

Undergraduate Research News Australasia

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Editorial

Season's Greetings, avid URNA readers! We're delighted to share the resounding success of the 11th Annual Conference

of Undergraduate Research (ACUR2023), a testament to the thriving culture of academic exploration in Australasia. This year's ACUR conference showcased the outstanding

work of 107 researchers from across the country, with captivating presentations and groundbreaking discoveries. The event not only offered substantial prizes but also created a vibrant platform for intellectual exchange. The conference's success is vividly captured in our photo gallery, showcasing the collaborative



spirit that defines undergraduate research in the region.

Looking ahead, we are excited to introduce the ACUR Medal, recognizing individuals who have made exceptional contributions to promoting undergraduate research. We encourage our readers to consider applying and continuing to champion the growth of this vital academic community.

Join us in welcoming our new Student Committee Head, Sara Wardak, whose passion and motivation promise to elevate the promotion of undergraduate research. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Charles (Charlie) O'Neill for his remarkable contributions to the committee in 2023.

In this edition, we feature Lucia Ravi, a Master's research student and seasoned librarian with a decade of experience. Lucia shares her research and presents case studies on undergraduate research, inviting URNA readers to actively participate in her study.

As we celebrate local achievements, we also encourage you to explore global opportunities. Keep an eye on other Undergraduate Research conferences around the world, and share your experiences if you decide to attend.

Thank you for your continued support of URNA. Together, we look forward to another year of inspiring discoveries and collaborative achievements in undergraduate research.

By Lilia Mantai

ACUR2023 conference



The 11th edition of the ACUR (Australian Council for Undergraduate Research) conference held at Swinburne University of Technology (Hawthorn, Melbourne) on the 20-22 November 2023 offered a fantastic platform for undergraduate students across Australia to showcase their research, exchange ideas, and engage in scholarly discussions.

There were in total 107 registered delegates, overwhelmingly undergraduates (86), with nevertheless a couple of supervisors (5) accompanying their mentees in their endeavours, and a few family members (16). It was a great opportunity for students to engage their family and friends in their academic journey as a token of their support.

This year's theme was "[A Connected World: New Research Directions](#)", which despite being perceived as challenging to include all disciplines, managed to get most presenters to dig deep in their subconscious to connect the dots. Of the 98 submissions received, 60 were selected for spoken presentations and 9 applicants opted for a poster. The top universities were: The University of Queensland with 17 delegates, followed by Macquarie University (10) while University of Sunshine Coast and Western Sydney University each had 6 representatives.

Conference Programme

The conference was formally opened by Professor Alan Duffy, Pro Vice Chancellor of Flagship Initiatives, followed by a Plenary Lecture by Emeritus Professor Angela Brew, Chair of ACUR.

The [heart of the conference](#) was a series of presentations and panels where students had

the opportunity to share their research findings with their peers. The presentations were well-organized, and students demonstrated a high level of professionalism in conveying their ideas. The panels consisted mainly of doctoral researchers from the School assisted by faculty members.

The conference covered a diverse range of topics from the "influence of psychedelic attitudes" to "stem outreach programs" including an overview of "parental beliefs about hunger" and a study on the "subjective well-being of people living with dementia", showcasing the breadth and depth of research interests among the participating students. These examples were the winners of the judges' awards.

To facilitate exposure of the delegates to various disciplines, the sessions were not grouped under disciplines but rather each parallel session showcased a mix of topics. For example, the first set of presentations covered: humanities, nutrition, chemistry, psychology, visual arts, and even oenology (it's the study of wines, for the non-expert audience). The hybridisation of ideas and concepts is key to innovation and is in perfect alignment with one of core values of ACUR: "the transformative power of research in all its form as a vehicle for individual and collective learning."

To entice the delegates to interact more with each other, we introduced two People's Choices awards for the poster presentations: Best Content and Best Visuals. These awards were attributed on the basis of direct votes by delegates and guests only, and not surprisingly both winning presentations showcased very topical issues: microplastics in the environment and water pollution.

The core of the activities was held in the School of Science, Computing and Engineering Technologies, and over the two days 60 oral presentations were delivered in parallel sessions. The first day concluded with a 1-hour AstroTour hosted by a professional astronomer educating about astronomy using innovative virtual reality technologies developed by Swinburne's Centre for Astrophysics and Supercomputing.

