

ACU

alum

Issue 13
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Announcing our Alumni of the Year

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Greg Craven: Closing the book

Eminent law academic, feisty commentator, accomplished administrator, devout Catholic and doting grandfather. Welcome to the world of Greg Craven.





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COVER:
Young Alumni Award and Alumni of the Year
Award winner Anne-Marie Reddan

INSIDE COVER:
Research or Scholarship Award winner
Dr Xavier Symons

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**Alumni Awards 2020
winner: Young Alumni
Award and Alumni of
the Year Award**





Inspiring change

Author: Christina Sexton

After one visit to Uganda as a teenager, Young Alumni of the Year award winner Anne-Marie Reddan's life changed forever and she's never looked back. She now runs Yimba, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping Ugandan youth stand on their own two feet.

"My family and I went to Uganda when I was 16 to volunteer in a rural community, and that was it for me. It changed my entire outlook on life and what I wanted my future to look like," said Anne-Marie.

"At first I thought it would be just a chance to go overseas and have a bit of an adventure. I honestly didn't think it would change my life the way it did.

"Even though I was a self-absorbed teenager, seeing a completely different world and realising how much need there was, I couldn't go home and just forget about it. It changed something in me. I came to understand it wasn't fair that people live this way because of where they were born. I knew I wanted to dedicate my future to doing the little that I could to make someone else's life better."

UNIVERSITY, HER WAY

While she was still in high school and thinking about her uni preferences, Anne-Marie was leaning towards a double degree in nursing and midwifery at ACU. But when she returned to Uganda on her gap year, she realised she was about to embark on the wrong path.

"I spent my gap year back in Uganda volunteering for various programs, mostly with a sex worker rehabilitation program for women. It got me thinking that nursing wasn't for me and I came home the following year to begin studying international development instead.

"I enrolled at ACU through the Community Achiever Program (CAP), which made such a difference to me. I like that it valued community

involvement, not just your ATAR. This really resonated with me and I appreciated that ACU's values aligned with my own."

Even though Anne-Marie immediately took to her Bachelor of International Development studies at the Melbourne Campus, she had now completely fallen under Uganda's spell, not to mention she had also met the man who would soon become her husband.

Once her degree was underway, Anne-Marie became a frequent flyer, travelling back and forth between Melbourne and Uganda on her semester breaks.

"I actually started my organisation, Yimba, during the holidays of my first semester."

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Anne-Marie began Yimba with her now husband Emmanuel seven years ago.

"We got to know each other as friends and it grew from there. When we met, I quickly saw we had the same vision for empowering local young people, so we started the organisation together in 2013."

Yimba has grown exponentially over the years and Anne-Marie has big plans for its future, but its mission has always remained the same.

"We want to empower Ugandan youth by providing access to employment and educational development opportunities to equip them with sustainable income-generating skills."

For Anne-Marie, this meant starting with finding out what the community wanted.



“We knew we wanted to start self-sustainable programs in a rural community, so we spoke to the locals first to find out what they were interested in.

“We wanted to empower them to make their own money and keep the programs running themselves. At the time, I was still coming back and forth from Australia, so it needed to be something they could do on their own.”

A SUCCESSFUL START

Yimba began with a goat program designed to help widows and single mothers earn an income from a goat's milk and by selling its offspring.

To Anne-Marie's surprise, the program was a huge success.

“It completely exceeded our expectations,” she said. “The goats became a form of capital that the women could later sell off as a business. Some were able to sell their goats for a cow, and from there they went on to sell a calf to purchase cement and bricks to build a home with. Another lady sold her goats to open a roadside shop. But mostly the women were using their goat businesses to pay their kids' school fees.”

Anne-Marie said her favourite part of the goat program was that its success was not her own doing.

“I love that the program has full community ownership. The people weren't receiving handouts from us and it wasn't like we were paying their kids' school fees. They did it themselves and they took pride in seeing the results of their own hard work.”

Anne-Marie is happy to say the project is still going and a new goat program has been developed specifically for young people in the community.

“We set them up with a goat pen, give them training, help them organise a business plan, and they use their goats to generate income for their families.”

FASHION FORWARD

As Yimba began to grow, Anne-Marie saw a new opportunity for the organisation to move into fashion, design and tailoring.

“We now have 20 young people training in a year-long course,” Anne-Marie said. “They learn how to make every garment you can think of, as well as bags, jewellery, shoes, everything. We also offer entrepreneurship training and help with literacy, numeracy and

English classes too. Things like pattern drafting involves a lot of maths, so we want them to catch up.

“Then at the end of the course, we set them up with a sewing machine and start-up capital so they can go out and start their own businesses. We also provide employment for the best students from each year and we have a social enterprise selling different African fashion to tourists and expats. We export items too.”

NEW DIRECTIONS

With inspiration from musician husband Emmanuel, Yimba's music program provided yet another creative direction for the organisation to move into.

“We do music mentorship and we have our own recording studio,” Anne-Marie said. “We teach audio production, sound engineering, and how to play musical instruments. And our students learn how to produce jingles for ads and do paid corporate work.”

Another project close to Anne-Marie's heart is the hygiene program she runs for young girls in the community.

“Our menstrual hygiene program is so important to us. We make washable



pads because so many girls drop out of school because they don't have access to sanitary products. Educating the women about their periods is a big part of it."

While Anne-Marie is incredibly busy with all of her current programs, she still has big dreams for Yimba.

"We'd love to open a large vocational training centre, helping vulnerable youth develop skills in a wider range of industries, such as plumbing, electrical, hairdressing and beauty, catering and baking."

GOOD IN A CRISIS

Unfortunately, Anne-Marie's dreams, like most people's, are on hold for now thanks to the global pandemic.

"Obviously 2020 hasn't gone according to plan for anyone," Anne-Marie said, "but we're hoping to introduce at least hair and beauty training services by the end of the year."

With the global crisis putting a strain on Yimba's usual programs, Anne-Marie's team was forced to get creative, and her tailoring students have now added face masks to their repertoire.

"We started selling them to people in the local community, but now we're

exporting them to Melbourne and my family is selling them on my behalf on Yimba's Facebook page. So far, we've sent 1,000 masks to Australia, we sold at least 5,000 in Uganda and we're sending more home soon.

"The pandemic has been so hard on the informal sector. We were doing a COVID-19 relief program at the start, and we put together emergency relief packages to feed more than 5,000 people. But we knew we needed to do something more sustainable, which is where the masks come in.

"The students have been sewing them for the entire pandemic and the masks have been what's feeding their families. Though we've also been distributing masks for free to communities in need here too."

HELPING OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES

While Anne-Marie has fully embraced Uganda's culture, its people, and speaks the local language Luganda – "I'm not fluent! But I can get by" – she likes to make it clear that she's not the one in charge.

"I'm not saving the world and I don't know best. Ugandans on the ground know the needs of their community in

a way that I never could. So, we ensure that every program we create can run on its own without me.

"Also, how we do things in Australia just isn't how things get done here. We consult with the community about everything we do – it's never about what I want; I'm not the one calling the shots. I couldn't do anything without my team.

"My degree really helped me understand that the work I wanted to do was never going to be about me swooping in to save people. It's just helping them make changes in their own lives, no matter where they come from."

Anne-Marie Reddan was the winner of the Young Alumni of the Year Award in ACU's Alumni Awards 2020.



The man on a mission to advance Indigenous knowledge

Author: Menios Constantinou

“It’s a long story,” says Professor Markham Rose through a patchy phone line from his home in Coburg, a multicultural suburb in Melbourne’s north, “but my father was a Stolen Generation kid, and he met my mother, who was non-Indigenous, and I was born in the mid-1950s, a dozen years before the referendum that finally gave me and other Aboriginal people citizenship rights.”

The life story of Mark Rose, the distinguished education academic with traditional links to the Gunditjmara nation of Victoria, is perhaps not unique amongst Aboriginal people.

