus on developing my clinical skills. Now that I’ve had a look around and seen what other people are doing in the world, I’ve thought, ‘Oh, we can do that back in Australia as well.’ It’s given me some really good ideas. It’s funny as I really thought after my first masters, no, this is it, but things change.”

*Ruby graduated with a Master of Psychology (Clinical) from ACU.*

# Teaching new ways

Author: Christina Sexton

For Bachelor of Counselling graduate Peter Suka Ririma, the opportunity to study at ACU's Melbourne Campus was quite literally beyond anything he'd ever dreamt. Born and raised in a remote village in Papua New Guinea, Peter is a dedicated teacher and school counsellor who is committed to helping his community.

Winning an Australia Award scholarship, a prestigious prize administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs, was a turning point in Peter's life. The scholarship gives people from developing nations an opportunity to learn skills that drive change and development in their own countries.

"Winning that scholarship meant everything to me," Peter said. "It really was a divine blessing. I grew up in a rural, remote village with illiterate parents. I'd never given a single thought to the privilege of studying somewhere like Australia."

By completing his counselling degree in Australia, Peter's teaching career at home grew in ways he didn't think were possible.

"Before the scholarship brought me to ACU, I was limited to a certain extent in my career as a teacher counsellor," he said. "After I completed my Bachelor of Counselling, I was much better placed to perform my role as a welfare officer for the students in my care."

Peter works at Don Bosco Technical School (DBTS) in Port Moresby, helping Papua New Guinea's most vulnerable youth.

"DBTS is mostly for students who've been rejected by other schools. Many of my pupils are difficult students who are facing a range of problems that impact their lives enormously. They often have poor academic grades, behavioural

issues and discipline problems," he said. "Don Bosco provides these students with a second home – and a second chance in life."

Possessing advanced counselling knowledge and professional qualifications has been an incredible help to Peter. "It's given me the right tools to really reach out and assist the underprivileged young people in my school," he said. "I'm able to ask them more challenging questions about the issues in their day-to-day lives and help them with their self-reflection."

In addition to his professional support work at DBTS, Peter had always hoped to give back to his local community beyond the school walls. Turning his desire to make a difference into action, one of his biggest achievements to date is establishing Yate Rawame Community Day, which is an annual series of local events that help educate his community about the issues that matter most to them.

"The idea for Community Day actually came to me when I was at ACU," he said. "It's a three-day event that focuses on community hygiene, the local economy and education. Hygiene knowledge is particularly important for those living in remote areas, and I wanted to help people practice basic healthy living habits. For the economy, I wanted to share how people can generate an income to sustain living standards and we provide budget and finance tips. And for the education part





of the event, we cover important issues such as HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, disability awareness, and law and order, which includes discussing politics, corruption and elections.

“During the three-day event, we also encourage activities and acts of service, such as community cleaning, planting flowers and trees, and showcasing village products. We have a talent show and interdenominational church services too. I’m so proud to see my people benefit from the event.”

With an eye on his next challenge, Peter has set his sights on establishing his own counselling service.

“I want to register my own trauma counselling practice to help as many local people as I can,” he said. “I want to upgrade my knowledge with a masters in my near future and I’m hoping I get a chance to return to ACU.”

Taking advantage of every opportunity to advance his education has always been Peter’s priority, and he tries to lead by example for his students.

“Anything and everything is made possible by education,” he said. “My hope for my students is they prioritise their own schooling and work extra hard to learn as much as they can to find their rightful place in the world.”

*Peter graduated with a Bachelor of Counselling from ACU.*

Alumni Awards 2018  
winner: Young Alumni  
of the Year Award

# Entering new territory

Author: Christina Sexton

Ask Caitlin (Caity) Little about the downside to working as a paramedic on the frontlines of Alice Springs and you'll only be met with silence. If pressed, she will admit it's not always easy, but her incredible passion for her work and the satisfaction she draws from her extensive volunteering endeavours have always helped her through the tough times.





“It all started for me in Year 11 when I went to Rwanda on a fundraising trip,” Caity said. “I knew nothing about the place and very little about the country’s horrific genocide. While I was there, I visited some hospitals and I remember looking around thinking ‘these people are so happy and they have absolutely nothing’. And that was it. My interest in nursing and paramedicine only grew from there.”

Caity completed a Bachelor of Nursing/ Bachelor of Paramedicine at ACU’s Ballarat Campus and went on to work as a paramedic for two years at home in Gippsland.

“It was an exciting, busy job, but the truth is, I’d always dreamt of working with Indigenous people in a really remote setting,” she said. After being given a push by her supervisor at the time – “He said, ‘If you don’t do it now, you never will’” – Caity decided to swap country Victoria for Alice Springs.

Her plan to move north for a short six to 12-month jaunt quickly turned into four years – with no end in sight. “I got up here and I just loved it, even the weather,” she said. “Once you arrive, it’s really hard to leave.”

Caity now works part-time as a nurse in the emergency department of her local hospital and full-time as a paramedic for St John Ambulance. While most people associate St John Ambulance with first-aid courses and unpaid volunteers, in the Northern

Territory, it’s the only ambulance service available.

“The experience you gain from a place like Alice is invaluable to your career. I’ve seen and learnt things that will stick with me forever,” Caity said. “The work here is like nowhere else. You can’t even explain it to other paramedics as they think you’re exaggerating. We have a lot of problems with anti-social behaviour, alcohol abuse, and many people have housing issues. Sometimes we have to deal with violence and aggression, and often it is just you and your partner. We don’t always have the luxury of having the police with us on scene and we have to walk into some really hostile environments.”

Giving back to others has always been instinctive to Caity, and when she’s not busy working, her spare time is taken up by a range of voluntary roles. She’s a regular at the Alice Springs Animal Shelter, walking stray dogs and taking care of the animals, and she’s spent time working for the Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation, supporting children who come from families with mental health issues.

“It’s mostly for kids with parents in the Australian Defence Force who often have PTSD,” she explained. “We take the kids to a camp or run fun activity days. It’s about helping them develop strategies to manage the tough times and letting them know they’re not alone.”

Caity has also spent time volunteering with The Wild Medic Project in Nepal, a social initiative that brings communities and medical teams together. Last year, Caity and her team hiked up into remote villages to share their skills in first aid and CPR with local Nepalese school teachers. “The focus is on sustainability of the programs, so it’s about teaching the teachers and helping them implement their new skills into their classrooms,” she said.

While Caity remains eternally humble, ACU isn’t the first institution to recognise her natural ability to turn compassion into action. Last year she won St John Ambulance’s Paramedic of the Year award. “I was shocked! I didn’t see it coming and I definitely wasn’t expecting it. I was nominated by my peers so it was a huge honour for me.”

Caity isn’t sure what happens next, but she doesn’t seem too worried. With her career on track and plans to continue her volunteering, for now she’s content with life in the Territory and taking it as it comes.

*Caity graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing/Bachelor of Paramedicine from ACU.*

# Are selective schools good or bad for our kids?

## Q&A with Associate Professor Philip Parker

Author: Menios Constantinou

Selective schooling has had a string of bad publicity of late, with increasing calls for it to be phased out. But new research shows it's not necessarily selective schools that are the problem – it's school selectivity.

“Warped and elitist” was how one recent article headlined Australia's selective schools, while another labelled them “inequitable and unethical”. But the problems with selective schooling may be more complex than many would believe.

Last year, ACU's world-renowned educational psychologist, Professor Herb Marsh, warned the evidence “consistently challenges the assumption” that selective schools benefit academically gifted children.

More recent research from ACU's Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) has reinforced the theory that the more selective a country's schools are, the worse its children perform on average.

“Now is not the time to be considering more selective schools,” said the study's lead researcher, Associate Professor Philip Parker. “We should be finding ways to ensure our public schools integrate people from a diverse range of backgrounds and ability levels.”

### THE RISE IN ‘SELECTIVITY’

The movement against selective schooling is not new. In 2002, a landmark review of public education in NSW recommended the dismantling of the system to leave only the seven oldest selective high schools in Sydney.