On the second day, besides talks and poster displays, the delegates participated in concurrent workshops exploring various aspects of research, such as skill building and intellectual property, and contributing with their personal experiences.

The social activities were organised and supported by the two main student bodies, Swinburne Student Life and Swinburne Student Union. Furthermore, the involvement and engagement of HDR students from the school were crucial to the success of the event, and it has been a great learning experience for the 6 volunteers.

Organising Committee

Thanks to the Organising Committee behind this successful event: Dr François Malherbe, Dr Huseyin Sumer, Ms Stephanie Kleores, Mr Asif Khan, Miss Samantha Mackay and

Miss Renee De Boer. For the logistics, the Organising Committee was supported by a team of PhD volunteers: Miss Setareh Elyasi, Mrs Tayyba Tariq, Mrs Suthira Pushparajah, Mr Ayaz Mehmood and Mrs Binu Senanayake.

Sponsorship and Prizes

The event was heavily subsidised and supported by the School of Science, Computing and Engineering Technologies, and the Organising Committee acknowledges the unwavering support of Professor Alex Stojcevski, Dean, Professor Enzo Palombo, Associate Dean Research, and Dr Rhys Shobbrook, Associate Dean Education.

A special thanks to Professor Laura-Anne Bull, DVC (Education, Experience and Employability)

who delivered Day 2 Plenary Lecture, and Professor Pip Pattison, former DVC (EEE), for their extra funding support.

We express our deep appreciation to LaTrobe University for their Bronze Sponsorship. Additionally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all the schools of Swinburne University of Technology for their generous financial contributions: School of Business, Law and Entrepreneurship, School of Design and Architecture, School of Engineering, School of

Health Sciences and School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education.

Thanks to HERDSA for providing the cash prize for the Best Presentation "Education" and an annual HERDSA membership.

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ACUR2023 Prizes and Awards

1st Prize Oral \$800 (sponsored by SoSCET)



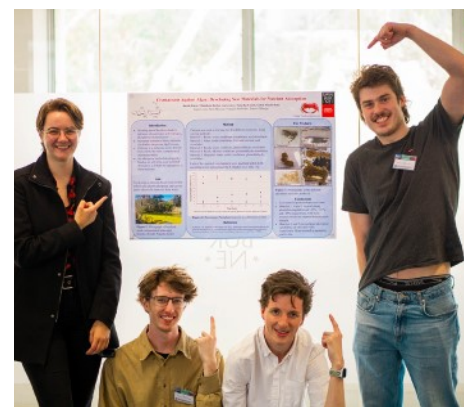
Charles McKinley
Macquarie University
The Influence of Psychedelic Attitudes on Psychedelic Experiences: A prospective Study

3rd Prize Oral \$300 (sponsored by SoBLE)



Sahba Monzaviyan
Western Sydney University
Examining the inter iater-Reliability of Proxy-Raters Measuring the Subjective Well-Being of People Living with Dementia

People's Choice Content \$300 (sponsored by SoDA)



Natasha Grant, Jack Gore, Galen MacFarlane, and Jacob Davis
Swinburne University of Technology
Crustaceans Against Algae: Developing New Materials for Nutrient Adsorption

2nd Prize Oral \$500 (sponsored by Swinburne Research)



Georgie Aiuto
Swinburne University of Technology
How are STEM Outreach Programs Promoting STEM Careers to Victorian School Students?"

Best Poster Presentation \$500 (sponsored by La Trobe University)



Alexandra Mruk
Macquarie University
Parents Lay Beliefs About the Causes of Hunger, Satiety, and Thirst in Children: An Exploratory Investigation

People's Choice Visuals \$300 (sponsored by SoHS)



Yee Hang (Josie) Yip
The University of Queensland
Microplastic in Moreton Bay

Best Paper Education \$500 + One-year HERDSA Membership (offered by HERDSA)



Brayden Condie
Western Sydney University
Can Infants Learn from Extended Reality?

2nd Best paper Education \$300 (sponsored by School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education)



Anita Walker
University of the Sunshine Coast
The Pedagogical Beliefs of Queensland & Irish Mathematics Teachers

Most Inspirational Talk: \$300 (sponsored by SoE)



Rohan Ford
Swinburne University of Technology
Exploring Frontiers: My Journey in Undergraduate Research – Engineering SMACCSAT1 and leading a student team to orbit

ACUR Undergraduate Research Medal - Coming Soon!