It’s a life influenced by the experiences of his father Geoffrey Rose, who was removed from his family as a six-year-old and never saw his mother again. Without the support mechanisms of family and community, Geoff Rose was rendered a fringe-dweller. He never recovered from the trauma of being stolen.

“It is really quite tragic, because my father’s demons followed him through his life, and that manifested through domestic violence,” says Professor Rose, an ACU graduate and Pro Vice-Chancellor at Deakin University.

Things were complicated further when Mark’s mother was diagnosed with epilepsy, a condition that was poorly understood at the time. Mark’s dad was ill-equipped to deal with her illness, and so at his mum’s urging, Mark and his brother were sent to boarding

school at the Convent of Mercy in Ballarat.

“I was cut off from my family and my Aboriginal community, but I was actually living an Aboriginal life,” he says.

“Even today there are Aboriginal people who are still struggling to make their way home and find their mob. That doesn’t make you any less Aboriginal; it’s actually a very common Aboriginal experience.”

Although being estranged was a high price to pay, Mark counts himself as lucky. A stone’s throw from the convent was the Ballarat Children’s Home, which housed many Aboriginal youths who had been declared wards of the state.

“Most of my Aboriginal cousins were there, and it was only by a twist of fate that I wasn’t there with them,” Professor Rose says. “Instead, I was in the convent being taught by these dedicated women, getting a good education and living a relatively safe life.”

He still carries the burden of guilt that he escaped what his cousins went through.

“Lots of non-Indigenous people look at my career and they say to me, ‘Gee, your people must be so proud of you’. And I say, ‘Well, I was fortunate’. I’m really proud of some of my cousins, who because of their circumstances and the colour of their skin weren’t afforded the same opportunities that I was, and yet they approach life with great peace and optimism. That takes real guts; I’ve been lucky.”

A BORN EDUCATOR

Mark Rose was still in his early teens when he got his first taste of teaching.

“I was in year 8 and one of the nuns fell ill, and bear in mind this was in the 1960s, but there was no emergency teacher, so I volunteered to take over teaching the class for a day and a bit,” he says.

“That ended up being the first class I ever taught, and in hindsight, teaching came naturally to me. I didn’t know it at the time but a lot of my Aboriginal family are in education, so it was in my DNA.”

In 1967, Mark’s mother died suddenly after a seizure, which brought his father further suffering, and he soon ceased providing financial support. Mark, who was then living with his grandmother, was forced to fend for himself through years 11 and 12, which meant working in factories at night to pay his school fees.

Despite this hardship, he gained entry to the Mercy Teachers’ College, a forerunner college of ACU in Melbourne, and within five years of graduating was appointed as principal of Sacred Heart School in Casterton.

“There were 90 kids, stables in the back and a whole lot of tiger snakes on the school grounds, which was pretty interesting for a city kid,” he says.

After a decade as a principal in both primary and secondary schools, Mark pursued further study and moved into academia. He has since served in various teaching, research and leadership roles both overseas and in Australia; most recently at Deakin, where he became the university’s first Pro Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Strategy and Innovation, and before that at RMIT, where he was a Professor of Indigenous Business and Enterprise.

In recent years, he has contributed his expertise towards advancing the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education agenda. He says that two critical issues need to be addressed.

“The first is the teaching of our people, because we keep seeing these dismal Close the Gap statistics showing that Aboriginal people are way behind in the areas of housing, justice and health, and while all of these social indicators are important, the silver bullet is education,” Professor Rose says.

“The second is the teaching about our people, because change cannot happen until Aboriginal people are seen and heard in the curriculum. The standard non-Indigenous person knows very little about Aboriginal perspectives and issues, yet they constantly make professional decisions – whether they’re doctors, lawyers, police or social workers – that affect the lives of Aboriginal people.”

The gaps in this area are what Professor Rose has termed “a silent apartheid”, referring to “the gaping hole in the nation’s narrative”.

“For many years the curriculum hasn’t included Indigenous culture and knowledge — it’s been overtly suppressed — and so non-Aboriginal people have been robbed from linking themselves to the land that they’re now living on,” he says.

“If they were taught about Aboriginal culture, the nation would have a fuller and more mature view of itself, and that would benefit all of us — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.”

CULTIVATING A CONNECTION

Like many Indigenous kids who were cut off from their community, the young Mark Rose knew little of his heritage.

It was only when he started teaching that he became connected with his Aboriginal family. He learned he was descendant of the Gunditjmara people of southwestern Victoria, and that he was a relative of Lionel Rose, the first Indigenous person to be named Australian of the Year.

“I was greeted by a really loving community, a very inclusive community, and a community of great humanity and great resilience,” says Professor Rose, who has since gone on to play an advocacy role for 33 Aboriginal communities in Victoria.

“The fact that I had a couple of university degrees at the time, it put me in a really good position to forward the

Aboriginal case, and so it was a win-win all around.”

In recent decades, with community endorsement, Professor Rose has sat on five ministerial advisory committees, including the Victorian Implementation Review of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

He was on the Vice-Chancellor’s Indigenous Advisory Council at Charles Darwin University, chaired the Batchelor Institute of Tertiary Education, and has led Indigenous knowledge programs at Deakin, La Trobe, RMIT and Melbourne University.

The inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and history in the national curriculum has become his life’s work.

As one of the original members of ACARA’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, Professor Rose has been a fierce advocate for the issue, arguing that the teaching of Indigenous culture goes “way beyond political correctness and compliance”.

“When I was at school, there was nothing ... I remember being taught that Aborigines can’t live in houses, because they rip up floorboards and burn them to light fires,” he says.

“We’ve come a long way from that but we still have a long way to go. We have an opportunity for all Australians to understand who we are, where we’ve come from, and how we can move forward and work together in a common national interest.”

As for the ultimate goal of improving the educational achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Professor Rose is convinced that “the progress is happening”.

“Aboriginal people sit at all levels of universities – we’ve got doctors, we’ve got lawyers, teachers, businesspeople, scientists – and we’re going to amazing places,” he says.

“If we are the world’s oldest living continuous culture, then by inference we must be the world’s oldest living continuous intellectual tradition, and our people are bringing into their professional communities a great sense of humanity, a fine-tuned emotional intelligence, and a great spirit that we can all learn from.”

Professor Markham Rose was the winner of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Award in ACU’s Alumni Awards 2020.

Alumni Awards 2020
winner: Community
Engagement Award



A caring heart

Author: Christina Sexton

When Babra Mutanda came to Australia in 2009 as a refugee from Zimbabwe, she'd had so few opportunities to learn that she had never even used a computer. Now she has two university degrees and is a compassionate aged care nurse and the founder of an organisation dedicated to helping others.

"We didn't have any choice about Australia," said Babra. "The situation at home was very tense and coming to a new country was not easy. I had never even used a laptop before I got here and barely knew what they were. All I knew was that Australia was my chance."

NIGHT AND DAY

Babra began her education at a local Sydney TAFE while working full-time in aged care. Knowing she wanted more for herself, she applied for a Bachelor of Nursing at ACU, which is when her determination went into full force.

"For my entire nursing degree, I was working in an aged care centre at night. I'd come home from my shift, shower,

and head straight to the North Sydney Campus for a lecture or a prac before resting in the afternoon."

In spite of the punishing schedule, her aged care work quickly became a valuable asset to her studies.

"I loved my placements at Westmead and Liverpool hospitals, it was the best part of the degree. And unlike a lot of the younger students, because of my aged care background, I already had considerable experience working in a hospital environment and my job became a great advantage to my studies."

TWICE AS HARD

It was during the second year of her nursing studies that Babra decided to



begin simultaneously studying for a Bachelor of Social Work – a fully online course.