But the recommendation never came to fruition. NSW has the bulk of selective schools in Australia (19 selective and 29 partially selective), while they also exist in much smaller numbers in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland.

In January this year, there were signs of an ideological shift amongst policymakers when Rob Stokes, the NSW Education Minister, flagged a move towards “inclusive” schooling.

“We need to have public schools that are inclusive of everyone rather than deliberately separate children on the basis that some are gifted and talented and others are not,” Stokes said, adding that there “may be merit in opening up selective schools to local enrolments.”







“In Australia we select kids into schools in lots of different ways – we’ve got private schools that favour those with wealthy parents, we have religious schools, we have selectivity by geography – there are lots of ways that schools can consist of kids that all look like each other in terms of their ability levels, and in our research, that’s what we have picked out as dangerous.”

But while Associate Professor Parker supports any move to limit selective schools, his research shows it’s not necessarily selective schooling that’s the problem; it’s school selectivity.

“I think we get hung up on whether a school is by name selective or not, but in reality there are only about four selective schools in Victoria, a few more in NSW and not many anywhere else,” he said.

Parker argues that private schools are also selective in nature, in that they favour students with wealthy parents by virtue of high fees.

“In Australia we select kids into schools in lots of different ways – we’ve got private schools that favour those with wealthy parents, we have religious schools, we have selectivity by geography – there are lots of ways that schools can consist of kids that all look like each other in terms of their ability levels, and in our research, that’s what we have picked out as dangerous.”

So, what are the dangers of increased school selectivity? We spoke with Associate Professor Parker to drill down into his research, which drew on evidence from 27 countries.

**One of the things you talk about is the ‘big fish little pond effect’, which describes the way a student’s belief about how smart they are is distorted by the students around them. Can you explain that for us?**

“Let’s say you’re an average performer in the country as a whole, you get the average score in NAPLAN but you get selected into a high-achieving school. Chances are that even though you’re an average performer nationwide, you’re going to be among the worst performing kids in your year grade, and as a result your academic self-concept is likely to be lower.

If we reverse that and imagine you’re a kid who is economically disadvantaged, who maybe lives in a rural area or lives in western Sydney, and have exactly the same NAPLAN score, chances are that in your school, you’re actually going to be among the top performing kids.

And so you have two kids with exactly the same NAPLAN score, and in one case their self-concept is diminished quite considerably, while in another school their self-concept is a whole lot higher.”

**Does that affect those children in different ways?**

“What our other research has found is that the more selectivity there is, the more distortion happens to the child’s self-concept.

The kids that are in high-performing selective schools feel even worse about themselves because they’re increasingly cut off from information about what they really look like in relation to the country as a whole.

Meanwhile, the kids who are in low-performing schools develop an unrealistically positive view of themselves because they’re cut off from experiencing what the true top performers look like.”

**Does this mean that selectivity is potentially a force for equality, in that it creates a more even playing field where disadvantaged students have a higher self-concept advantage?**

“Essentially what you’re doing is robbing self-concept from the rich kids and giving it to the poor kids. That may sound fantastic, but there is a complicating factor, and we call it the ‘perverse Robin Hood effect’.

Selectivity actually makes it really hard for poorer kids to ‘spend’ their increased self-concept on better outcomes, and that’s due to the lower expectation that society places on children that come from the schools they attend. And so they’re actually less able to translate their greater confidence into more ambitious post-school pathways.”

**Why do poorer kids struggle to convert the advantage into better outcomes?**

“The sort of school you go to – whether it’s a comprehensive school or a selective school, a Catholic school or a private school – sends everybody a clear signal about where you’re headed in life and the sorts of things we should be expecting from you.

So even though you may gain self-concept from going to a less competitive school, the school you go to really suggests the sorts of options that are available to you, and so you may find it hard to convert that self-concept into things like better access to university.”

**Selective schools have an entry test, but they still tend to be dominated by children from privileged backgrounds. Why is that the case?**

“The important thing to ask is who actually takes those tests? It’s almost certainly the case that with every dollar increase in socio-economic status, the likelihood of you taking that test increases, regardless of your underlying ability. It is also less likely for a child in a country area to gain entry, because there are very few selective schools in rural areas, or a child from a working class background, because they’re less likely to take one of those tests than a child from a privileged socio-economic background.”

**Your study found that Finland has the school system with the least self-concept distortion. What are they doing right and what can Australia learn from them?**

“In Finland, students have very low self-belief distortion because there is very little selectivity and very little funding disparity between schools. They come very close to randomly assigning kids to schools.

In Australia, one thing that’s happened culturally in recent years is that, to be a good parent, you need to choose the ‘right’ school. There tends to be more fear among parents, more concern about making sure their kid is selecting the right school. And I don’t really know the rationale for that, but whatever has happened, as a result Australia has skyrocketed in the selectivity rankings.

One of the ironies is that our research shows that, as selectivity within a country increases, average academic achievement in that country tends to decrease. At the local level our research also shows that in many cases a gifted child would do better in a local public school than they would do in a high achieving private or selective school.”

**How do you think we can address increased school selectivity from a policy perspective?**

“While my research focuses on the effects on achievement, I also worry about what kids – and I’m talking here about highly able kids, kids who are not so highly able, rich kids, poor kids – lose by not being educated with groups of kids who are unlike themselves.

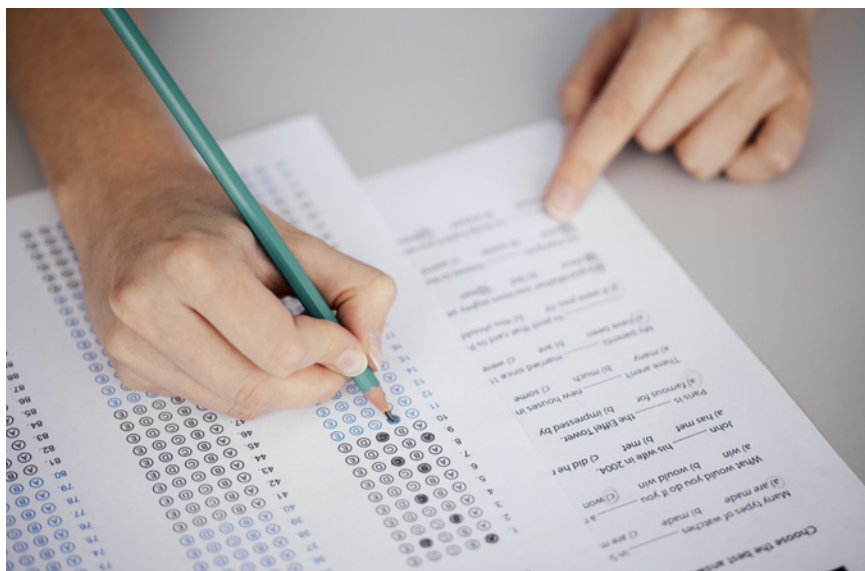
I think what we need to be focusing on more from a policy perspective is the value that students get from being around people who are not like them. What does that do for social solidarity? What does it teach you about learning how to get along with people who are not like you?

When you have kids with a mix of ability in the same classroom, there are benefits to the poorer performing kids because they get peer tutoring from more able students, and they also get a better picture of where they sit within society at large. And if we look at the research, there is evidence to say that gifted and talented children lose very little and may even gain from being educated within a classroom of diverse peers.

So I think in terms of policy circumstances, in many cases we’re having the right conversations. But I think we now need to start, within our society more widely, having a conversation about what benefit both advantaged and disadvantaged kids get from having more diverse peers.”

*Associate Professor Philip Parker, from ACU’s Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, has published in a number of international journals including Child Development Journal, Developmental Psychology Journal and Journal of Educational Psychology.*

Parker argues that private schools are also selective in nature, in that they favour students with wealthy parents by virtue of high fees.



Social

**Delete "Facebook"?**  
Deleting this app will also delete  
its data.

Cancel

Delete

Snapchat

Flickr

Instagram

# Digital detox: how taking a break from Facebook can reduce stress

Author: Menios Constantinou

Ever tried a Facebook detox? New research shows you'll probably be less stressed – but the hiatus may have some additional surprising effects on your wellbeing.