Exciting news for all our ACUR members and the broader academic community! It's time to shine a spotlight on those making a significant impact in undergraduate research across Australasia. We're thrilled to announce that nominations for the prestigious ACUR Undergraduate Research Medal are now open!

This medal celebrates exceptional contributions to undergraduate research, whether it's through innovative curriculum designs, engaging events, or dynamic networks. If you've made a notable difference in this field, we want to hear from you. And guess what? You can even put your own hand up for recognition – yes, self-nominations are welcome!

Here's what we're looking for in a winning nomination:

- A detailed description (up to 300 words) of your contribution. Tell us what you did, how you did it, and the way it's elevating undergraduate research.
- Proof of lasting impact (also up to 300 words). We're keen to see how your work has resonated over at least two years. Share feedback, achievements, or any form of measurable success.
- Two punchy references. One from someone who's directly benefited from your work (like a student or participant) and another from a colleague or supervisor who's seen your efforts up close.

Don't miss your chance to be recognised for your incredible work. Winners will not only receive the esteemed medal but also get the opportunity to feature in ACUR promotional materials, like URNA and our website.



Ready to make your mark? Submit your nomination and let's celebrate the amazing work happening in undergraduate research together!

Details and due date will be announced soon!

Study Seeking Participants!

Your approach to integrating research for undergraduate students.

This research aims to provide a practitioner's perspective on both 'why' and 'how' research is being integrated in support of UG students' learning outcomes. It aims to develop

theoretical research-based learning conceptual frameworks in ways that facilitate teaching practice.

I am seeking to interview academics from Australian and New Zealand universities who are either unit coordinators or who work in a teaching capacity within UG units which include a research component, about their

perspectives on integrating research for UG students.

Participation involves a one-on-one 1hr interview with the researcher, online or MS Teams.

Please email your expression of interest to: lucia.ravi@research.uwa.edu.au.

Student Committee Report

In the past year, the ACUR Student Committee has concentrated its efforts on two main domains: operational streamlining and programmatic expansion.

Under operational streamlining, the committee introduced a Discord server as a centralised communication hub. This server aims to integrate academic and student communities, serving not just as a forum for dialogue but as a collaborative workspace. It has attracted the interest of 12 external academic organisations, thereby amplifying ACUR's outreach and influence. To tackle the administrative bottleneck of password management, especially during committee transitions, a LastPass account has been implemented. This digital vault, controlled by a master key held by the Executive, mitigates the risks associated with password losses and ensures continuity in digital operations.

In terms of programmatic expansion, the committee is in the initial stages of developing a workshop for 2024 in conjunction with

the ANU Science Society. This workshop diverges from past events by focusing on the human network within academic research, specifically targeting the mentor-mentee relationship between research supervisors and undergraduate students. It will be held in conjunction with the Three Minute Thesis competition in order to showcase undergraduate research. We also hope to work with similar student-run organisations from other universities. By facilitating these connections, the committee aims to address a latent need in the academic community and pave the way for a more fluid exchange of ideas and opportunities in undergraduate research. This initiative dovetails with the committee's overarching goal to foster a dynamic and interconnected research ecosystem at the undergraduate level.

Finally, the student committee is exploring making the ACUR Student Conference archival, which will allow students to gain experience preparing work for publication, as well as providing additional motivation for

participation in the conference. This will be work done largely in conjunction with the new student committee and ascending head for 2024.

On a more personal note, this year has been incredibly rewarding. I've been incredibly fortunate to have a strong student team around me and it was so fulfilling to see the 2023 Conference come together. Undergraduate research is close to my heart and I am yet to come across an initiative that provides even a tenth of the support, guidance and encouragement that ACUR provides us undergrads. I'd like to thank my whole student committee, Donna for her great help (and reminders to finish my reports) and all of the Executive. I look forward to assisting the new Head of the Student Committee in my role as descending head.

Charlie O'Neill

Descending Head of Student Committee

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Letter from the Chair

It was such a pleasure to witness the many excellent presentations and to share the joyful atmosphere at this year's ACUR conference. It's wonderful to see the enthusiasm and interest in ACUR shown by these future professionals.

