

Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry

Information for Applicants and Research Students

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Level 4, 250 Victoria Pde
East Melbourne, 3002
Victoria, AUSTRALIA

T: +61 3 9953 3285
E: EO.IRCI@acu.edu.au
W: irci.acu.edu.au

Research at ACU

Since 2014, ACU has greatly expanded its research effort in targeted areas (religion, philosophy, health, education, social justice and the common good). This research intensification has directed resources to supporting research active staff, recruiting outstanding new researchers to the University, expanding international collaborations with leading universities around the world, developing new research programs, and creating dedicated research institutes to build critical mass in identified areas of research strength. The Australian government's most recent research assessment reported substantial improvement in the quality of research in several disciplines that are aligned with the strategic mission and focus of the University. In Philosophy (FOR 2203) and Religious Studies (FOR2204), ACU research was judged above world standard. ACU was ranked equal first in Australia in Human Movement and Sports Science, Nursing, Public Health and Health Services, Psychology, and Religion and Religious Studies; Philosophy and Applied Ethics rank equal sixth in the country.

The Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry

The Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry (IRCI) was formed to support research in religion and philosophy. The IRCI promotes collaborative research on religion and philosophy from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including philosophy, theology, history, and literature. Focusing on Philosophy and Christian thought and practice from antiquity to today, we explore inter-relationships between religion and philosophy and their cultural contexts, and contribute to contemporary theological, philosophical, ethical, and political debates, aiming to advance understanding of our world and imagine ways to improve it. The Institute is directed by Prof. David Runia FAHA, a world expert on Ancient Philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism. It has developed a lively and collegial research culture, including regular seminars and reading groups, invited international guest scholars, and a growing research student community. While this Institute is still in a growth phase, it comprises four Research Programs: Biblical and Early Christian Studies, Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Philosophy, and Religion and Theology (see further below).

The IRCI hosts four large-scale, 5-year international projects, led by senior researchers, on topics related to New Testament (Texts and Traditions), Early Christianity (Early Christian Epistemology), Philosophy and Theology (Autonomy) and Religion (Atheism). In addition, smaller-scale projects are funded to build towards larger international collaborations. Recent projects include empirical and theoretical studies of philosophical questions presented by moral disagreement, and analyses of 'hope' from the perspective of philosophy, theology, and religious studies. There is scope to expand IRCI research through these internally-funded schemes. The Institute also hosts Australian Research Council projects (Early Career and Discovery Program) in Early Christianity and Philosophy.

Alongside and partly by means of these projects, the IRCI has developed a range of national and international partnerships. A co-tutelle agreement with KU Leuven will enable joint PhD degrees, and 2018/19 will see the first of a series of ongoing seminars between ACU and Leuven, and a three way symposium between Leuven, the Humboldt, and ACU. Research projects include Chief Investigators from Durham, Leuven, Notre Dame, and Yale. ACU scholars also collaborate with scholars from several leading Australian universities. In addition, a number of world-renowned scholars have joined the Institute. They spend time in Melbourne during the year, and assist with leading major research projects, mentoring staff, and research training. In the area of Philosophy, these Professorial Fellows include Mark Alfano (Delft), Robert Audi (Notre Dame); Roger Crisp (Oxford); Steve Evans (Baylor); Chris Insole (Durham, also Theological Ethics); Claude Romano (Paris-Sorbonne); Eleonore Stump (SLU, also Medieval Studies). Across the other areas of the Institute, visiting fellows include John Barclay and Francis Watson (Durham, New Testament), Lewis Ayres (Durham, Early Christianity, Modern Theology), Matthew Champion (London, Medieval Studies), Philip McCosker (Cambridge) and Denys Turner (Yale) (Theology and Medieval Studies), and Veronica Alfano (Delft) and Miranda Stanyon (Cambridge/London) (Literature and Early Modern Studies). The Institute also aims to develop graduate level programs. All this builds to a vibrant research environment and a critical mass of researchers in religion and philosophy, broadly understood.