It's 7am and the alarm on your smartphone is buzzing. You slowly pick it up, unlock the screen, tap the Facebook icon and spend a few idle minutes scrolling through your news feed. And if you're like most people, this repeated browsing of social networking sites – sometimes passive, sometimes active – will happen several times throughout the day. At the bus stop, on the loo, in the lift, waiting for the barista to serve up your flat white...

The pervasiveness of social media has led many of us to try digital detoxing.

Tech giant Apple has developed a tool to help wean people off their devices. And even Facebook's own researchers have admitted that the mindless scrolling of social media can make people feel bad.

But what effect does Facebook have on our mental health? And do digital detoxes really work?

Stephanie Tobin from ACU's School of Psychology recently teamed up with Eric Vanman and Rosemary Baker from the University of Queensland to

test the effects a Facebook detox would have on stress and wellbeing.

The idea for the study, which was published in the *Journal of Social Psychology*, came from Dr Vanman's own experience of temporarily deleting his Facebook account.

"When I told colleagues about my 'Facebook vacations', I found I wasn't alone," he said.



"It seems that people take a break because they're too stressed, but return to Facebook whenever they feel unhappy because they have been cut off from their friends."

## THE BURDEN OF ONLINE FRIENDS

Vanman, Baker and Tobin's study, titled *The Burden of Online Friends*, involved 138 active Facebook users, with 60 participants running the gauntlet of 'No Facebook' for five days, and the rest continuing as 'Facebook Normal'.

The participants had saliva samples taken before and after the test period to measure the stress indicator, cortisol, and were also asked a series of questions on perceived stress and wellbeing.

"The main finding was that those who did not use Facebook in the five-day period had a lower level of the stress hormone cortisol, which signals a benefit to taking a break from Facebook," Dr Tobin said.

However, despite the reduction in physiological stress in the No Facebook group, perceived stress did not change – or as Dr Vanman put it, "they weren't aware their stress had gone down".

And perhaps most surprisingly, the

reduction in stress came with a catch, with participants also reporting lower levels of wellbeing during their five-day detox.

"Many of the No Facebook group were happy to return to Facebook after the break," Dr Tobin said. "They felt socially disconnected because they were effectively cut off from their network for those five days."

## DIGITAL DETOXING WORKS... IN THE SHORT TERM AT LEAST

Vanman, Baker and Tobin's study shows there may indeed be merit in switching off from Facebook for less than a week. The sheer volume of information on the platform can be a lot to process, which many users find emotionally taxing.

"When you're on Facebook on a regular basis, there is a huge amount of social information coming through from a wide range of people, it's a lot to keep up with and that can definitely be stressful," Dr Tobin said.

This, argues Dr Vanman, could mean that cycling between periods of active use and detoxing could be beneficial.

"It seems that people take a break because they're too stressed, but return to Facebook whenever they feel unhappy because they have been cut off from their friends," he said.

"It then becomes stressful again after a while, so they take another break. And so on."

However, while there may be value in disconnecting in order to clear your mind of clutter, not all people use Facebook in the same way. And Dr Tobin suggests that user habits are crucial to determining an individual's experience on the platform.

"When you look at the literature, it's often the passive users of Facebook who experience the negative effects on wellbeing, those who don't post or engage very much but just scroll through and consume content from others," she said.





**Dr Stephanie Tobin**

“The main finding was that those who did not use Facebook in the five-day period had a lower level of the stress hormone cortisol, which signals a benefit to taking a break from Facebook.”

So in general, the more you interact with others on Facebook – your close friends, acquaintances and like-minded users – the more positive your experience.

“Those who use Facebook to stay connected, who engage in active use, tend to experience the more positive outcomes, such as increased wellbeing and greater connectedness,” Dr Tobin said.

### **THE PROS AND CONS OF DISCONNECTEDNESS**

In 2014, Australian comedian Andrew Denton launched a one-man campaign against excessive social media use, inviting readers to join him in shunning the world of Facebook and Twitter.

“This is JOMO – Joy of Missing Out – a cheerful disengagement from the twin universes of Facebook and Twitter; one that gives me active pleasure in not minding that I haven’t seen, or been seen to respond, to the latest post, meme or snark,” Denton wrote.

“Step away from the device. You are not an algorithm. You are you. If you are willing to assert yourself over a desire to please strangers, you’ll be amazed at the great, liberating joy to be had in missing out.”

JOMO is, of course, a reaction to FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out, defined by one 2013 study as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent ... characterised by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing.”

This may partially explain what those in the No Facebook group in Vanman, Baker and Tobin’s study were experiencing during their five-day Facebook hiatus.

“I don’t think it’s as simple as saying, ‘well, you should never use Facebook’ – it’s much more complex than that,” Dr Tobin said.

“Our study showed both positive and negative outcomes. Yes, being on Facebook all the time may be stressful, but you may also feel less life satisfaction if you cut yourself off, especially if your whole social network is carrying on without you ... and you would imagine that the longer you’re off it, the more you’d miss out on.”

Dr Tobin and her colleagues said more research was needed to investigate the effects on stress levels during a longer break from Facebook. She is also investigating the effects that the goals and motivations of social media users have on their individual experiences.

*Dr Stephanie Tobin is a senior lecturer in ACU’s School of Psychology. Her research examines the psychology of social media use, including social media addiction and activities that promote and threaten belonging and wellbeing.*

# The Gunners' secret weapon

Author: Menios Constantinou

Australia has had its fair share of star players make an impact in the English Premier League. But one of our leading sports science innovators may prove to be the most influential Aussie yet in world soccer.

It was 20 years ago that Australian fitness guru Darren Burgess – then a sprightly sports science graduate – snail-mailed his resume to 91 European football clubs in the hope of scoring his dream job.

“They were letters because I didn’t have a fax machine, and I only got three back saying ‘thanks, but no thanks,’” Burgess said.

“The other 88 ignored me, which is fair enough because back then it was a long way to send a letter back. But that was how keen I was to work in professional soccer.”

One of the 88 clubs that snubbed Burgess was his current employer, top-flight English Premier League side Arsenal. And when they finally did get in touch, they definitely didn’t use snail mail.

It was midway through the 2017 AFL season while working as Port Adelaide’s head of high performance that Burgess received a phone call from the UK.





He was soon to learn that former Arsenal coach Arsène Wenger had handpicked him to be the club's director of high performance, a new role created specifically for him.

"The phone call was completely out of the blue. I answered and it was just, 'I'm calling from Arsenal to see if you would like to come and meet Mr Wenger and discuss some opportunities', and to be honest I didn't think it was completely serious at first," Burgess said.

Within a couple of weeks, he announced he was leaving the AFL and Port Adelaide to return to the Premier League with the Gunners, having previously worked with rival club Liverpool.

Even in the high profile world of English football, it's pretty rare for a backroom staff appointment to make news. But Burgess's signing prompted scores of headlines, some proclaiming he was "a genius" and "the best in the world".

"I have to admit that those headlines made me wince," he said. "The most important thing for me is gaining the respect of the people you work with, so I try not to pay too much attention to anything that can distract you from that."

If the past is anything to go on, Burgess shouldn't have much trouble winning the esteem of Arsenal's stars. Former AFL player Kane Cornes, who was at Port Adelaide while Burgess was the club's high performance manager, said the trainer's greatest strength was his ability to communicate a complex fitness program.

"He also makes the players believe they are fitter than they actually are," Cornes told the Football.London website. "It's a vital mindset that can be the difference between winning and losing."

And former Liverpool doctor Peter Brukner, who worked with Burgess for both Liverpool and the Australian national team, says he is "the best in the business".

"I can certainly say he's the best fitness person I've ever worked with, and obviously I've been in the game for a very long time," Brukner told *The Evening Standard*.

As one of Australia's leading sports science innovators, Burgess has an impressive resume to boot. His career kicked off with an eight-year lecturing gig in exercise science at ACU while working as a fitness coach at the Sydney Swans and soccer club Parramatta Power.

As well as his first Premier League role with Liverpool and two stints with Port Adelaide, he was head of sports science at Australian Football Federation in the lead-up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, which still stands as his career highlight.

