Undergraduate Research News Australasia

Australasian Council for Undergraduate Research – Issue 25 • June 2024

Undergraduate Research from Diverse Disciplines (see article on page 6)

Editorial

Welcome to our latest newsletter, where we celebrate and showcase undergraduate research and introduce some exciting new initiatives. Our students aren't just exploring fascinating research, they're deeply engaged and passionate about their learning. Their stories show a keen interest for lifelong learning and the high-quality education we aim for. Whether it's cutting-edge science or solving real-world problems, their work is truly inspiring.

We're thrilled to launch the ACUR Undergraduate Mentoring Program, connecting students with mentors for guidance and insights. Plus, we're introducing the ACUR Medal to recognise outstanding contributions to promoting undergraduate research. And students, listen up, there are $100AUD up for grabs if you help us design the Medal!

Mark your calendars for the 12th ACUR Conference on 1st-2nd October 2024. It's a great chance for students to present their work, network, and gain valuable experience. To inspire participation, Natasha shares her experience at ACUR 2023, highlighting the impact such conferences have on academic and personal growth. We also hear from François, the Academic Director of Student Experience at Swinburne University, who talks about the benefits of their research-based learning approach. François explains how it enhances academic skills, critical thinking, and creativity.

Finally, we thank Lilia for editing the past five URNA issues as she hands over the baton. I gained an insight into the URNA through the generous invitation to share my research interests in the previous issue. As a professional librarian at the University of Western Australia, with a long term interest in integrating research into curricula, I really look forward to learning more from my association with ACUR.

Lucia Ravi
University of Western Australia

Undergraduate Research Stories

Three stories about the value of UG Research Experiences from our ACUR Student Committee Representatives.

From Inquiry to Impact: My Path in Mental Health Research

Experiencing research as a keen and curious undergraduate has allowed me to explore my interest in mental health and contribute to impactful work in the health sphere. It has changed the trajectory of my professional, aspirational, and personal journey.

As a child I had an insatiable sense of curiosity. I have always loved learning and asking questions about the world. I spent my childhood moving between Canberra, London and Geneva and was consistently fascinated by how people differed between and within my communities. My desire to understand others is broad, however as I experienced mental health struggles in my adolescence, I was determined to understand why some people are affected by specific events, treatments, and conditions, but others are not.

As I grew older and began my academic career at the Australian National University (ANU), I catered my studies to reflect my mental health interest. By studying Arts and Science, I was exposed to criminological, psychological, biological, and neuroscientific approaches to the human experience. My cross-disciplinary studies were incredible, but I was craving opportunities for more autonomy. It was this desire to examine the world independently that led me to undergraduate research.

Fortunately, ANU provides students with a plethora of research opportunities. In my second year I engaged with a neuropsychology research group and developed my own project. This was the first time I could truly drive the research process and it was incredibly fulfilling. I conducted a literature review on how a neuroimaging method could be used to better understand and treat depression; this was the most comprehensive piece of work I had completed. I went on to present this project at several conferences (including ACUR!) and gauged the importance of effective science communication. This first research experience was a steep learning curve, but having my interests nurtured and my work guided by an incredible supervisor imbued a desire for more. This was the process of deep learning that I had been craving.

Thereafter, I conducted another project at ANU, this time in synthetic biology, and went on to complete an internship at ACT Health, examining psychological stress in ICU survivors. These experiences of health research reinforced my desire to enact change through meaningful work. Alongside this, I am part of a youth reference group for the Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance (CYMHSA). In this role, I advise on mental health policy, initiatives, and research, contributing user-led insights for projects seeking to serve young people. As a mental health researcher and consumer, I cannot understate the value of centering lived experience. With a domain as nuanced as mental health, we need intersectional and varied perspectives to ensure research outcomes are meaningful.

Currently, I am completing my honours in population health, seeking to identify targets to improve self-recognition of and help-seeking for mental health problems. Research has provided me with opportunities to contribute meaningfully and scratch the never-ending itch to know more. As this year's vice head of ACUR's student committee, I'm keen to facilitate opportunities for other undergraduates and encourage young people to dip their toes into the exciting research world!

Sonali Varma
Year 5, Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Science (Honours), The Australian National University and ACUR Student Committee Member, Vice Head.

Following Alice into a Mathematics Research Journey

The world of mathematics had always presented itself as a chaotic, ambiguous challenge for students and professors throughout history. Intrigued by Lewis Carroll's mad journey through mathematics as a child, I spent most of my life pursuing studies that would eventually lead me to the research I do today.