“Considering I had never even used a computer until quite recently, you can imagine how hard it was to suddenly be studying a new degree 100 per cent online. I knew this was what I wanted to do, so I just kept going.

“When I was studying the two degrees at once, I was often asked, ‘How are you doing this?’ I’d say, when I was growing up in my family of eight, my father wasn’t rich but he managed to send us to school. If you’re a girl in Africa, boys get to go first in everything, but I always thought if I can manage to go to school, I want to be a nurse. So, when I got to Australia, I told myself ‘I can do this’, and studying became my priority – I just did it.”

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Babra knew right from the start of her nursing degree that she was leaning towards aged care.

“There are no nursing homes in Africa, elderly people die with us at home,” she explained. “So, when I saw old people being taken care of till the end of their life with compassion and care, it really touched me and gave me the passion to continue working in this field.”

To mark her graduation, Babra returned home to Zimbabwe to celebrate with family and friends.

“My mother killed a cow for me, and we had a huge party. I invited my old

teachers from both primary and high school who’d taught me as a kid. They said that back when they were teaching me, ‘We saw a brightness in you’. And I remember them telling me, ‘If you get the chance, you have to do something’. It made celebrating my nursing degree with them so much more special.”

A NEW CHALLENGE

As Babra continued to thrive in Australia and her expertise as an aged care nurse grew, a new challenge unexpectedly came her way.

“I went to a nursing friend’s wedding in Sierra Leone and it changed everything for me,” Babra said. “The country has been through so much and I saw the brutality of the rebels for myself. They would ask men questions like, ‘Do you want short sleeves?’ This meant they’d cut a man’s arms off at the elbow. ‘Long sleeves’ meant their hands were cut off at the wrist. Pregnant women were being brutalised and babies were cut from their stomachs. It was so terrible, just the worst of the worst.

“I had seen the effects of Sierra Leone’s war in the news but being there in real life was totally different. So many people there were living with disabilities as a result of the rebel war. Not to mention, polio still exists in Sierra Leone, and then the ebola virus started there after the war too. I was crying every day I was there. I said to my friend I don’t have any money but I need to do something.”

BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF CARING

When Babra returned home to Australia, unable to get Sierra Leone out of her mind, she got busy.

“I started collecting clothes and shoes to donate, and I went back in 2019 to start the Caring Hearts Foundation. With everything they’ve been through, I knew I had to help.

“I want to help young kids whose parents have disabilities and were victims of the war, or been effected by polio or the ebola virus. I just want to help them live like normal kids anywhere in the world.

“From then on, I just kept sending donations, food, sanitary hygiene products for the girls, whatever I can. The thank yous make you feel like you are someone and it inspires me to work even harder. These people have nothing, so if they thank you it means so much. And I know that I don’t have much myself, but I try to share as much as I can.”

Babra Mutanda was the winner of the Community Engagement Alumni Award in ACU’s Alumni Awards 2020.

Alumni Awards 2020
winner: Entrepreneurship,
Innovation and
Leadership Award



Losing fear, finding home

Author: Christina Sexton

Abiola Ajetomobi was forced to leave her home in Africa for a new life in Melbourne, arriving with limited English and a high school certificate. Now, this former refugee has completed multiple university courses and is a leader in her community, working to help others seeking asylum find their rightful place in Australia – and a new sense of home.

In spite of everything she's learnt since she first arrived in Australia as an asylum seeker in 2008, Abiola admits free time is something she knows little about. Instead, this year's winner of the inaugural Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Innovation Alumni Award has been incredibly busy for the past 12 years, and is in the process of completing her sixth professional education course, which includes four university qualifications.

"Learning is addictive for me! Every year I try to do something, even if it's just a two-week course. The way I see it is I owe society to be the best me I can be. So, I'm constantly exploring more and more so I can be of value. I always think next year I'll do things differently and reduce my commitments, but if I'm being honest, usually I just end up adding more.

"Right now, I'm in the middle of a leadership and executive program at the Melbourne Business School that I actually first read about on LinkedIn on Christmas Day. What was I even doing on LinkedIn at Christmas? I have no idea!"



A LONG WAY

Abiola knows she has come a long way from when she first arrived in Australia with a young family in tow.

“We came here by default. It was all about safety, stability and creating peace for my family. When you’re in crisis in a highly volatile environment, fighting for your life, you are just looking for somewhere that you can breathe.”

Abiola said adapting to her new life in Melbourne was a slow process.

“It took me a good three to four years to internalise why I was here. It wasn’t something we chose, and once we got to Australia we began to understand we couldn’t go back.

“At the time I wasn’t thinking about the future, only the now. I knew it was an opportunity to restart my life again. But I thought, what does that even look like?”

It didn’t help that the family got off to a rocky start. Five days after arriving, Abiola’s daughter was rushed to hospital with a badly broken foot on the family’s first city outing.

“It destabilised everything. We didn’t have Medicare yet, and the hospital had to call the Red Cross to work out how to help us.”

With time, and help from a local family, Abiola started to find her way.

“The family we met helped us see that Australia is a land of opportunities if you open yourself up to it. They said you can do this, you can explore. I thought, ‘Wow! So, I’m allowed to start thinking this way?’”

FINDING THE OPPORTUNITIES

Improving her English was Abiola’s first goal and one of the hardest hurdles to overcome.

“I had to apply for a fee-waiver at TAFE as I couldn’t afford it and I was living a two-hour bus ride from the campus that I had to get to five days a week. But that’s how it started.”

After her English studies, Abiola gained a business degree, working at night in an aged care home so she could study during the day. She then got a temporary job at a local TAFE in client services before moving into her first managerial role in a crisis relief centre, “but not because I applied.”

Abiola’s unexpected job offer came about when she met the mother of a sick child in her mother’s group.

“I was trying to organise a fundraiser to help her family. We’d only just met, so she was very surprised I was offering. But I said no, I feel your pain, I want to do this.

“I met with the pastor of her church where I was hoping to host the fundraiser and I explained my idea to

him and what it meant to me to help this family. Instead of agreeing to the event, he just looked at me strangely and said, ‘Will you work for me?’

“His manager had resigned and he thought I was right for the role. I immediately said ‘No, I’ve never had a managerial role in Australia, people say my English isn’t good enough, I can’t manage anyone. No, no, no.’ However, when I was invited back and saw the women in distress and the compassion resonating through the centre, I didn’t leave till 7.30pm that night and I started working there the next day.”

It was through this job that Abiola found her way to ACU to study a Graduate Certificate in Management of Not-for-Profit Organisations.

“I realised I had big knowledge gaps and little understanding of not-for-profits in Australia, and I needed to upskill quickly. The course was perfect for me and it changed my career trajectory significantly.”

ANSWERING THE CALL

Abiola is now the director of the Innovation Hub at the Australian Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, where she works to empower people seeking asylum in the hope of instigating long-term social change.

“This job is a privilege. I think working in this sector is my calling;



it's very demanding, but it's a call to action. I just can't afford to ignore injustice anymore. As a former asylum seeker myself, it affects me deeply to think others haven't had the same opportunities and access to resources like I've had. If they receive the same help, their stories could change completely.

"And now, through my work, I never sit in front of a potential employer trying to sell them an 'asylum seeker'. Instead, I'm offering them individuals who have the capability, merit and agency to contribute to an organisation – and our society."

MAKING THEIR WAY

Abiola believes it's important for everyone to understand the realities of how people seeking asylum made their way to Australia.

"People seeking asylum don't choose their destination, the destination chooses them," she said. "So, if they're here in Australia, it's not by accident. They just need to be given the resources to thrive so they can contribute fully to our society."

"The representation of people seeking asylum has limited our ability to see them as humans. But those things you wish for yourself? It's ok to wish that for other people too. The current representation of refugees is dehumanising; we see them as a burden to carry. But they can do so much more. I know because I've met some incredible people, read some of their resumes and told them, 'Actually, you know what, you could seriously do

my job'. They have so many skills to offer. And the reality is many people have nowhere to go back to and this is home for them."