"To help get the Socceroos to the World Cup, I'm not sure that will ever be overtaken as the dream job," Burgess said.

"I love Australia and I love Australian football and I've been a fan of the Socceroos for as long as I can remember, so that role was amazing and I'd certainly love to do it again down the track should the opportunity arise.

"But the Arsenal role – this is a dream job in another way. It's the culmination of 20-odd years of hard work and I'm really excited about what the next few years hold for the Arsenal Football Club. It's easily the best professional club I've seen in all my travels, so to have the privilege of working with them is a really amazing gift."

*Darren Burgess completed a PhD in sports science (talent development and player monitoring) at ACU. He also lectured at the University in exercise science.*

# Building a brand that's more than skin deep

Author: Menios Constantinou

Ella Baché boss Pippa Hallas is the third-generation entrepreneur who's got one eye on the past and the other on the future, as she leads her family business into the modern era.

It's 2009 and Pippa Hallas has just become the CEO of Ella Baché, the successful skincare brand brought to Australia by her grandmother Edith. She makes a daring decision to sponsor teenage sailor Jessica Watson in her controversial solo journey around the world.

"It really created a firestorm of controversy," said Pippa. "The amount of phone calls I took from media around our decision to support Jess was pretty hardcore, but for me, it was about being brave and taking risks. You have to when you lead a business, otherwise you play it safe the whole time and nothing ever happens."

The company's decision to sponsor Watson was, in the end, a masterstroke.

Three days before her 17th birthday, she completed her seven-month voyage and triumphantly sailed into Sydney Harbour. Her yacht came to be known as Ella's Pink Lady.

"When you meet Jess, you quickly realise she's an amazing person who deserves to be backed," Pippa said.

"She's gutsy, inspirational and a pioneer, and that reflected the brand we are and made her a great fit with the values of Ella Baché, so I had no problem defending our decision to sponsor her."

## THREE GENERATIONS OF PIONEERS

Ella Baché has a history of brave, inspirational women. The skincare company was founded by Pippa's great aunt Ella Baché in Paris in the 1930s, at a time when there were very few women running companies. Pippa's Hungarian-born grandmother Edith Hallas launched the brand in Australia to great fanfare in the 1950s when she strutted into David Jones in Sydney in a bid to get her products stocked.

"We had invented the first hot wax on the market, which you could literally put on where the hair was and remove it, and my grandma walked in, went straight to the buyer, hiked up her skirt and waxed her legs, right there in the middle of the store in Elizabeth Street," Pippa said.

That was 1954, and it forged a relationship between Ella Baché and David Jones that has lasted more than 60 years.

"She was incredibly gutsy, and both Edith and Ella were pioneering women in their own right," she said. "They were innovative, they were brave, and it is pretty awesome to have that in my DNA."

"We had invented the first hot wax on the market, which you could literally put on where the hair was and remove it, and my grandma walked in, went straight to the buyer, hiked up her skirt and waxed her legs, right there in the middle of the store in Elizabeth Street."





“My dad always said to me, ‘don’t ask for permission, just apologise later’, and it’s one of those things that influenced my thinking even though I never realised it at the time.”

#### **CARRYING ON THE FAMILY LEGACY**

While Pippa was a kid, her father John Hallas was the driving force behind Ella Baché, cementing the brand’s position as the nation’s largest skincare company. She would often help out at the warehouse, tagging along when her dad and grandparents Edith and George would pack skincare products. But for many years, Pippa had not considered the idea of joining the family business.

After completing her Bachelor of Commerce at ACU, she forged a successful marketing and advertising career both here and in London. In her early 30s she decided to “jump ship” and move back to Sydney to become Ella Baché’s marketing manager. And it wasn’t an easy transition.

“I was completely and utterly naive. My dad lived up the coast in Byron and although he still owned the business, he wasn’t involved in the day-to-day operations, so there hadn’t been family members in the business for 20 years,” she said.

“For me to walk in with my surname, the staff totally thought I was a family spy and it freaked them out in ways I could not understand.”

After years building her credibility in advertising firms overseas, Pippa had to prove herself all over again. She won the trust of her peers and went on to take the position of CEO, bringing her own down-to-earth style to the role. But she also faced hurdles in that transition.

“It did take me a while to perceive myself as the person where the buck

stops, and it was a real balancing act to take what was good about the past and protect it while also making the changes that were necessary for the business to move forward into the future,” Pippa said.

“I had to make the role my own, and if that meant doing things differently from what my dad or Ella or any other person in this business would do, then that’s okay.”

While some culture change has taken place at Ella Baché since she took the helm, Pippa said the basic principles of the company go right back to the 1930s.

“The values that Ella brought to the business – innovation, being brave, pushing boundaries, working hard, creating good relationships and making people feel like they’re family – those things still apply,” she said.

The impact of technology and the rise of e-commerce and social media have, however, “had a humungous impact on the way we do things”.

“As a company that’s been around for so long, we’ve had to adapt, to be proactive, to use technology to get to know our market and stay agile, and to continue to take risks,” Pippa said.

“We’re living in such a disruptive environment globally at the moment, but when Ella launched the business in the 1930s, World War II was about to happen, so there was an equal amount of disruption back then.”

### **PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES**

Ella Baché’s advertising campaigns have always been bold. The business has “grown around the idea that we have to push boundaries, that’s our personality as a brand and that’s what challenger brands do”, Pippa said.

In 2013, the company had a billboard featuring three naked women banned because the serious expression on their faces was deemed to be too sexy. Ella Baché defended its ad and pointed out that it had run risqué campaigns in the past, including “ads approved with nude men and women hugging and kissing”.

Perhaps its most legendary campaign was the ad featuring a group of naked Sydney Swans players, each with a big tube of sunscreen in front of their nether region and the tagline: “Protect your largest organ, longer.”

“You could be a lot more risqué in the 80s and 90s than you can in this day and age, where you virtually get in trouble for doing anything,” Pippa said.

“My dad always said to me, ‘don’t ask for permission, just apologise later’, and it’s one of those things that influenced my thinking even though I never realised it at the time.”

These days Ella Baché’s marketing strategy is increasingly focused on social media, where it creates brand awareness and customer engagement with the help of influencers like model Tahnee Atkinson. It also launched the #IWillBeMe campaign, focused on empowering women to be comfortable in their own skin.

“There is a huge market at the moment which I call ‘the fast food of beauty’, and it’s driven by the social media trend of people using botox and fillers to change how they look,” Pippa said.

“We wanted to make sure that we had a voice in the market to really empower people to express their individuality and make the most of their individual skin, as opposed to erasing it.”

As for Pippa, though her role is constantly challenging, she has shown she is comfortable in her own skin as Ella Baché’s leader.

“I’m passionate about this business, I always have been, and although I’m proud of its past, I’m conscious that we need to continually reinvent ourselves in order to stay relevant,” she said.

“That goes for me personally too, because if I don’t reinvent and acquire new knowledge and get excited about new things, then I can’t possibly pass that onto the staff and the Ella Baché family as a whole.”

*Pippa Hallas graduated from ACU with a Bachelor of Commerce (Marketing).*

“It did take me a while to perceive myself as the person where the buck stops, and it was a real balancing act to take what was good about the past and protect it while also making the changes that were necessary for the business to move forward into the future.”

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# America and guns: Q&A with Professor of History, Michael Ondaatje

Author: Menios Constantinou



Professor Michael Ondaatje

Why does tighter gun control continue to elude the United States, despite regular mass shootings, each leading to a period of national soul searching? The complex answer includes the influence of the powerful gun lobby, the widely publicised ‘culture wars’ in the US, and the fact that firearms have been embedded in American society and culture for a very long time. We spoke to US expert Michael Ondaatje, Professor of History and National Head of ACU’s School of Arts, to help us better understand America’s attitude towards guns.

**The Las Vegas massacre in October 2017 was the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history, with 58 people killed and 546 wounded. It was yet another incident, in a long line of incidents, which prompted horror and anger – but little change. Why does America have such a ‘blind spot’ when it comes to guns?**

“I am not sure it is right to say that ‘America’ has a ‘blind spot’ when it comes to guns, but there certainly is a gun problem in the US, and this problem needs to be discussed openly and rationally if the goal is to reduce gun violence through gun reform.