Unsure about what I wanted to do in university, I once attended a lecture about Actuarial Studies back in high school. From that moment I was intrigued in exploring uncertainties and analysing risks, and I knew this would be the focus of my future university study. Using mathematical modelling and financial theories, my research is based on making some sense of the uncertainty in the current world.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this journey is the sheer unpredictability of what you might find. Risk analytics, the backbone of my research, teaches us to expect the unexpected. It's about understanding the likelihood of various outcomes and preparing for them, even when they seem counterintuitive. My research process includes searching for interesting stories in the media and connecting it with my research interests. Under this process, I look for datasets, use financial and statistical modelling, and analyse external sources appropriate to the current research I am undertaking.

My first encounter with research was my presentation at the 25th International Congress on Modelling and Simulation (MODSIM2023) on Australian insurance losses from catastrophic disasters. In this combined study, we examined a data set obtained from the Insurance Council of Australia. This data set contained historical records going back to 1967 about the occurrence of insurance losses in relation to natural disasters in Australia. In analysing the data, it is possible to create a model of those insurance losses which could be utilised for policyholders and other stakeholders in the insurance sector. The study focused on modelling insurance losses using generalised additive models. This first research experience made me fascinated in how a daunting spreadsheet of data and numbers start to tell a story with the right statistical tools and knowledge.

Since this first encounter, I became more eager to dive into more applications of statistical analysis and mathematical modelling. At the ACUR conference in November 2023, I presented a statistical analysis of data breaches, using similar modelling methods. At the same time, I also undertook different research into probability. I presented a talk on optimal sequential decisions, focusing on financial applications, at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Australian Mathematical Society (AustMS2023). Both these opportunities further solidified my enjoyment of researching and interacting with experienced researchers and fellow students.

Whether it's in making decisions based on incomplete information or dealing with uncertainties, the principles of statistics and probability are very applicable to real life situations. As such, I am excited to continue undertaking research opportunities in risk analytics and to further enhance my data analysis skills in the future.

Ksenia Sofronova
Year 2, Bachelor of Actuarial Studies and Commerce (Business Analytics), The University of New South Wales and ACUR Student Committee Member, Secretary.

Digitalisation: Revealing the Impact of Digital Platforms on the Australian Rental Market

We now exist in a world driven by digital innovation and enjoy the convenience of digitisation, but the emergence of innovative practices inevitably impacts traditional ones. With this realisation, the traditional landscape of the Australian leasing market has been found to be undergoing profound change.

My research delves into the complex dynamics between digital platforms (particularly short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb) and the traditional long-term rental market in Australia. As the internet continues to reshape every aspect of our lives, from the way we communicate to the way we shop, it's no surprise that it's also revolutionising the way we find and rent properties. With the rise of digital platforms offering short-term rentals of homes, the once-stable rental market is undergoing a sea change, impacting both landlords and tenants.

Through a combination of data analysis of existing housing and the short-term rental markets and market trends observed over the years, I explored the impact of this digital revolution on multiple aspects of the supply of both the long-term and short term rental

market. From the increased accessibility of rental properties to the changing power dynamics between landlords and tenants in terms of demand, as well as the investment preferences of builders and developers, my research reveals the nuances of this evolving landscape.

But it's not just about analysing data and trends. As a researcher, I'm also interested in the human stories behind the numbers, especially when exploring demand markets. I've delved into analysing the different reactions landlords and tenants have shown to the emergence of digital platforms for renting. What challenges do they face? What opportunities arise? What has led them to have different preferences when it comes to choices? By understanding these lived experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the wider impact of digitization on the housing market and society as a whole.

In addition, my research offers a critical reflection on the ethical considerations surrounding digital platforms in the rental market. With the cost of housing as a significant expense in the cost of living, does the rise of the short-term rental market have implications for important issues such as social justice? As researchers, it is critical that we not only document these changes, but also advocate for policies and practices that promote ethical and equitable access through affordable housing.

In essence, this research goes beyond a superficial analysis of digital trends. It seeks to reveal the potential social, economic and ethical impacts of digitisation, particularly due to the rise of short-term rental platforms on the Australian rental market. By illuminating these complexities, I hope to contribute to a more informed conversation around the future of housing in the digital age and for future urban planners.