Hosting an ACUR conference starts with a committed individual who gathers together a team of colleagues and students. The conference hosting team at Swinburne University of Technology, under the leadership of Dr François Malherbe created a wonderful student experience, and it was great to see commitment and support from colleagues and PhD students and their university's senior leaders. We hope that such a team will soon come forward from another university with a proposal to host a conference in 2024.

As universities respond to the uncertainties of knowledge production within the Generative AI environment, ACUR has an important role in helping to ensure that students develop the researcherly mindset that comes from sustained engagement in research. Through the research skills and techniques and the professional skills and capabilities they develop,

each student grows as a person. Through doing research they develop nuanced understandings of the nature of evidence. They learn to question the truth of assertions, to differentiate fact from fiction, and to be critical of the source of the ideas before them. All of this is urgently needed in the GenAI context. In doing research they also gain an appreciation of important ethical issues raised by GenAI: privacy and data considerations, inaccuracy, misinformation and bias, exploitation and copyright issues, and they are trained to appreciate the importance of rigorous research ethics procedures.

ACUR aims to promote and advance undergraduate research not just for a few privileged students, but across the undergraduate curriculum. It supports universities in their efforts to grow opportunities for students at all levels to engage in research. In the current higher education context ACUR has an important role to play, not only in providing conference opportunities for students to publicly present their research, and in our colloquia where academics and academic managers come together to talk about implementation issues.

But also, increasingly, ACUR has been called upon to provide consultancy help in implementing strategic university-wide initiatives, to share resources and good practice, put practitioners in touch with each other, provide additional mentored opportunities for our students, and we are now working to reward excellent practice in undergraduate research implementation. We all need a researcherly mindset in dealing with the present connected yet disconnected complex world we are living in. So ACUR work is central to today's higher education.



An expanded Executive is important in enabling us to meet this large agenda and to plan for sustained growth. With this in mind, the ACUR Executive is now working to establish some new Executive positions. If you would like to be part of this inner circle, please contact myself or another member of the Executive and tell us what you would like to contribute.

Emeritus Professor Angela Brew

Chair, ACUR

chair@acur.org.au

Meet Sara



Sara has just been appointed as the new Head of the Student Committee. I wanted to know what drives her, her personal research highlights, and the challenges she encounters as an undergrad research student.

Lilia: Sara, tell me about your first encounter with research, what was it like?

Sara: When I was about eight, mum was doing her PhD and took me with her on campus. That was my first encounter and it was a nice memory. But my first personal experience with research was completely separate and in a different field – I received an internship as a Youth Advisor with Dr Stephanie Partridge, at that time in the Westmead Applied Research Centre, when I was 16 years old, after attending a Careers in Health Day at Westmead Hospital with my high school. I work with the same team led by Dr Partridge now at the Engagement and Co-Design Hub in the Faculty of Medicine and Health, USYD. I gave advice on the creation of a survey that was to be sent out to other young people, and drafted a piece for *Frontiers for Young Minds* that got published a while later, that presented research on nutrition for a younger audience. As of today (14 August 2023), it has had 175,772 views and downloads from all over the world – there is something quite

rewarding and satisfying about feeling that your contributions are leading to something real that can actually be useful to people.

Lilia: That's impressive, Sara, is that what excites or fascinates you about research?

Sara: The chance to create new knowledge rather than simply consuming knowledge – it makes you feel like you are part of a community that is all interested in a common goal in some way or another rather than simply observing progress from the sidelines, without a voice to shift the conversation.

Lilia: It's fantastic to hear that despite being early in your research journey you already feel like you are a member of the research community here and feel like your work has impact. Can you tell me more and have you experienced any challenges along the way?

Sara: I don't think that younger researchers have quite been normalised yet, even when they work on topics that are related to young people like my research. For instance, it is difficult to secure funding to present your research at conferences. When I presented at a conference in Montreal, Canada, this year, they did not have an age or degree category on the registration form for me at all – I am 19 years old and haven't finished my Bachelor's degree, and the categories on the registration form went from 20 years old onwards, and Bachelor's onwards. It is very difficult to enter the field in the first place if you do not have an academic or team who is willing to guide you and vouch for you, but I think this is beginning to change. I am lucky to be in a team that recognises the value that younger researchers can bring to the field.