Unfortunately, I don’t see such a discussion being possible today. Every time there’s a gun massacre in the United States, the response is more or less the same. People express shock and horror, offer sympathy to the families of the victims, and pledge to keep them in their prayers. Liberals and those on the left of politics demand ‘gun reform now’, while conservatives or those on the right of politics caution that ‘this is not the time to politicise

tragedy’ and insist that, if anything, the nation needs more guns in the ‘right’ hands. Insults are hurled by both sides, with hyperbole substituting for serious dialogue, and soon any hope of achieving reform evaporates.

In many respects, the gun ‘debate’ reflects the wider polarisation in US political culture. Legitimate competing interests on the other side of any debate are barely tolerated; politicians and political activists typically assume the worst about their opponents (they are not just ‘wrong’, they are ‘evil’, and must be crushed); and there is relentless shouting about problems, but rarely, if ever, a pragmatic way forward to achieve solutions. This is certainly the case when it comes to guns and gun laws in America.”

**How would you describe the gun problem in modern America?**

“Guns are a major problem in America because they facilitate killing, and a lot of it. Since 1960, nearly 1.5 million Americans have died from guns, either in homicides, suicides or accidents. Every year twice as many Americans

lose their lives to guns than die in terrorist attacks around the world. Mass shootings, like the recent ones in Las Vegas and Florida, invariably capture the most public attention, but these shootings account for only a tiny fraction of gun-related deaths in the United States.

In fact, most gun victims die in non-mass shootings that occur daily in communities across the country.

This is the real tragedy – how normal and ‘every day’ gun violence has become in the US, particularly in poor urban areas.

To outsiders looking in on America, the problems seem obvious – far too many guns in circulation (300 million) and inadequate gun laws. The solutions also appear obvious: reduce the number of guns and tighten gun laws. But the history of guns in America is long and complicated, and this history has been tied up in larger debates over American identity and patriotism. Many see reducing gun violence as a moral imperative, but doing this won’t be easy, knowing what we know about American history.”

### What is it about American history that has made guns such an issue in America today?

“For many Americans, guns are a fundamental part of the American experience (think: War of Independence, Civil War, Frontier) and the right to own a gun is seen as connected to core American values like individualism and personal liberty.

Today’s gun rights activists see themselves as heirs to the American Revolution, vigorously defending the Constitution against ‘left-wing forces’ seeking to restrict individual liberty broadly, and the right of the people to bear arms specifically.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) is the major gun rights advocacy organisation in the country, with a membership of five million and an annual budget in excess of \$300 million. Since the early 1970s, the NRA has been remarkably successful at promoting the view that gun regulation of any kind threatens the freedom of American citizens and will lead to ‘tyrannical’ government.

Before the 1970s, the NRA’s position was not so rigid. NRA presidents actually supported gun regulation and as late as 1968 the organisation was promoting ‘gun safety’ and helping President Lyndon Johnson pass the Gun Control Act. The question we need to ask is: what changed? To understand the issue of guns in modern America, the primary focus needs to be on the ‘culture wars’ of the past 50 years. Politics has been – and continues to be – the greatest impediment to gun reform.”

### What specifically is the connection between the ‘culture wars’ and the rise of the NRA?

“Before the 1970s, NRA advocacy around the Second Amendment (‘the right to keep and bear arms’) was rare, but in the late 1960s concerns about rising crime led increasing numbers of citizens to purchase guns for protection, and the NRA rallied behind them and gave expression to their anxieties. By the mid-1970s faith in government was at an all-time low, and there was heightened paranoia that the government was plotting to take away people’s guns.

There was also a wider conservative backlash against liberalism and the ‘excesses’ of the 1960s. The rise of anti-government sentiment and anti-liberal sentiment, together, propelled the NRA to a powerful position in American politics. Guns essentially became a symbol of a larger political fight.”

### Do you see any prospect of gun reform in America in the near future?

“In some respects, I am not overly optimistic. In recent years the explosion of mass shootings has not led to gun reform, despite strong support from President Obama. It was the Sandy Hook massacre of 2012 that reinforced to me how difficult it would be to secure reform: if the mass slaughter of children isn’t enough, then what will it take? Sandy Hook was a ‘turning point’ where history failed to turn. President Trump is part of the problem, not the solution. The NRA donated \$30 million to his

election campaign and since becoming president he has signalled to them that they have ‘a true friend and champion’ in the White House. The NRA is a formidable outfit that won’t be defeated easily. They are relentless on this issue and they know how to win. For years now, they have debated, lobbied and electioneered more effectively than gun reform activists.

But it’s not all doom and gloom. Gun ownership in the US is dropping significantly. Support for stricter gun control is at an all-time high, with more than 90 per cent of Americans expressing support for universal background checks.

A social movement has emerged in the aftermath of the Parkland massacre – led by survivors – and has broken through where previous protests have failed. But in the years ahead gun control activists will need to do more than march. They will need to be pragmatic and strategic. They will need to recognise that not all gun rights supporters are extremists and that compromise is possible and crucial. In the short term, gun reform activists should forget about banning assault weapons – that is not an argument that they are going to win – and instead focus their energies on background checks and stricter gun safety regulations. They should speak for Americans, not against gun owners, leveraging the nation’s changing demographics more effectively than they have up to now. More minority citizens, increasing urbanisation and growing numbers of Americans in

“It was the Sandy Hook massacre of 2012 that reinforced to me how difficult it would be to secure reform: if the mass slaughter of children isn’t enough, then what will it take? Sandy Hook was a ‘turning point’ where history failed to turn.”





higher education will mean stronger support for gun control in the years ahead.”

**Australia’s gun laws are often cited as a good model for America. In 1996 former Prime Minister John Howard introduced the mandatory gun buyback scheme after the Port Arthur massacre. 650,000 guns were bought back. But, of course, America’s gun problem is dramatically larger in scale than Australia’s. Is the comparison even relevant?**

“I don’t want to take anything away from John Howard. For his leadership on this issue he deserves the highest praise. He stood up to Australia’s gun lobby and members of his own party to push through (what turned out to be) a very successful gun law reform package. But the situation is very different in America, where the historical commitment to guns is much

stronger and there is a mass guns rights movement spearheaded by the NRA. There is no Australian solution to this uniquely American problem. Change will have to come from within America.”

**What are some the challenges in American politics over the next two to three years, and what are the prospects of an Oprah Winfrey candidacy in 2020?**

“If a Trump presidency is possible, then an Oprah candidacy certainly is, but whether this is desirable is another matter. Some like to say she’s everything he’s not (she’s black, a woman and she likes to read), but I’m not convinced that America’s interests will be best served by another celebrity president outsider. An Oprah candidacy would be exciting – no doubt about it – but I increasingly prefer politics to be light on the ‘excitement’ and heavy with

pragmatic policy proposals. It’s not as if there aren’t challenges to address. How to rebuild trust and restore faith in institutions? How to counter the tribalism and authoritarianism on the right and the left? How to reinvigorate liberal democracy? Trump offers no solutions, but who are the Republicans and Democrats offering serious responses to contemporary challenges? Americans – and the world – need these people to stand up.”

*Michael Ondaatje is a Professor of History and Head of ACU’s National School of Arts. He is an expert in American political history, with a particular focus on conservatism, foreign policy and presidential elections.*



# After the final siren: helping athletes adapt to life after sport

Author: Menios Constantinou

When elite athletes blow the whistle on their careers, many struggle with depression, unemployment and a lack of a sense of purpose. So how can we help sportspeople to adapt?

In a sports mad country like Australia, the celebrity and esteem that comes with elite sporting success can make athletes feel on top of the world. But what becomes of our sporting heroes when the stadium lights are dimmed?

Last February the rugby world was stunned by the news that former Wallaby Dan Vickerman took his own life at the age of 39. The rugby great, who had battled depression, often confided in friends of the difficulties he faced in retirement.