GIVING BACK

In between her demanding work schedule and never-ending university study, Abiola has still found time to volunteer.

"The Joyway Widows Foundation was started by a friend who was thinking about widows without children in a country like Nigeria where people often don't have access to social security or support. If people don't have children, who's going to look after them? They get forgotten."

"The foundation works to provide these women with financial resources and empowerment opportunities. I know education is key in life – if you can be trained, you can do; if you can be taught, you can perform. So, we try to develop their employability and we link the older women to hospitals for extra support. It's still very micro, but it's making a big impact."

Another organisation Abiola lends her time to is United African Farms, which is using food to engage the African community.

"People think of Africa as being like one country, but there are so many of us and we're all different. This was an opportunity to find common ground using farming, food sovereignty and healthy eating as our focus, and it's a knowledge sharing space for our youth too."

REDEFINING HOME

Nigeria will always be a part of Abiola's story, and her heart.

"When we arrived in this country, we didn't think we'd return. But since I started working in the social innovation space and in leadership, I always get drawn back to my country, my culture and my community. I think about how much more can I do to help."

"And I do play with the idea of maybe going back to Nigeria to help with capacity building – they need to learn to respond to their own issues rather than waiting for developed countries like Australia to step in."

"However, is Australia home? All the struggles I've been through helped me overcome the challenges I've experienced here. So, Australia is home, but my motherland is home too. I have a deep sense of gratitude and Australia helps me appreciate the acceleration that's happened in the past 12 years for my family."

"Though sometimes I wish I had started working on my dreams earlier. This wasn't anyone's doing, just my own confidence and feeling like I couldn't contribute. If I'd had the same sense of agency and confidence I have now, I wonder what I could have achieved sooner? I wish I knew then to believe in myself and push through. But everything I've done is based on opportunities. I'm just so grateful for what I have."

Abiola Ajetomobi was the winner of the Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Innovation Alumni Award in ACU's Alumni Awards 2020.

From advertising to advocating

Author: Kristy Porter

A one-hour online training session was the catalyst for a life changing decision that saw Youna Kim transition from corporate highflyer to an advocate to prevent family violence.

“I have been very fortunate to have lived, studied and worked in five different countries: Panama, the USA, South Korea, Spain and Australia. One thing I found so hurtful and painful was the fact domestic and family violence was so prevalent regardless of culture, level of education, race, religion or social class,” said Youna.

“I became so curious to what caused it, why it kept happening and whether we could even stop it. I just could not understand that people were being hurt and even murdered by their family members, their supposed loved ones. I was so shocked to learn home could be the scariest and the most fearful place for some people. I kept thinking about this and asking others about it, but it just seemed like a social norm back then.

“Then I came across an online training video that clearly explained using violence was a choice, therefore, family violence was preventable by cultivating respectful relationships and achieving gender equality.”

This was a life-changing experience for Youna: it changed her way of thinking and set her on a whole new path.

“I felt like I found the meaningful and valuable cause I wanted to contribute my energy, passion, skills and effort to. I decided to quit after eight years in the corporate sector so I could dedicate my future to social work. I wanted to learn more and commit myself to reducing all forms of violence against victim survivors, particularly women and children in family violence cases.”

MAKING DECISIONS

After working around the globe in international trade, advertising, marketing and public relations, Youna began her social work training at TAFE in Melbourne before winning an academic scholarship to undertake a Master of Social Work at ACU.

“I was working at the Australia Trade Commission when I watched the online training on family violence,” said Youna. “I oversaw supporting Australian tertiary educational providers to export to the Korean market. Through this work, I learned how great social work courses in Australia were and I decided to move to Australia and study social work.”

“At ACU I found practical and insightful teaching and really



**Alumni Awards 2020
winner: International
Contribution Award**

appreciated the experience of the lecturers and professors who were also working in the sector.

“The supportive teaching staff were genuinely passionate about the work they were doing and contributing to. They opened opportunities to wider sectors in social work that made me see how my diverse skills from different areas could be transferable and relatable.

“Learning more about family violence, I wanted to address this intersectional problem. It’s driven by the complex hierarchies of power, privilege and oppression with far-reaching impacts that reinforce structural disadvantage and systemic marginalisation.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

As the General Manager in Innovation and Development at Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS), Youna makes a real difference to those facing disadvantage and marginalisation.

“When it comes to social and health issues, we must focus our energy on the people who are experiencing the highest and most imminent risk. In family violence, it is sadly and overwhelmingly women and children who make up the majority of the victim survivors,” she said.

“My role is to analyse community needs, connect with members of the local community, develop and deliver programs to raise awareness of the EDVOS service, as well as family violence and gender inequality.”

MAKING IT COUNT

Through Youna’s leadership, EDVOS prevention and response training has reached over 4,500 people in Victoria and the team has presented more than 120 forums and conferences reaching over 8,000 people. This training raises awareness of EDVOS and family violence, especially to those who are experiencing multiple disadvantages which limit their access to services and support.

“These initiatives drove a significant growth in self-referrals to our service of more than 200 per cent in 2018–2019. Self-referral is now the second highest referral pathway to EDVOS after police referrals,” she said.

Youna has led projects recommended by the Victorian Royal Commission

into Family Violence to provide an inclusive and accessible service for people from all backgrounds and developed a tool to collect feedback on the EDVOS service outcomes. She also initiated national gender equality and family violence training for salon professionals, HaiR-3Rs.

“The program guides salon professionals through how to recognise, respond and refer someone who may be experiencing violence or controlling behaviour at home,” said Youna.

“Visiting a salon may be one of the only places a victim survivor is allowed to go to alone without their perpetrator, which puts them in a unique position. We encourage salon professionals to put posters in their bathrooms and give them resources on how to discreetly assist a victim survivor.

“This kind of program is a first for Australia and we have trained more than 700 salon professionals since 2018.”

MAKING CHANGES

Domestic and family violence is one of the leading causes of illness, disability and death for women aged 25–44, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Youna continues to work daily for the health and safety of women and children.

“I want people to know how prevalent and serious family violence is in our community. EDVOS supports eastern Melbourne, seven local council areas, and just from these areas, we get on average 600 to 1,000 family violence referrals every month.

“One in four Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner. Women facing other forms of discrimination are at greater risk of violence. Violence against women is driven by gender inequality.

“It is important for everyone to know the attitudes and behaviours that drive violence against women. They are: condoning violence against women; men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence; rigid gender roles and stereotypes; and male relationships that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

“To change these attitudes and end violence against women for good, we need to stop it from happening in





the first place. This is called primary prevention. The best way to prevent violence against women is to promote gender equality. We do this by addressing disrespect and inequality where people live, work, learn and play.

“Women should have access to equal power, resources and opportunities. They are to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. We need to recognise that gender equality is essential to economic prosperity.

“Everyone has a role to play in stopping violence against women. We can call out sexist attitudes and poor behaviours when we see them. We can promote gender equality at home, at work, at school and everywhere. Everyone has the right to live in a safe and equal society.”

MAKING WOMEN SAFE

With seven years of experience working with victim survivors of family violence under her belt Youna has seen many highs and lows. But she takes inspiration from her colleagues,

and the women and children they are keeping safe, to keep fighting the good fight.

“I learn from inspirational colleagues and team members who constantly remind me why we do what we do. Our clients and victim survivors, women and children, never cease to inspire and empower us with their strength, hope and resilience. Their courage and strong will makes me more committed and passionate to the cause,” she said.

“A real stand out moment for me was working with other local agencies to give information to the Victorian Police that led to the immediate arrest of a perpetrator who had life-threatening weapons in his van. He was heading to emergency accommodation where victim survivors were temporarily residing. He was made accountable for his actions.