Lilia: I hear you, this kind of advocacy and support is also quite important for more established scholars as well. Feeling like you belong here is essentially fuelled by the support of the community around you. What do you think doing research teaches you? What skills does it develop?

Sara: I think that research teaches perseverance above all. It can often be a long process, longer than assignments at university for instance, and it teaches you how to handle large projects over time consistently. Teamwork is also a skill that research develops, because often you write papers and work on projects alongside other co-authors, and each individual brings their own perspective and expertise. My co-authors taught me how to do systematic literature reviews using review software, so doing research in a team is a great opportunity to learn practical skills from each other.

Lilia: And perseverance and resilience are such important qualities, as we know. Employers of our graduates tell us that all the time! Is there anything research develops better than any other form of learning and teaching, do you think?

Sara: Research develops creativity better than other forms of learning and teaching in my opinion. In research you cannot rehash the thoughts of others without bringing them together in a unique perspective, or without linking it to novel data and conclusions.

Finally, when I ask her about a personal highlight, she shares that one of her papers got accepted to the [Lancet Child and Adolescent Health](#). The Youth Reviewer said that their paper “represented a way of thinking that needs to become more widely held across the world”.

“When the message you want to convey is received well by the very people you want to do research for, the hours you put into that piece pay off and it is a wonderful feeling.”

Note: This article was originally published in extended form in the [DIBERG blog](#).

Events announcements

[British Conference of Undergraduate Research \(BCUR\)](#) 25-26 April 2024, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

[International Conference of Undergraduate Research \(ICUR\)](#), 26-27 June 2024, University of Warwick, UK

[ConnectUR conference](#), 20-21 June 2024 online and 24-26 June 2024 onsite, College Park, Maryland, US

Exploring Purpose as the Compass to Integrating Research into Teaching

Lucia Ravi

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The links between research and teaching are often used to promote the high levels of quality learning the university sector can provide. Within teaching practice, there is ongoing debate on how the benefits of these links can be achieved and if they are relevant to all students' learning.

As a university librarian, I am passionate about supporting students in developing research literacy skills for lifelong learning. Delving deeper into the subject, I encountered long-term theoretical discussions on the relationship between research and teaching. These debates revolve around the connection between the two and whether it only benefits certain students.

The integration of research into teaching through research-based learning (RBL) is seen by some as a way to transform higher education. RBL is associated with major educational shifts away from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. Away from a passive emphasis on students attaining content knowledge to an emphasis on the development of their ability to think about and construct their own knowledge. This opens up opportunities to integrate RBL in curriculum.

But ideas on 'how' to integrate research and opinions on which students benefit from 'research experiences' get caught up with debates about the overall learning aims for higher education.

In the theoretical literature, these contested spaces are connected to broader social questions about the overall purpose of higher education in society. These questions are related to the degree of moral responsibility that universities have towards society as a whole in contrast to the interests of specific groups. The views of government, industry, and community stakeholders impact both the educational outcomes for university graduates and the way research is defined and valued. My research aims to explore how different views and positions influence the way research-based educational methods are implemented into higher education teaching practice.

There is a significant emphasis in the research literature on macro-level theories that explain both 'why' and 'how' research should be integrated into teaching practice. Those who support the integration of research for all students argue that the 'why' should consider the complex challenges faced by contemporary societies. Therefore, building students' capacity to think critically, solve problems, and become lifelong learners is essential. These are the graduate attributes that are often highly valued by professional and employee groups, and



universities promote them as the core benefits of the research-teaching nexus.

In contrast, there is often a lack of clear benefits associated with RBL and uncertainty on 'how' to effectively integrate research into teaching. RBL views range from beliefs that no specific integration practices are necessary to the idea that only direct engagement with researchers qualifies as RBL. Considering this diversity it's important to understand how questions of purpose are being perceived in various learning contexts and for different student cohorts. My research explores the specific inter-relationships between 'why' and 'how' used by academics in support of the student learning aims.

The Art of Integrating Research into Teaching – Shared through Narrative Case Studies

As a facilitator of this Community of Practice (CoP), I experienced firsthand the difficulty of clearly articulating and sharing the process of integrating research into teaching. The CoP agreed that building case studies was vital for showcasing best practices. However, the challenge was how to convey the art of integrating research into daily teaching due to the diversity of views and complexity of issues that influence the approach of integrating research into teaching.