“When you’re an athlete in the spotlight and in the bubble, everything – the highs and the lows – is magnified and intensified, and so when they retire, many sportspeople experience sheer shock and a deep sense of bereavement,” said Associate Professor John Saunders, the national coordinator of ACU’s Elite Athlete and Performer Program.

In recent years, more and more athletes have spoken out about their struggles to adapt to life after hanging up the boots.

Former Opals captain Lauren Jackson, one of Australia’s greatest-ever basketballers, felt like she was “put out to pasture” after her forced retirement due to injury.

Champion cricketer Nathan Bracken struggled with joblessness and said he “felt a failure” when he couldn’t score a job at a supermarket.

Others have found it hard to throw off the shackles of their sporting careers.

“All of a sudden, you’re standing in a room full of strangers ... your new work friends,” said former Wallaby Brendan Cannon.

“They’re wanting to talk to you about what you used to be, and all you want to focus on is what you want to become.”

## THE PROS AND CONS OF PROFESSIONALISATION

Once upon a time, athletes had day jobs that they did alongside their sporting careers. First-grade rugby league players slogged it out on the paddock

on Sunday afternoon, only to clock on for work the next morning as labourers and tradesmen.

The widespread professionalisation of sport means many athletes no longer need day jobs. But does this potentially leave athletes more prone to joblessness post-career?

“That’s undoubtedly the case,” Associate Professor Saunders said.

“Professionalism has changed the whole nature of sport, and while there are positive aspects, in that most athletes can now focus on their sport full-time, there are also negatives, because in some cases there’s no opportunity for them to pursue other aspects of life, including training for a vocation they can do after sport.

“And when you get people as young as 14 who are put into talent squads with professional sporting teams, it’s understandable that they become consumed by their sport, often at the expense of other aspects of life.”

## 'IDENTITY FORECLOSURE' IN ATHLETES

Elite athletes who experience early success in their chosen endeavour also tend to have fewer opportunities to explore alternative aspects of their identity.

This can lead to 'identity foreclosure', the act of committing to an identity prematurely, without proper exploration or choice.

"As we develop, we all find ourselves in multiple roles – as scholars at learning institutions, for example, or as sportsmen and women out on the sports field, as members of our family and social group – and all of these aspects become part of our overall identity," Saunders said.

"But when one identity takes over and consumes us without allowing the other identities to be developed and explored, that's where the word 'foreclosure' comes into play as a useful way of describing how we shut ourselves off."

The result is that athletes rely excessively on their identities as sportspeople, which can sometimes lead to an intense sense of loss when their sports career ends.

"Imagine something that's so much a part of your life and your identity, something you've pursued with such intensity for years, is just taken away

from you, and all of a sudden it's like you've got no purpose and you've got to start your life all over again," Saunders said.

"It's a very tough thing to deal with, even for the most balanced of individuals, and that's why it can lead to all sorts of problems, including depression."

## TACKLING THE BLACK DOG

Sport was once seen as something that could improve an individual's defences against mental illness, the theory being that they'd learn the lessons of life on the sporting field and apply them elsewhere in life.

However, a recent Australian study of 224 retired athletes found that one in four suffered from depression, which roughly corresponds with the level of depression in the general population.

"The theory that competitive sport shields athletes from the symptoms of mental illness has been turned upside-down," Saunders said.

"This has happened in association with the professionalisation of modern sport and the development of intense athlete development systems, which have as their primary goal the development of podium athletes. Today sportspeople can be some of the first to suffer the mental illnesses that so many in the general population are suffering as well."

## HELPING ATHLETES TO PREPARE FOR POST-CAREER LIFE

Dan Vickerman's death shone a light on the need for athletes to prepare for the transition from sports star to regular person.

But while there are dozens of programs that seek to assist retiring athletes, Saunders believes many of them have shortcomings.

"The problem with many of the programs is that they concentrate solely on the transition into retirement. They've got a remedial mindset: here's a problem, let's put a patch on it and fix it," he said.

"In my view the responsibility for making sure athletes are able to develop multiple identities starts at the very beginning and should be carried all the way through their careers, because it's a continuous educative process of helping them to achieve work-life harmony."

Forty-one universities across Australia have combined with the Australian Institute of Sport to form the Elite Athlete Friendly University network, which has "done some great groundwork", Saunders said.

"I think it shows the way forward and promotes the importance of helping the athlete to develop as a person while they are pursuing excellence on the sporting arena," he said. "Waiting until the athlete is about to retire is often too late."

**"The theory that competitive sport shields athletes from the symptoms of mental illness has been turned upside-down."**

*John Saunders is Associate Professor in Exercise Science and Sport Management at ACU. He is the Editor-in-Chief of International Sports Studies.*



# From learning to leadership

Author: Kristy Porter



Just three years after graduating from her ACU education degree, Erin Eade has become the first female principal, and the first Aboriginal principal, of Mogo Public School.

Located in a small heritage village on the NSW south coast, Mogo Public School is close-knit – with only 37 students, the majority of whom identify as Aboriginal, in attendance. A proud Wangaibon woman herself, Erin is aware of the effect her new appointment will have on the small community.

“Wow, it’s an accomplishment isn’t it? I wasn’t even aware I would be the first female and first Aboriginal principal until recently. It wasn’t something I used as motivation when I set my goal of becoming principal of Mogo, but it is a unique opportunity that I take seriously,” Erin said.

“Being the first female principal means that I am in the perfect position to be a role model to female students, remind the community that females can achieve great things, and that there are many opportunities for women in leadership roles.

“Being the first Aboriginal principal is something that I am also proud of. It is very humbling. If someone had said to me four years ago that I would be in the position I am in now, I would not have believed them.”

## ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

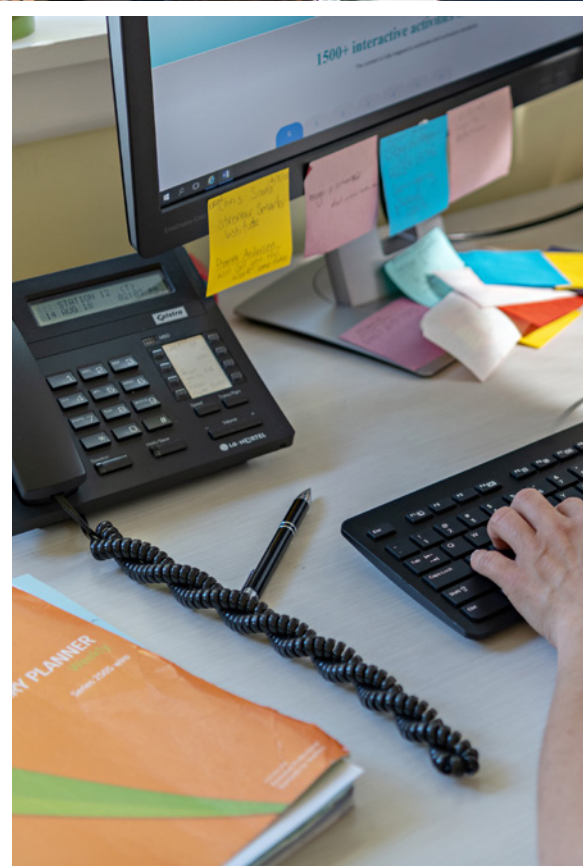
Erin, who has worked at the school for three years, is backed by her supportive community and colleagues who have eagerly been awaiting her appointment.

“I am glad that I surrounded myself with people who encouraged me. In the lead up, people would often ask me if I was applying for the job. It was positive reinforcement like this that guided me through the process,” Erin said.

“Previous principal Jason Barby encouraged my skill set, and challenged, mentored and supported my developing leadership skills. He gave me the courage and confidence to take on leadership roles in the school and in my second year, I was given the opportunity to relieve as principal on a number of occasions.

“As a teaching principal, it is a balance of classroom teaching (which is a priority) and leading and managing a school. We are a great and passionate team of staff at Mogo PS, who share the same vision and values, and we are dedicated to improving educational outcomes for all students through quality partnerships with parents and community.”