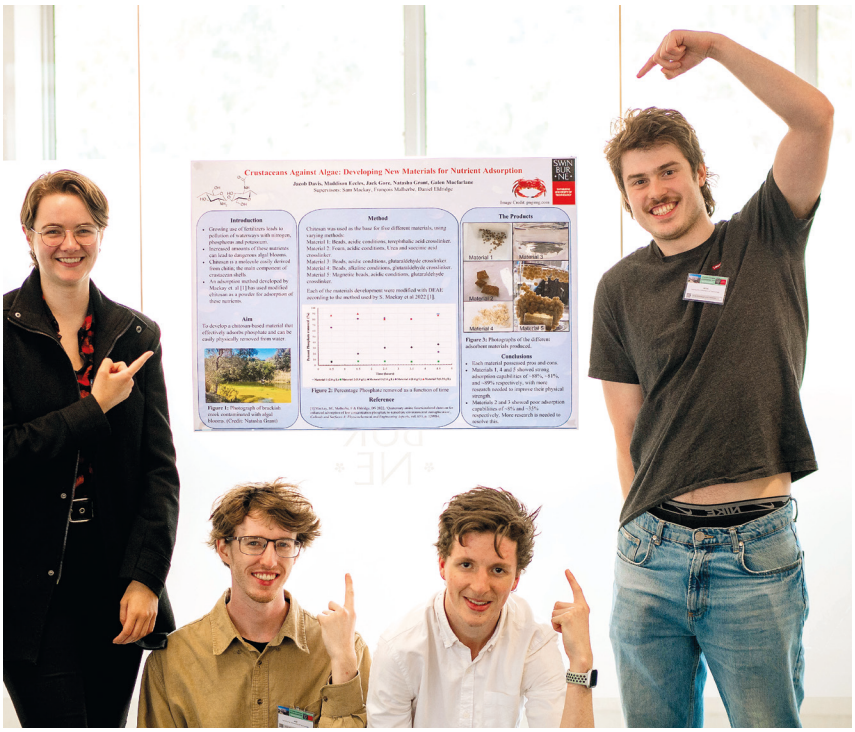
Qifan Yang
UG student, Year 3, Bachelor of Regional and Town Planning, The University of Queensland and ACUR Student Committee Member, Social Media Officer.

Participating in the ACUR Conference

Read a student and academic account of the benefits of participating in the Conference and of building curricula around research-based learning experiences.

The Benefits of Presenting at ACUR2023

Natasha Grant from the Swinburne University of Technology shares her experience of participating at the ACUR conference as she is completing her Double Degree in Chemistry and Creative Writing.



Natasha Grant, with colleagues sharing their research project poster at the ACUR UG Research Conference.

What was the highlight for you as a participant?

My group and I undertook individual research tasks focusing on the shared topic of pollutant adsorption, and we collaboratively presented our findings as a poster. We won the 'Peoples' Choice Award for Content', an honour voted on by the other conference attendees. This award underscores the impact and quality of our work, reflecting the positive reception and appreciation from our peers.

Why did you feel it was important for you to attend a student research conference like ACUR2023?

Over the course of my capstone project, a mandatory SPINE unit named 'Grand Challenges in Science', I started to realise that I might want to explore research as a potential career pathway.

Attending conferences is a crucial aspect of research, offering opportunities for networking, knowledge exchange, and professional development. These events enable researchers to share their findings and receive feedback from peers and experts. Being able to attend ACUR2023 was a great opportunity for me, as an undergraduate, to experience just about every aspect of formal research and this has reinforced my desire to pursue a career in this field.

What have you learnt at the conference?

Aside from learning from the research of other attendees, ACUR2023 exposed me to a variety of presentation and formatting styles for oral presentations and posters. This was particularly beneficial for me, as I had struggled with creating my poster due to limited skills in visual design. Preparing for the conference allowed me to experiment with new tools and techniques I hadn't considered before, and which I plan to use further.

What support did you receive, within your unit/course or by your university more broadly, to enable you to participate?

The School of Science, Computing and Engineering Technologies subsidised the registration fees for our entire team in exchange for our assistance in setting up the event. Additionally, my supervisors were a great support throughout the entire research process, offering great advice on putting together the poster, and taking care of the printing for us!

How were your interactions with other students local and interstate?

I made valuable contacts with other students while attending ACUR2023. During the social events, I had the opportunity to get to know some of them better and learn more about their research projects and experiences at their home universities. These interactions not only broadened my understanding of different research methodologies but also helped me build a network of peers with similar academic interests.