“I can see myself in 10 years still working in this sector, applying new learnings, striving to learn about innovative-evidence based practices and being inspired by my colleagues

and victim survivors. I follow a vision to create a society where everyone can thrive free from fear, violence and discrimination.”

Youna Kim was the winner of the International Contribution Alumni Award in ACU's Alumni Awards 2020.

Building a better world with bioethics.



Author: Menios Constantinou

Bioethicist Xavier Symons is well aware of the potential pitfalls of a career in philosophy. Like all scholars of philosophical disciplines, he spends much of his time pondering some of life's fundamental questions: What ought we to do with our lives? Do we all have a right to health? How do we make the world a better place?

"Dealing with ultimate questions is really what drew me to philosophy, and I think it comes down to the desire to create a better world by helping people to think more deeply and more ethically," says Dr Symons, an ACU PhD graduate and 2020 Fulbright scholar.

"But when you make the decision to pursue philosophy as a lifetime occupation or profession, there's always the danger that you end up dwelling in the world of ideas. So I think it's really important to find ways to ground yourself and look for balance."

The answers to deep philosophical questions often lie in thought and exploration, but they can also be found in unexpected places.

While living in Melbourne, Dr Symons spent time volunteering through his local parish. He helped in nursing homes for the elderly, soup kitchens for the homeless and disadvantaged, and long-term care facilities for people

living with disability or dementia.

"I think that caring for people who are in their later years of life or are perhaps a little more dependent, it teaches you that we're all vulnerable and we're all in need of support in different ways," he says.

"When you interact with people who are facing certain challenges, you learn about vulnerability in a very real way. You learn about human nature and you learn about yourself, so it's very grounding and it can help you to find a good balance."

These experiences have also influenced the issues Dr Symons explores in his research.

In early 2020, having completed his PhD in the ethics of healthcare rationing and taken on a research and teaching position at the University of Notre Dame, he was awarded a prestigious Fulbright Future Scholarship.



The research grant will take him to Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute for Ethics – arguably the world's leading bioethics institute – where he'll explore the ethics of dementia and focus on issues identified in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

"I'll be looking at how we can optimise care for people with advanced forms of dementia like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, and I think that was inspired by working in nursing homes and seeing the challenges people face when they're experiencing advanced cognitive decline," Dr Symons says.

"It really is quite heartbreaking, but at the same time I think there's something to be said for the idea that even when people are suffering the most severe forms of dementia, there's always a personality that lasts and continues.

"I think we need to recognise and respect that, and that means making sure our care is the same as we would provide to any other human being. I think that's a very positive step in providing dignified care for those who are in aged care homes."

AN INQUIRING MIND

As a high-school student at Redfield College in Dural, a semi-rural suburb in Sydney's northwest, the young Xavier Symons was already engaging with philosophical questions.

Guided by teachers who ran philosophy and theology courses as part of the school's curriculum, and a school chaplain with a PhD in philosophy, he was lucky enough to participate in intellectually rigorous dialogue at a young age.

"I was interested in philosophy and I had a lot of people around me who fostered my interest," he says. "I think philosophy is suited to a certain temperament – people who tend

to be quite deep thinkers and who are interested in ultimate questions – and I just happened to have that temperament."

Dr Symons went on to study at the University of Sydney, engaging with the work of a broad array of philosophers: Foucault, Bachelard and Kierkegaard, to name a few. He explored the work of Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham in his master's thesis, before transferring to ACU for his doctoral program.

He was drawn to bioethics "by chance" when a friend asked him to contribute to BioEdge, an online bioethics newsletter, and continued to pursue bioethics as an area of specialisation because "it has very clear and real-world applications".

"I think the pandemic has highlighted that bioethics is more relevant now than ever, and that really motivates me; the realisation that my work has important practical implications to public policy, and the fact that we're dealing with the basic values of our civilisation," says Dr Symons, a research fellow at ACU's Plunkett Centre for Ethics.

"Whatever people think on debates to do with vaccines or healthcare rationing, or abortion and euthanasia, or human enhancement and genomes, these issues really do cut to the heart of who we are.

"I find that fascinating, and I think that as philosophers and ethicists, we can help to foster a more respectful society by making thoughtful contributions to all of these debates."

SPEAKING TO THE PUBLIC

On top of an impressive track record of high-quality publications for his academic work, Dr Symons is a prolific contributor to ethical debates in mainstream media.

In recent years, he has been published widely in news outlets on topics

including euthanasia, abortion, healthcare rationing, disability, conscientious objection and drug policy.

His output comes amidst calls for scholars from all disciplines to share their ideas and research with a wider audience.

For some academics, this is not easy, requiring them to unlearn everything they know about communicating their work.

Dr Symons sees the value in public engagement; however, he believes there is "room for diversity amongst academics".

"There surely is a place for a theoretical physicist to spend 40 years in a laboratory, producing very niche publications on some problem in the fundamentals of physics," he says.

"At the same time, we do need people who make all that wonderful knowledge and depth of analysis that you find in academia available to the public."

He sees it as his role to encourage people to use critical thinking and reasoning in discussions about all topics – big and small.

"It's a bit of a passion of mine to find a better way of conducting ethical debates, and I think it's important that bioethicists take the ideas they see in philosophy that are relevant to social issues, and help people to understand those ideas," Dr Symons says.

"We're in difficult times, where even something as banal as wearing a face mask becomes a culture war. If we can all learn to be a bit more open-minded and to think more deeply and ethically, I think we would live in a more respectful and harmonious society."

Dr Xavier Symons was the winner of the Research or Scholarship Award in ACU's Alumni Awards 2020.

ACU alumni share their stories of life in lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic led many governments to put their countries into lockdown and brought huge changes to our lifestyles. People were required to stay home, some businesses were made to adapt, parents juggled between working and remote learning, and teachers adjusted to new methods of educating their students.

ACU has thousands of alumni across the globe – from paramedics and healthcare staff, to teachers, accountants, entrepreneurs and community workers. We reached out to some of our alumni overseas about their experiences in lockdown.

BILLY PETERS

Paramedic, London Ambulance Service, London UK

Bachelor of Paramedicine, 2019

“I never considered an international role during my time at ACU, but in January I moved to the UK to work for the London Ambulance Service (LAS). Working in a new healthcare system was always going to be a challenge but has been particularly difficult in such a dynamic time. I’ve been lucky to be here doing the job that I like. In retrospect, it must be very difficult for the people that have been stuck working from home all year. There has been such a huge demand on the LAS that we called upon the London Fire Brigade to supply firefighters to work as

ambulance drivers, allowing the LAS to increase their capacity to respond to emergency calls, and putting more vehicles out on the road.

With this year’s events, my own grievances with the pandemic have been dwarfed by the impact I’ve seen it have on some of my patients. Each day, I meet people from so many diverse backgrounds, and I get a glimpse of how they are dealing with 2020. Some have been so lonely they call an ambulance just to have someone to talk to.

I might not have done all the travel I had hoped for by now, but I’m still on the other side of the world doing my dream job. No complaints from me.”



TIN MA MA HTET

Founder and Executive Director, Sayarma Foundation, Myanmar
Master of Teaching (Primary), 2016

“COVID-19 highlighted underlying social issues, inequalities and unfilled gaps through the sufferings of people at different levels. On the other hand, interconnectedness and the value of supporting one another has never been more magnified.

In Myanmar, teachers, parents and students are still new to the use of computers in the classrooms and struggle to go through online learning platforms. But we do know that many people know how to use Facebook.

Sayarma Foundation, with the help of volunteers across the country, provided a free online learning at home program on our Facebook blog to help parents and teachers. It is a four-week program, and our first batch of lessons had more than one million views. We are already in our third batch of learning at home lessons.

COVID-19 challenged everyone, but it also encouraged us to find alternative solutions and showed us that there is always something that we can contribute. Burmese Buddhists would call this ‘the nature of dependent origination.’ This is the time to feel connected.”