### TAKING THE LONG WAY ROUND

Erin left school in Year 10 so the path to principal wasn't a straight line, especially when you factor in marriage and motherhood. She was working at the Department of Education in Griffith as an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer when a colleague encouraged her to try the Away From Base program at ACU. Away From Base allows students to live and work in their local community, while studying online and attending residential study blocks.

"I was interested in learning about the curriculum content being taught in schools, and I knew ACU's program would allow this. Plus it suited my lifestyle. The resources available to participants made it easier to complete the degree, and the Aboriginal perspective appealed to me.

"In the beginning, I found it a bit daunting travelling into the big smoke on my own, and getting back into the role as a student was surreal, but having the right group of supportive friends, family and staff at ACU made it enjoyable.

"Although at times it was challenging, I soon learned that I could manage the balance of work, university and family. It was while studying at ACU I realised my potential, and that I could combine my passion for education and my passion for my culture."

### INSPIRING OTHERS

Yalbalanga Indigenous Higher Education Unit Coordinator Danielle Dent played a big role in Erin's journey and was a rock during her time at ACU. She is not surprised at Erin's success and sees the positive impact it has on other students.

"Erin started her degree, then took a break from studies, then returned to complete it. Having the passion and drive to complete a degree, especially away from home, is something special," Danielle said.

"I am not surprised at her success. Erin was a high-achieving student throughout her time at ACU. She was determined and committed to complete her studies no matter what

obstacles came her way. I am so proud of her.

"I think Erin's achievements are huge for other students currently studying, not only in this degree, but all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Erin will be an amazing leader in her community and a great role model for Aboriginal people that are thinking about going to university for the first time.

"Students have been on campus and heard Erin's story and have been discussing her achievement. One student said, 'that's what I want to aim for, if Erin can do it so can I'."

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

It's clear that Erin's passion for education and empowerment has already allowed her to make an impact. The mother of three is now looking ahead to the positives she can generate in the future.

"My journey in getting to this point has been longer than expected but because of that I have had many experiences that have made me more resilient, more competitive and more eager to succeed," she said.

"Each morning I literally jump out of bed, ready and excited about what the day will bring. As an Aboriginal person I hope my experience, enthusiasm and positive nature can demonstrate to my students that they too can dream big, and through hard work and determination, they can succeed.

"I know I can make changes with the work that I do. Principals and teachers play an important role in making a positive difference every day. The community know that I have each and every student's best interest at heart and I will continue to challenge myself to create opportunities that are for their benefit, and continue to raise the bar.

"Education creates empowerment, empowerment creates opportunity."

*Erin graduated from ACU with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) (Indigenous Studies) and a Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.*

# The social factors shaping radicalisation and violent extremism in Australia

Author: Menios Constantinou



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VIL



A hostage falls into the arms  
of a tactical police officer after  
escaping from the Lindt Cafe  
in Martin Place yesterday  
and (inset) Sheik Man Haron  
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Chris McKee

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SELF-STYLED SHEIK IDENTIFIED AS GUNMAN

# Hostages

PAUL MALEY  
CAMERON STEWART

AN Iranian self-styled...

The rise in domestic terrorism in Western countries like Australia, the UK and France has troubled our politicians and the wider society. Dr Joshua Roose, author of the book *Political Islam and Masculinity: Muslim Men in Australia*, helped us to navigate the minefield of violent extremism and radicalisation in the West.

For many Australians, the spectre of radicalism hit home when the front pages of our major newspapers were plastered with pictures of Aussie jihadists who had lined up to fight alongside Islamic State (IS).

A string of terrorist incidents on home soil, most notably the Lindt Cafe siege in Sydney, had fanned the flames of fear. And in an effort to combat the threat of violent extremism, the Australian government poured millions of dollars into de-radicalisation programs.

Our politicians have been vocal in expressing their concerns about the rise of violent jihadist movements. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull linked the rise in terror attacks on “radical Islamist ideology” and former Foreign Minister Julie Bishop declared that Islamic State was “the most significant threat in the global rules-based order to emerge in the past 70 years.”

There is no doubt that the group’s narrative was planted in fertile soil in the West, and a few young Muslim-Australian men fell prey to the sophisticated IS propaganda machine.

Dr Joshua Roose is the Director of ACU’s Institute for Religion, Politics

and Society and an expert on political Islam. His work has explored some of the root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism in Australia.

### THE ‘9/11 GENERATION’

Why did so many young Australian-born men leave their families and homes to fight in Syria and Iraq?

It’s a complex question with no simple answer. In his book, Dr Roose referred to the ‘9/11 Generation’: Young Muslim men and women born around the time of the September 11 attacks who have, he says, “grown up in an environment that is inherently hostile towards them in terms of the media and political discourse.”

Dr Roose has conducted case studies of Australian men involved in suicide attacks and found some of the key shaping influences often weren’t discussed in connection with radicalisation. These include vulnerability, shame and grief.

“The first generation of Australians to be connected with this type of radicalism embodied that image of violent extremists: they were all big guys, they were all going to the gym, they had full-length beards,” Dr Roose said.

“But what we’re seeing more recently is these young men who don’t look the part. They’re not dressing like hard-line Salafis (an ultra-conservative branch of Sunni Islam), they’re not going to the gym, they don’t embody that sort of resistance identity or outlook... but what they are is incredibly angry and incredibly emotional, there’s a lot of turmoil bubbling inside them.

“Many of these young men have experienced extreme grief, vulnerability, a sense of humiliation and a sense of shame, and it’s about how they’re responding to those extreme emotions when you’ve got a group like Islamic State actively targeting them online, talking about empowerment and fighting back.”

### RADICAL GROUPS A ‘FIX’ FOR WOUNDED MASCULINE PRIDE

In exploring the role that masculinity plays in radicalisation and violent extremism, Dr Roose has argued that Australian-born Muslims reference who they are as men in relation to “those with real power, those with more resources and more status than themselves”.

“Australian society is still dominated by white men in suits. If you look at



the boardroom and if you look at the Australian government, diversity hasn't made many inroads," he said.

"In comparison, many Australian-born Muslim men are lacking things as basic as being able to afford a car and a house and resources in order to be able to marry, they are in these downward economic trajectories."

The comparison "reinforces a wounded masculine pride", Dr Roose said.

"You're promised as an Australian that you can do anything, but these young men are hitting a glass ceiling and finding out that's not quite true," he said.

"That causes a lot of anger and a lack of belief in Australia, and so when this alternative narrative comes from Islamic State, offering them not only empowerment, but saying, 'come and fight for us and you can effectively go from being zero to hero overnight', that's a very attractive fix."

### ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT IN THE TABLOID MEDIA

The Western media's role in helping Islamic State to sell its message has been widely explored. The Lowy Institute's 2016 paper *Islamic Estate Propaganda and the Mainstream Media* declared that IS "relies on Western media reporting to amplify its message... Unwittingly, the Western media has become an accomplice to Islamic State's aims".

What's less often talked about is the effect the media's reporting has had on Muslims in the West. Australian author Randa Abdel-Fattah has written about "the pervasive and relentless impact

of political and media discourse in training people to fear Muslims".

Dr Roose agreed that mainstream depictions of Muslims in the tabloid media can lead young Muslims to feeling persecuted and demonised.

"The re-emergence of radical Islam through Islamic State, replacing Al-Qaeda, led to a return to the tabloid fix, of easy cannon fodder for the tabloid media," he said.

"That's very often listed by people in the wider Muslim community in Australia as a major cause of alienation from wider society.

"On the other hand, when [non-Muslim] Australians receive this messaging, this often extreme messaging through the mainstream media, which in many cases is their primary source of news and information, is it irrational for them to fear Islam?"

### THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO RECRUIT FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Islamic State has been a latent force in the social media wars since it declared its so-called caliphate in 2014, and Western foreign fighters have been instrumental in helping to recruit others to the cause, Dr Roose said.

"People like [Australian Islamic State member] Neil Prakash and others have effectively sat in rooms and spent their days messaging and tweeting and engaging potential fighters, young Muslims who are seeking this sense of belonging, and what they do is target their humiliation, their sense of alienation, and they throw that message out there through

sophisticated videos and tweets and so on, and some young Muslims are buying into it."