Biblical and Early Christian Studies

Biblical and Early Christian Studies (BECS) researchers have played a leading role in New Testament and Patristic Studies in the region and internationally. BECS includes fifteen researchers with interests across the New Testament canon as well as non-canonical literature, and expertise in Early Christian Studies, Late Antiquity, and Byzantium. Research in the Program is unified through five-year collaborative projects on 'Texts, Traditions, and Identities in Early Christianity' and 'Modes of Knowing and the Ordering of Knowledge in Early Christianity'. BECS researchers are involved in two Australian Research Council (ARC) Projects, one on religious violence and the political use of memory in early Christianity, another on Cyril's *Contra Iulianum*. There are overlapping interests in mechanisms of cultural and intellectual reception, the appropriation, negotiation, and construction of traditions and identities, doctrines, and the development of ideas and social practices in early Christian communities.

Three senior BECS scholars are fellows of the Australian Academy of Humanities; BECS also includes active members of international academic societies such as SNTS and the AIEP-IAPS. Pauline Allen, a past President of the International Association for Patristic Studies, was recently made a fellow of the British Academy, a rare honour for an Australian researcher, especially one who has not held a tenured position in the UK. BECS sustains several international research partnerships, including a strong Asian network nurtured through the Asia Pacific Early Christian Studies Society (APECSS).

Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Medieval and Early Modern Studies is a new program within the Institute which draws on existing strengths and will take further shape in 2018–19. The program will use interdisciplinary methods and diverse source materials (including visual and material culture, music, and text) to investigate European religious cultures and locate significant religious ideas and practices in their historical context and relate them to the modern world. It will focus on the cultural, intellectual, and social dimensions of Christianity across confessional identities, and between Christians and non-Christians. It will investigate continuities and discontinuities both across the period and with the modern world, for example by interrogating categories of ‘reform’, ‘the secular’, or ‘conversion’, or through medievalism or reception history. And it will explore the everyday lived experience of people in different levels of society, diverse social groups, and diverse locations.

The new team will relate closely to other areas of the Institute, including scholars of early Christianity and Byzantium, historians of philosophy, systematic theologians, and experts in the study of religion. Intersections between these Programs will flow, for example, from the confluence of medieval and early modern thought and contemporary theology and cultural theory, and from the influence of early Christianity on medieval and early modern Christianity.

Philosophy

Philosophy has expertise in areas such as epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, political philosophy, social philosophy, and history of philosophy, thereby establishing a strong philosophy program broadly in the Anglo-American tradition. Within these areas, there is also potential to build on current expertise in empirical philosophy, especially at the intersection of ethics, epistemology, and social philosophy, and to develop conversations with scholars with expertise in Continental thought including phenomenology and the history of philosophy from other areas of the Institute.

Currently, the Philosophy Program has fourteen members. It will expand significantly in 2018, with new positions open across all areas. Activities include Richard Rowland’s ACU-funded project on moral disagreement, including two international symposia at ACU’s Rome Campus. Robert Audi leads the ‘ACU Global Issues in Ethics’ series at ACU’s Rome Campus, and has attracted significant international scholars to contribute to these seminars. In 2018, Audi will also lead an international symposium on ‘Moral Epistemology’ and Roger Crisp will convene a colloquium on ‘Acts and Omissions,’ gathering together philosophers from around the world. Such activities demonstrate ACU’s commitment to building research networks and partnerships in Australia and overseas. Dr Steve Mathews recently won an ARC Discovery Project titled ‘Dementia, Moral Agency, and Identity’ (DP180103262) starting in 2018 together with Jeanette Kennett (Macquarie). Another activity in this Program is the Melbourne Applied Philosophy Seminar, a collaboration between ACU and Melbourne University, which in Semester 1 of 2018 has attracted national and international speakers including Tom Hurka (Toronto), Simon Keller (Victoria University, Wellington), and Colin Klein (ANU). Such activities sustain collaborative national and international partnerships. To that end, there is scope to develop a major five-year research project to provide a focus for collaborative and international research within the Philosophy Program.