FIONA BOUMELHEM

Deputy Team Leader, Ealing Council, London UK
Bachelor of Theology (Social Work), 2007

"I am employed as a team manager in a front door team. We receive all the referrals for any child where safeguarding concerns are identified. When the pandemic broke, the local authority I work for responded quickly to ensure that the staff were safe and put provisions in place. Buildings around the borough were closed and skeleton staff were working from our head office. Visits to see children and families were done remotely or at their doorstep. New ways of working were put in place and thankfully staff were already equipped to work remotely.

We have also seen an increase in referrals from police and from schools when students return from the school holidays. The pandemic has had an impact on homelessness, child and parental mental health and added an element of financial pressure

on families. There has also been a significant increase in domestic abuse since the lockdown and as a result we had to change how we are working with victims of domestic abuse and how we undertake our assessments on children and families.

The lockdown also affected me personally. When I heard that Australia was closing its borders and flights were being grounded, I immediately thought of my family. All my family are in Australia so not being able to visit home and not having a trip to look forward to is hard. I usually travel home for Christmas because I hate the cold and don't want to be in the UK during this period, but it's uncertain if I'll even make it home this year. Being away from family means I've missed out on a lot of events. I'm really close to my sister Louwana, who gave birth to a baby boy in June. I met her son Augustine on Facetime, which made me miss family more.

One of the advantages of working and living in the UK is the travel across



Europe. Over the last few years, I got to visit a new city or new country a few times a year. However, with the current restrictions in place, travels for this year has been put on the back burner. In the first two months of lockdown, I spent my Sunday mornings speaking to my mum and getting virtual cooking lessons. I also found other ways to connect with friends and relatives. COVID-19 made us miss important events or cancel travel plans, but it also allowed us to slow down and reflect on what's truly important."

ALANNAH PEARSON

Primary School Teacher, Edenhope College, Edenhope Vic
Bachelor of Education, 2020

"What a year to be a graduate teacher. This year has been tough, but there are also many great things about being a graduate teacher in 2020.

I started my teaching career with a small group of Year 3 and 4 students. At first, I found it difficult to connect with them due to my lack of experience. Coming from a different area made it even harder to form connections. I decided to focus on one student at a time and build relationships as I go. I started really enjoying time spent with the kids in my class; hearing about their weekends and stories about friends and families. My students were my first friends.

The biggest shock for me was the amount of time I had to spend planning. I was used to having a supervising teacher to support me during my placements, and to have to do all the work alone was an adjustment. I worked long hours in my first few months – planning

the first term on my own. When I started working with another teacher, my mental health and productivity improved immensely.

As I was starting to feel comfortable in my job, COVID-19 happened. Being adept with technology, I volunteered to help train other staff to use Google Classroom. I created several resources to assist staff with online teaching. It felt good to be able to help other staff members and still able to take care of my own responsibilities as a teacher.

When the beginning of our flexible learning period began, I felt completely out of my depth. Whilst I had a good understanding of the programs and needs of my students, I knew it was going to be even more difficult than face-to-face teaching. One issue we face in the community is that many students have little or no access to internet. On top of putting together online content, I also had to arrange printed programs for several of my students. I was essentially doing double the work.

As a school, it took us a little while to find our feet and understand what



was working for our students. When our second round of remote learning happened, we were more prepared. 2020 has certainly not been the year I was expecting. I have missed out on a lot of things such as school photos, camp and Book Week celebrations. But I am also grateful to be able to step up and show my commitment to my school, my students and to my profession. While I would've preferred a normal year, I can't say I'm disappointed with how the year unfolded."

Running a sustainable business.



Author: Christina Sexton

ACU commerce graduate Phoebe James saw a timely gap in the market brought about by the global pandemic and seized the opportunity to take her business in a new direction.

UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY

“Just to be clear, I can’t wait for life to return to normal!” Phoebe said about the devastating COVID-19 crisis. “But at the same time, the global pandemic brought about a new opportunity for my business that I had to jump on.”

Phoebe began her accessories business Cordsbag while she was still at uni, selling her products to friends and family. While tote bags are her main focus, she has recently pivoted to producing handmade, upcycled fabric facemasks, which has proven to be a particularly timely move.

“I saw the need for masks, especially here in Melbourne where I live, and I realised there was a gap in the market. I knew I had to move quickly and I started sewing straight away. It was exhausting trying to keep up. But I’m proud of what I’ve produced.

“My facemasks are a lot more trendy than what’s out there. They’re more

comfortable, warmer, and just a bit more fun. I love incorporating colour and brightness into the designs.”

SLOWING DOWN

Sustainability was always going to be integral to Phoebe’s brand. “From the beginning I knew I wanted to be a part of the slow fashion movement. Most people I know didn’t realise where their clothes and accessories were coming from, and didn’t know a lot about sweatshops and worker conditions. I didn’t want any part of that.

“I only use high-quality materials to build bags and accessories that will last. All of my shipping is done with compostable postbags and I don’t use plastic in any part of my business. Plus, all of my facemasks are made with recycled fabrics.

“My hope is that I’m creating something for everyone, but something



ethical too, which is where my personal beliefs lie.”

STITCHING A CAREER TOGETHER

As happy as Phoebe is with the direction Cordsbag is now going in, she wasn’t always certain that running a business was in her future. “It was on my mind, and I knew I liked sewing, but I never thought it would be a career for me.”

The origins of her business started simply. “I just wanted a tote bag made out of corduroy. I couldn’t find anything, so I decided to make one myself. I thought it was cool and started selling them on Instagram. Later on, I got my website up and running. It was doing well, so I decided to go with it.”

Phoebe readily admits the sewing side of her business had a rocky start. “I grew up as a dancer, so my mum was always making costumes for me on her sewing machine,” she said. “I paid attention to her and I’m mostly self-taught. But I spent a lot of years of making truly horrible things! Eventually I got better at it.”

FINDING FREEDOM

Phoebe said that freedom is by far the best part of running her business.

“I love working at my own pace, being creative, and finding inspiration and ideas from everyone.

“I’ve always been entrepreneurial, and my dad was forever talking to me about business ideas. He actually came up with the business name and he really helps me along. Plus, he and mum let me take over a space at home and turn it into a work studio, which I’m so grateful to have.”

The downside, however, for Phoebe is ever present.

“It’s just me. And that can get really overwhelming. Eventually I’d love to have more people on board to help me out. Sometimes my phone blows up with customer queries and it’s a lot to take on.”

LEARNING THE BASICS

Phoebe said her Bachelor of Commerce (she majored in marketing and event management) has proven invaluable to growing her business.

“I really loved the entrepreneurial units. It’s where I learnt the most,” she said. “And I think the other students in my cohort would agree – in those classes everyone was really attentive and switched on to what the lecturers were discussing.

“I got some great advice about how to start a business, I learnt about price points, and I developed a good understanding of consumer behaviour. I was also taught how to retain customers and develop strategic social media plans. I wouldn’t have known any of that without my degree.”

STRIKING A BALANCE

As a natural creative, striking a balance between the fun design side of her business with necessary admin tasks like bookkeeping has been challenging for Phoebe.

“I would have to force myself to sit down in a nice, calm spot with a cup of tea and tell myself, ‘Ok, you can do this’. But I got a lot of help from old classmates with the accounting side of things, as well as figuring out some of the technology. I’ve since learnt it’s really important to make time for every part of your business.

“And I admit I can be tough on myself. I always feel like I could be doing more. The biggest lesson is to sit back and appreciate everything I’ve done. And then to move forward, you just take it step by step.”



The life of an artist

Author: Christina Sexton

Patrick Hunter, better known as Inkhunter, is a Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design graduate who is making a splash in a big way.

Pursuing the life of an artist isn't always easy. Luckily for ACU alumnus Patrick, his artist mother and grandmother already led the way.