### PREJUDICE AGAINST MUSLIMS AND THE PAULINE HANSON EFFECT

Does prejudice play a role in adding to the sense of alienation felt by many Australian-born Muslims? "It's not helpful," Dr Roose said, "but it's certainly not the sole cause."

"I'm personally critical of the concept of 'Islamophobia' because what it does is it polarises. It effectively says that if you don't like Islam then you are irrationally scared of it.

"There are many, many Australians out there who've never even met a Muslim, let alone worked with one or developed a friendly relationship with one, and that is where some prejudice can occur.

"This is why more work needs to be done to bring communities together and to put people into contact with one another, to break down those barriers and walls."

And while some argue that Pauline Hanson's re-emergence on the political scene with a strong anti-Islam policy push was an insult to Australian Muslims, Dr Roose said she was "effectively preaching to the converted".

"She's been successful in gaining some attention, but if you look at the response to her burqa stunt, she received immediate condemnation from [former Federal Attorney-General] George Brandis and the Liberal Party, Labor, the Greens and others, and I think that's the key," he said.



IS "relies on Western media reporting to amplify its message... Unwittingly, the Western media has become an accomplice to Islamic State's aims".



Martin Place in Sydney, after the Lindt Cafe siege.

### COMMUNITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The NSW Government's Radicalisation e-brief lists "close personal relationships" as one of the key driving factors that lead people toward violent extremism. This is often through radical fringe groups that are ostracised by mainstream mosques, Dr Roose said.

"When we talk about Muslim communities in Australia, we're talking about 80 different nationalities, we're talking many different languages, we're talking incredible diversity, but who represents these communities?

"It's the older generation, which is usually out of touch with young people and isn't very good at engaging with them, and it creates this vacuum where young people can be easily exploited by radical imams.

"Almost 99 per cent of the time the self-proclaimed imams are men, talking to groups of young men, and so that leadership is important and can propel them towards further action, which can include going overseas to fight with the Islamic State or conducting violent attacks here in Australia."

### THE EMERGENCE OF POPULISM AND ECONOMIC MARGINALISATION

You think the rise of Donald Trump, Brexit and the Islamic State bear no direct relation to each other? Dr Roose makes a strong case that they are part of the same phenomenon.

"In recent years we've seen the emergence of different types of populism, and people who are feeling marginalised and alienated are being drawn to narratives that offer them empowerment, be it through Donald Trump, be it through the far right movements in Europe and the push for Brexit, be it through Bernie Sanders, a populist who attracted a more hard left supporter base," Dr Roose said.

"I argue that these same forces that are driving working class men in rural America, or the UK and Europe, are quite similar to the forces that are shaping people to be drawn to the IS movement, and that's effectively an economic marginalisation.

"The new economy is pushing people to the fringes, and you can either perform in the knowledge economy and adapt and evolve or get thrown on the scrap heap.

"Take that and combine it with a sense of alienation on the basis of your race and religion, combine it with many other factors – a lack of critical thinking skills developed at school because they've dropped out, a lack of an upward mobility because they can't get a decent job, a sense of humiliation – these are key triggers that we are finding with young men. Combine all of these factors and we have a perfect storm that's being exploited by populist movements, including Islamic State."

"...combine it with a sense of alienation on the basis of your race and religion, combine it with many other factors – a lack of critical thinking skills developed at school because they've dropped out, a lack of an upward mobility because they can't get a decent job, a sense of humiliation – these are key triggers that we are finding with young men."

*Dr Joshua Roose is the Director of ACU's Institute for Religion, Politics and Society. He is a member of the Victorian Government's Institute for Social Cohesion. His book Political Islam and Masculinity: Muslim Men in Australia was published in 2016.*



### Lay Lay Moo, ACU nursing student

“For me, the peaceful Brisbane Campus is another world to the one I grew up in. My family and I had to flee our home in Burma when I was just four years old and I spent my younger years living in a refugee camp in Thailand. There was a lot of dust and barbed wire, and our huts were made out of bamboo with leaves for the roof. We were not allowed to leave the camp. I grew up eating the same thing every day: rice, chili, yellow bean, and fish paste.

But it was these very experiences that gave me the dream to become a nurse, because I had seen many people die from curable diseases, both in Burma and in the refugee camps. The World Health Organisation considers Burma to have a critical health worker shortage, which makes me incredibly sad. I always knew I wanted to do something about this.

In 2009, my family and I were granted a humanitarian visa and flew to Australia. After starting over with a new life in Brisbane, I was accepted into ACU and began working towards my nursing degree, bringing me a step closer to my dream.

With committed support from generous donors, I was then awarded a scholarship. Winning it was a great surprise to me – and a great honour. I am so thankful as my scholarship has been a big help financially.

My parents encourage me to study hard and do the best I can at university, but money is very tight. With my scholarship, I was able to buy a good computer for my study and assignments. As I didn't learn to speak, read or write English until I came to Australia, my scholarship also helped me pay for extra English tutoring. I was then able to meet the advanced English language requirements of my nursing course.

Thanks to my education and the generous support provided by my scholarship, I am on track to reaching my goals.”

# Creating Opportunity Fund

ACU's Creating Opportunity Fund helps students in need receive the education they deserve. By generously supporting our fund, you will be directly helping talented students unlock their potential and explore their gifts and passions without limitations.

### WE'RE ALREADY MAKING A DIFFERENCE

This year, we have been delighted to release the first scholarships from the fund. These scholarships are dedicated

to the students who are facing financial, social or cultural obstacles to their studies – for example, they may be a refugee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, a victim of domestic violence, or a single parent or carer.

Without assistance from the fund, these students may find university out of reach – missing out on the transformative power of tertiary education to improve not only their own lives, but the lives of those around them.

### LET'S MAKE AN IMPACT, TOGETHER

To really make this a community project, for every gift you make we will match your contribution, dollar for dollar, doubling the impact of your donation.

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# A place where people go places

Our events, research, partnerships and everything we do is about seeing the world through the eyes of others. It's about standing up for people in need and causes that matter.



## Exercise changing cancer care

ACU's Professor Prue Cormie is the lead author of a world-first position statement for exercise to be embedded as part of cancer treatment.

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) position statement on exercise and cancer care highlights the role of exercise alongside surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, and calls for all cancer patients to be prescribed exercise as a standard part of cancer care.

Professor Cormie's push is backed by a significant body of research as well as the medical might of Australia's leading cancer experts and organisations.

"We have about 20 new patients referred every week and we've been overwhelmed by the amount of amazing feedback from patients and health professionals," said Professor Cormie.

The move is supported by 25 influential health and cancer organisations including Cancer Council Australia.

## ARC backs cutting-edge research

An Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellowship awarded to ACU's Professor Kathy Mills will drive a project exploring how harnessing all the senses can enhance the digital literacy of primary students.

A professor of literacies and digital culture at ACU's Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education (ILSTE), Professor Mills will benefit from almost \$1 million to support the four-year research project.

This project aims to advance new learning and pedagogical models of sensory orchestration for the enhanced multimodal and digital literacy learning of primary students.

## ACU appoints new Deputy Vice-Chancellor

ACU has appointed Professor Zlatko Skrbis as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Students Learning and Teaching.

Professor Skrbis joins ACU from Monash University where he is the outgoing Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Standing Deputy for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Education).

He has held several leadership roles at Monash since 2013 including Vice-Provost, Graduate Education, and Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Research Training. Before that he held senior positions at the University of Queensland from 2009 – 2012.

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“For me, the 10 per cent alumni rebate was a great reward for returning students and it was something I definitely wanted to take advantage of. As an alumnus, the rebate made me feel valued and appreciated by ACU, and I was very grateful to receive that acknowledgment.”

*Eddie Lsui, Master of  
Business Administration  
(Executive) graduate*

## Stay in touch

We love to hear from our alumni. If you have a question, need to update your details or wish to discuss an opportunity, please get in touch.

[acu.edu.au/alumni](http://acu.edu.au/alumni)

\*The 10 per cent rebate will be offered to domestic ACU graduates from any faculty.