Religion and Theology

Religion and Theology at ACU includes concentrations in systematic theology (including but not limited to Catholic theology), religious ethics and political theology, religious studies, and philosophy of religion. It supports theoretically-informed constructive work in the study of religion. It has expertise in European philosophy, especially post-structuralism and phenomenology, and researchers also have a keen interest in cultural studies. Their research draws upon these resources in conversation with classic religious texts in order to address urgent ethical and political questions, and develop new ways of thinking about religion in contemporary society. The Program currently has fourteen members, and further recruitment is planned for 2018.

Collaborative research in this area is focused through two five-year projects. The first, ‘Atheism and Christianity: Moving Past Polemic’, explores intersections between atheism and Christianity in discourse (in light of negative theology), experience (drawing upon phenomenology), and politics (especially post-secular political theology). The second, ‘Redeeming Autonomy’, aims to transform theological ethics for a new generation of scholarship by investigating the vexed concept of autonomy from the perspectives of theology and philosophy. Scholars in Religion and Theology also have on-going research projects in areas such as Kant’s theological and philosophical legacy, Mother Teresa, the notions of hope, catholicity, and rhythm, Catholic social teaching, Vatican II, and intersections between violence and charity in Christian thought and practice.

Intersections between the Programs

Researchers in the Institute are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues across the Institute, and there are formal structures, such as seminars and reading groups, in place to facilitate multi-disciplinary research. In addition, while we always seek scholars with highly-developed disciplinary expertise and an exciting individual research program, we also look where possible to appoint scholars who can contribute to at least two Programs, since we expect that novel research will emerge at the margins.

ACU Melbourne St Patrick's Campus

ACU's Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's) has more than 8,900 students including over 1,000 international students. The campus is conveniently located on the fringe of the Melbourne Central Business District. The popular retail strips of Brunswick Street and Smith Street, with their variety of cafes, shops and art galleries, are just a short walk away. Some of Melbourne's finest parks, gardens, and recreational facilities are also within easy walking distance of the campus.



[Melbourne and Olympic Parks](#) host sporting events such as the Australian Open Tennis Grand Slam, Cricket (national and international), Football (Australian Rules and Soccer), Rugby (League and Union), Netball and Basketball, as well as music concerts and shows. Alongside other CBD attractions, and also within walking distance of the Melbourne Campus, are [The National Gallery of Victoria](#) (NGV International and NGV Australia), [The Arts Centre](#) Theatres and Concert Hall, the [Melbourne Recital Centre](#), and [Fitzroy Gardens](#) and the [Royal Botanic Gardens](#).

Melbourne's St Patrick Campus

Living in Melbourne

A multicultural city of about 4.5 million people from over 200 different countries, Melbourne has topped the [Economist's Global Liveability Index](#) for the last 7 years. The index is generated from a range of quantitative and qualitative factors measuring stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Mercer's 2017 [Quality of Living Index](#) most recently ranked Melbourne 16th of 231 cities across 10 socio-economic measures. The 2017 [Social Progress Index](#) judges Australia among the most socially progressive nations in the world (9th overall; 1st in Asia).

Information about Melbourne and Victoria

[Live in Victoria](#): Information about Victoria, including Places to Live with interactive maps, Education and Childcare, Healthcare and Medical Services, Public Transport and Driving, Housing and Property, Cost of Living, and Relocation Checklists.

[Visit Victoria](#): The Victorian Government's tourism site, with information about what you can see and do in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

[That's Melbourne](#): Like any other global city, Melbourne boasts a range of Festivals, Exhibitions, and Major Events; find further information here.

[Play Melbourne](#): An interactive take on what Melbourne has to offer. A live Periscope stream with stories about Melbourne told by locals.

[Public Transport](#): Information on trams, trains and buses in Melbourne and across the state. Information on cycle routes and programs can be found [here](#).

[Churches in Victoria](#): Links to members of the Victorian Council of Churches.