"I was so lucky to have an artistic upbringing with creative people surrounding me," Patrick said. "Though, it's funny, that while both my mum and nan are artists, I never really asked them to teach me new skills. I was just always observing and paying attention. For me, this was the best way to learn and I subconsciously took it all in. Because of them, I knew I'd get into art. It was always for me, there was nothing else."

A HAPPY MEDIUM

While Patrick now specialises in street art on a grand scale – one of his latest works stretches for an epic 70 metres along a construction site wall – being exposed to all of the different mediums during his degree became a valuable lesson.

"One of the best things about going to uni to study art in-depth was it helped me gain a solid understanding across all of the mediums," he said. "It really forced our minds to stretch and push in different ways."



"I like having that base knowledge now, even if I'm not using everything I learnt every day. But when I have to get creative and think of a concept for a new project or design, this knowledge from uni helps it all come together."

LIVE ACTION

One of Patrick's latest creations is in a prime position on the promenade leading to Manly Beach in Sydney, where eight million people stroll by each year. Patrick was tasked with transforming a blank 70-metre construction site wall into a uniquely urban artwork. However, he was not alone and volunteers from the local community were encouraged to pick up a paint brush.

"I had all sorts of people helping me complete it, including lots of kids from the local school."

When Patrick and his volunteers were busy painting, onlookers enjoyed live music and relaxed in deck chairs seeing the artwork come to life – literally watching paint dry. Patrick's Sunset Dreaming design was so successful, it went on to win 'Best Utility Art' at the recent Australian Street Art Awards.

ABOUT TIME

While Patrick is now an in-demand street artist, with big clients like Four Pines beer and Westpac to his name, he readily admits success didn't come quickly – or easily.

"I definitely felt scared about my future career when I was studying," Patrick

said. "It took me a good two years to build a portfolio, and during this time I was just working casual jobs and getting support from Centrelink. And I was lucky enough to get a government grant that helped me stretch things further. But figuring out how to turn visual arts into an actual career has been the hardest part.

"So when I left uni, I DM'd as many street artists as I could. This turned out to be the best career move I made – I'd just hang out with other artists to learn from them. I met lots of likeminded people, like Alex Lehours, who also studied visual arts at ACU, and the street artist, Mulga, who sold t-shirts at markets and inspired me to try the same thing."

THE ARTIST'S WAY

While Patrick is busier than ever these days developing the Inkhunter brand, his head is firmly on his shoulders as he rides the ups and downs of the artist's life.

"What usually happens is you have a win, and then you wait. Then you'll get another win – and another wait. Things happen that are completely out of your hands," he said.

"Recently, I had a job lined up with a local council, but now it might not happen because of the bushfires in their area. Or maybe a job opportunity gets taken away because of something like a shifting budget, and suddenly your artwork might not be the right step for them after all."

FAILING UP

Making mistakes, sometimes big ones, has all been a part of Patrick's growth as an artist. "It's so hard. You need to have a realistic approach to jobs and it takes a lot of time. You have to be dedicated and you must be ready to fail – a lot. But what I found is uni is a really good place to do that. You later realise those mistakes you make while you're studying become part of your process as an artist."

Patrick's plan for now is to follow his passion for painting and see where it leads him.

"I want to keep illustrating for anyone who enjoys it, I want to continue building my portfolio, and I want to keep working with big brands and talking to everyone I can.

"I'm just happy right now – but it took me a long time to get here."



Greg Craven: Closing the book

Eminent law academic, feisty commentator, accomplished administrator, devout Catholic and doting grandfather. Welcome to the world of Greg Craven.



The facial features of Gregory Joseph Craven are quintessentially Irish. The prominent chin. The thin upper lip. The contoured nose. A map of Ireland on a face. On his first visit to the old country in 1990, as a 32-year-old Australian who had never ventured overseas, he came face-to-face with “some really confronting things”.

“One is that there are only four types of Irish looks, and I’ve got one of them,” says Craven, Professor of Law and the retiring Vice-Chancellor and President of Australian Catholic University (ACU).

“My father used to say, ‘by the time you’re 50, you’ll look exactly what you are: an Irish peasant from Galway’. That was true. I had no choice but to embrace it.”

Visiting Ireland for the first time “wasn’t one of those mawkish emotional experiences”, but it did bring him closer to his Irish-Catholic heritage. With his wife Anne and four children in tow, he went searching for Cloondorgan, a township in County Galway where his ancestors once lived.

“There was one house, and when the farmer and his wife came out, I said, ‘we’re looking for Cloondorgan’, and they said, ‘this is it’. We looked around and we thought, ‘something awful has

happened here.’”

Before them was a vast field dotted with rough stones memorialising those who fell victim to the Great Famine.

“It suddenly made the Irish history of famine – being Catholic in Ireland, having to leave Ireland – it made it real,” says Craven, now 62. “That was a sort of galvanic moment ... an experience that you don’t easily repeat.”

It put into greater context the journey of his great-great-grandfather Thaddy O’Creaven, who arrived in Australia in 1867 and was handed a piece of paper with his new name: Timothy Craven. Problem was, he couldn’t read.

For the next three generations, the Craven men were labourers, and life was hard. Greg predicts that if it weren’t for education, and specifically Catholic education, he would likely be “digging a road somewhere outside Geelong”.

“We have no idea how many generations of brilliant men and women lie buried without a headstone in Ireland because they were never taught to read and write,” he says.

“And so I’ve had a consciousness of, in a sense, good fortune that my family escaped relatively recently from grinding poverty, a strong feeling that

the reason it happened was education, and a burning desire and duty to make sure my children had the same opportunities for it.”

THE GREAT LEVELLER

The progression of Greg Craven’s paternal line explains his passion for providing educational opportunities to people who never had them before. He’s been a vocal supporter of the demand-driven system of funding, which uncapped university student places to provide broader access to higher education.

Craven is a firm believer in the system as an equity measure. He has used his national platform to shout it from the rooftops.

“That’s what uncapping places means to people,” he told *The Monthly* in 2016. “You know that daughter you thought was going to be a cleaner, like you? She’s going to be an accountant. That son you thought was going to work on the roads? He’s going to be a nurse.”

Craven speaks of his strong desire to help those who are rich in talent but poor in opportunity. Universities, he says, “should not simply be a privilege of people who are either wealthy or well placed”.



The young Greg Craven was well placed, and he was certainly clever, but he wasn't always a model student. In primary school, his parents received a report from an educational psychologist declaring he would not make it past year 10.

"I've never known whether that was a completely accurate report and I've massively overachieved, or whether he was completely wrong," Craven says.

Even in high school at St Kevin's College, his academic performance was patchy.

"When my sister died, my performance completely collapsed and went up and down," he adds. "I was very unmotivated because I was very unhappy."

REMEMBERING PAULA

Fifty years on, Greg still thinks of his sister often.

He was 12 when Paula died crossing the road near their home at Glen Waverley. Paula was 11. Greg was right next to her when it happened.

"It's quite vivid, so if I want to, I can picture it," he says.

He remembers the truck coming over the hill, him stepping backwards, Paula stepping forwards.

"It was all so quick that the view of the truck ... I mean, I was literally there, and it blocked my view of Paula. When I saw her, she was lying on the road, dead. It's not a memory I often allow myself to conjure up, but yes, I have the clearest memory of it."

Losing her permanently changed his psychology.

"I've seen a terrible thing happen that no one could possibly reason away," he says. "I think it's led to me being a very anxious person, because if you think things can constantly go wrong, you will be like that."

The loss sent shockwaves through the family, and Greg's father was heartbroken. John Craven was a well-known Melbourne sports journalist. He died at 47, seven years after Paula's death, and Greg has no doubt that the tragedy contributed to his early death.