My hunch is that different views of purpose form the basis of an academic's reasons

for 'why' and 'how' they choose to integrate research.

Through the support of two University of Western Australia academic colleagues, I got a chance to explore the use of this conceptual framework as a way to build case studies that could provide this in-depth exploration of the art of integrating research into teaching. I'm sharing two below:

Case Study One: by Dr Demelza Ireland, School of Biomedical Sciences

Dr. Ireland's case study focuses on integrating research into the curriculum of three units in the Minor in Women's Health. This integration serves two purposes: preparing students for future careers and promoting research into the gaps in women's health. One of the learning objectives is to equip students with the necessary skills to become researchers who can design studies aimed at addressing these gaps. Additionally, by understanding research, students will be better equipped to make evidence-informed health decisions in their future professional roles and convey the findings to a wider audience.

The importance of research integration into teaching is highlighted by the purpose or reasons why it is being done. Demelza's level 1 unit focuses on research-led learning, introducing students to different information sources. They begin with lay-focused resources and gradually move to more research and evidence-based resources. This helps them understand issues better through disciplinary frameworks. At level 2, students are more critically engaged with disciplinary research through research-orientated and tutored research integration approaches. They question the critical assumptions within the research literature. Level 3 requires students to apply the critical analytical disciplinary frameworks they developed over the last 2 years. They learn how to develop a research proposal related to an identified gap in women's health.

The case studies summarize the assessments based on the research integration purpose and learning aims established for this particular group of students. These assessments are developed based on the specific curriculum content and learning activities designed for the students. An important aspect of RBL as a teaching approach is that it revolves around an inquiry question. Therefore, in the case studies, the inquiry question is highlighted in the assessment areas of the case studies to determine how inquiry influences the development of assessments.

The assessment design is linked to purpose-driven questions that inform the learning aims and curriculum choices for Demelza's units. In the first year, students communicate the latest evidence on a woman's health issue to a lay target audience; in the second year, they participate in peer-to-peer reviews of primary research; and in the third year, they submit a research proposal on a gap in women's health.

Focusing on the purpose of integrating research into teaching practice is crucial for building authenticity among students. It is how we convey to them the significance of their involvement with disciplinary content and how they can use it to think critically about

relevant questions and issues concerning both themselves and the wider society. By using a case study-based approach to share and build practices, we can delve deeper into how varying perspectives of purpose shape the interrelationship between why and how research is being integrated.

Case Study Two: by Dr Peter Mark, Natural and Physical Sciences

The undergraduate units Human Reproduction and Human Biology integrate research to instill in students the dynamic nature of knowledge and foster a scientific mindset. By engaging in research, students grasp the evolving nature of information, emphasizing that academics are perpetual learners. This approach ensures that course content reflects the latest knowledge, cultivating a proactive attitude toward learning. Research integration lends legitimacy to both the course and the instructor, emphasizing that knowledge is not static.

Theoretical models are merged with critical analysis of primary research, equipping students for evidence-informed decision-making in their future professional roles. This moves beyond memorization, focusing on applying acquired knowledge. At level three, research projects serve dual purposes: providing real research experience and preparing students for professions requiring the interpretation and dissemination of research findings. Exams are insufficient for developing these skills.

The curriculum scaffolds research engagement, with an emphasis on level 3 units. Levels 1 and 2 introduce research through reference to pivotal papers, fostering early critique skills. Level 3 involves research-tutored and research-oriented learning, where students engage deeply with research ideas and methods in journal clubs and reflective weekly journals. A capstone research project in level 3 directly engages students in research by requiring students to conduct a literature review, identify research gaps, formulate questions, and progress through data collection and analysis. A library workshop supports literature review skills,



ensuring students can critically assess and apply information in their research endeavours.

The pedagogical elements include inquiry based learning used throughout the course with a strong focus on research integration of findings against larger theoretical models that inform the discipline and on research discovery. Students are actively positioned in relation to research throughout all their 2nd and 3rd year units in particular, but a critical stance is facilitated through the unit coordinator in all units. Authentic research is shared with students so they understand that knowledge and evidence is constantly changing, and new questions are being asked with new ways to collect and analyse data.

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