In the end, it was his father's words that impelled Greg to turn a corner at school. He was in year 9 when his dad approached him to very sadly say: 'Look, I'm working very hard to pay your fees. I don't mind if you don't do well because you can't, but I'd really appreciate it if you tried.'

Though Greg didn't reply, the message came through loud and clear.

"When somebody says, in a tone of real pain, 'please just try', it does have an effect on you," he says. "So my effort and results in year 10 were miraculously better than year 9, and it just progressed from there."

A STRONG CONSTITUTION

Paula's death may have given Greg Craven a profound sense of grief, but it never shook his Catholic faith. If anything, it strengthened it.

He has worn his Catholicism as a badge of honour, even when he felt pressure

to conceal it. He first encountered hostility while studying law at Melbourne University.

"If you encountered bigotry outside of university, you'd get people who'd say quite honestly that they don't like Catholics," he says. "In university, it was a lot more intense and much more self-righteous."

Years later, there were more ferocious attacks on Craven, but they were to do with politics rather than religion.

In the early 1990s, having held academic positions at both Melbourne and Monash universities, he became crown-counsel in the Kennett government. His performance cemented his reputation as one of the country's leading constitutional lawyers.

But professional success came at a high personal cost.

The government pursued an aggressive and often controversial reform agenda, and as a leading adviser, Craven was the fall guy. The attacks – both private and public – were vicious.

"It was incredibly tense and quite unusual to know that large numbers of people who you've never met really, really hate you," he says.

Whether he liked it or not, Craven now had a public profile to match his legal expertise.

After a brief stint as a Reader in Law back at Melbourne University, he moved to Perth to set up the University of Notre Dame's law school, and then to Curtin University, where he landed



a role as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning). He kept busy writing journal articles and books, including *Conversations with the Constitution* (2004), described in *The Australian* as “the wittiest book on the Constitution and one of the wisest”.

Before he knew it he was 47, the age his father was when he died.

“I worked out the exact day I would be as old as he was, and I sort of assumed I’d die at that point,” he says. “I thought, ‘well, this is interesting, I’m not dead. So, I better do something.’”

When the call came for him to move to Sydney to become ACU’s vice-chancellor, he wrestled with the decision. It was a young university, and perhaps one of the more challenging assignments in Australian higher education. In hindsight, he made the right choice.

CLOSING THE BOOK

One could easily surmise that Greg Craven is a natural extrovert, but he begs to differ.

“I’ve always been quite shy,” he says. “At a function, if you see someone standing in a corner, that will be me. I’m very good at making a speech to 1,000 people, but put me in a group of 50 and I won’t quite know what to do.”

Shy he might be, but throughout his career, Craven has been anything but quiet. He has been described publicly as “a feisty commentator”, “irreverent” and “the noisiest person in the university sector”.

As ACU’s vice-chancellor, he has pursued an ambitious and wholehearted reform agenda, and the university has earned wide respect in the areas of research, teaching and overall influence.

The institution that was once regarded as “that funny little Catholic university” now has “a genuine place in the Australian higher education system”, Craven says. It has climbed the rankings in research and student satisfaction, has a campus in Rome, and will open its ninth campus in Blacktown next year.

Craven has also left his mark on the sector, playing a prominent role in developing policy on university funding, regulation and teacher quality. He is a frequently published commentator on issues including republicanism, and Indigenous recognition.

In all of these endeavours, he’s never been scared of a fight.

“Professor Craven is always ready to go into battle for what he believes in,” said ACU chancellor, the late John Fahey, in April 2020.

Others have noted that Craven “thrives on a bit of biff”.

“He’s not oppositional by nature,” *The Australian* declared in 2012. “It’s just that he passionately defends his position.”

On occasion, the biffs have been controversial, and Craven has been on the receiving end of criticism. But some battles are “so important and so true

that they have to be fought”.

“You’ve got to have vice chancellors and professors who are prepared to stand up for things that matter,” Craven says, “and frankly, to suffer for them.”

There is an insider joke that Australia’s university executives like to tell. If you ever feel the need to ring a vice-chancellor at 3am, go right ahead. They’ll be awake, too.

“Being a vice-chancellor is terrifying,” says Craven, “because so many things can go wrong. Some people can literally have the world falling around their head and they can sleep soundly at night. I can’t do that.”

Craven is the first to admit that, despite all he has achieved in a long and fruitful career, he can’t help but worry that things might go awry. Put it down to the devastating loss of his dear sister, or to his “natural Irish pessimism”.

In retirement, he’ll spend more time on his farm in Wollombi, enjoying “a senile version” of his childhood in Glen Waverley. He’ll read and write more. Spend time with Anne. Tend to his cows and herd his grandson. He’ll sit with a sense of pride at what he has achieved, and a sense of relief that – finally – there’ll be less that can go wrong, and there’ll be less to worry about.

“I look back with satisfaction,” Craven says, “and I look forward to going ... it’s the right time for me to go.”

Staff celebrated with Vice-Chancellor's Staff Excellence Awards 2020

The Student Urgent Relief Fund Team has been awarded the 2020 Vice-Chancellor's Medal for Excellence in recognition of their work raising funds to support grants for students through the pandemic.

This team established a relief fund which supported 832 students experiencing financial difficulties. Team members have also received a Vice-Chancellor's Staff Excellence Award for Mission Excellence.

During the virtual ceremony, ACU Vice-Chancellor's Staff Excellence Awards were presented to staff across six categories: Mission Excellence, Service Excellence, Spirit of Reconciliation Excellence, Excellence in Student Experience, Excellence in Community Engagement, and Excellence in Research and Research Partnership.

MISSION EXCELLENCE

Team: Rachelle Bramley, Tara Loty, Kathy Sweeney, Jing Tong and Adrienne Conway.

MISSION EXCELLENCE

Team: Colleen Tracey, Tanya Kehoe, Greg Jeffery, Hannah Hladik, Ann O'Connor, Jeremy Ambrose, Cristina Gomez and Brother Michael Callinan FMS.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Team: Wil Daniels, Keng Ong, Dustin Marcus, Gordon Howell, YingFang Lee, Trung Nguyen, Brendan Hunt, Matthew Remington, Natasha Zissis, Paul Wagner, Govinda Subedi, Glen Fisher, Douglas Simpson and David Prentis.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Team: Helen Murnane, Katie Cooper, Catherine Thompson, Amanda Wang, Ashleigh Brown, Annette Rigby, Kym Fizzell and Patricia Yamasaki.

EXCELLENCE IN STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Team: Monica Bordignon, Rebecca Riley, Howard Costello, Karen Grech, Anne-Marie Yates and Benjamin Todd.

EXCELLENCE IN STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Team: Professor William Ashraf, Dr Richard Colledge, Dr Bhavani Sridharan, Professor Meg Stuart and Associate Professor Anthony Whitty.

SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION EXCELLENCE

Team: Associate Professor Elspeth Froude, Associate Professor Kerrie Thomsen, Associate Professor Loretta Sheppard, Associate Professor Laura Miller, Dr Susan Darzins, Dr Elisa Yule, Dr Margaret Wallen, Dr Ros Harrington, Hugh Stewart and Jennifer O'Brien.

SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION EXCELLENCE

Team: Associate Professor Loretta Sheppard, Associate Professor Joanna Zubrzycki, Associate Professor Wendy Pearce and Richard Jameson.

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Syed Muhammad Fazal-e-Hasan, for his work with asylum seekers and migrants.

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Associate Professor Dr Laura Miller, for her work with the Brisbane Paralympic Football Program.

EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Professor Kathy Mills, for her research into the role of multimodal and digital technologies in education, and her work forging beneficial research partnerships.

EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Team: Dr Karen McLean, Professor Susan Edwards, Dr Timothy Katiba, Jacinta Bartlett, Sam Carroll, Melanie Thomas and Celine (Poh Yoke) Chu.

Congratulations to all the
2020 award winners

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