Why would you recommend the conference

I highly recommend the annual ACUR conference to anyone with research to share or an interest in discovering work across various fields. While there was a strong focus on scientific research (my favourite!), attendees also presented on topics such as sociology, early childhood development and teaching practices. It was a fantastic opportunity to explore a diverse range of subjects and gain insights from different disciplines.

Would you be interested in attending ACUR2024 if provided with the appropriate support?

If I'm able to, I will definitely attend the next conference. Since attending last year's event, I've completed further research that I'd love to share. My aim would be to prepare an oral presentation, as I see it as an opportunity to enhance my public speaking skills.

Empowering Future Professionals: The Transformative Role of Undergraduate Research

The demands of contemporary professional landscapes, across all industries, have elevated the standards of competencies expected from graduates entering the workforce.

In an era of rapid evolution, propelled by digital advancements, today's youth often question the relevance of traditional degrees in securing employment. With the pace of change accelerating, a pressing concern emerges: Are conventional degrees equipped to meet the demands of modern careers?

The answer is a resounding "Yes!". Knowledge is the wealth of information that a person possesses, indicating their understanding and comprehension. However, without the ability to apply this knowledge in real-life contexts, it becomes irrelevant. Application is what transforms knowledge into a potent tool for problem-solving, innovation, and personal or societal advancement.

Employers gauge an individual's professional attributes based on Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA). To underscore the significance of these qualities for employability, the Australian Government introduced the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) in 2020. This grant scheme aims to support universities in fostering collaborative industry projects to produce job-ready graduates.

The objective is to cultivate highly sought-after transferable skills through carefully structured learning experiences integrated into the curriculum. At Swinburne University of Technology, this is achieved through the incorporation of a research project at all levels of the Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Engineering (Honours), through a scaffolded series called SPINE units.

With Sustainability Challenges in the second semester of the first year, students work in multi-disciplinary teams to solve real problems submitted by external collaborators. The context is broadened in the second year with Societal Challenges where the aim is to create a meaningful social impact. Culminating in the third year is Grand Challenges where students integrate their learning to tackle complex, multifaceted problems on a larger scale. These units are effectively mini-research projects.

François Malherbe with colleagues and students from Swinburne University of Technology

Built in the framework of each unit are connected modules that provide students with the necessary resources to develop critical professional skills, enhance their knowledge base, and prepare for real-world challenges in their respective fields. Moreover, the diversity of concurrent projects offers exposure to other subsets of science, broadening their understanding and enabling interdisciplinary collaborations.

Work-integrated Learning (WIL), internships, sustainability, research, professional development, and societal well-being are all intricately linked to drive holistic growth and progress. These elements collectively contribute to an ecosystem where experiential learning intersects with real-world challenges, fostering the development of skilled professionals who not only excel but are also committed to creating positive social and environmental impacts.

The level of engagement with the SPINE units is significantly higher, empowering students to undergo substantial personal and academic growth. These units provide an immersive learning experience that stimulates deep exploration, critical thinking, and innovation, allowing students to expand their skills and knowledge beyond the parameters of a conventional project.

> *"Application is what transforms knowledge into a potent tool for problem-solving, innovation, and personal or societal advancement."*

The transformative role of undergraduate research manifests in multiple impactful ways: reshaping teaching practices (evidence-based teaching), curriculum development (innovative design), policy formulation (NPILF), and overall education outcomes (holistic development of students). The ACUR UG student conference gives our students a rich authentic experience in how to communicate their research outcomes to peers.

François Malherbe
Academic Director Student Experience, School of Science, Computing and Engineering Technologies, Swinburne University of Technology.

Disciplinary Analysis of ACUR Undergraduate Conference Presentations

An analysis of the disciplinary focus of UG research presentations given at the ACUR student conferences held from the inaugural conference in 2012 to last year's conference in 2023.

"You mention research on your website, but you don't talk about specific disciplines." This statement by an interested observer challenged me recently to undertake an analysis of disciplines represented by all the undergraduate research presentations at ACUR conferences. At every individual conference a wide spectrum of disciplinary areas is evident. Collectively, a vast array of academic research interests is represented. Here, I present an overview derived from a preliminary analysis of the ACUR conference presentations given by almost twelve hundred students since 2012. Taking account of the group presentations, 1,170 UG research presentations were analysed. An indication of the percentages of presentations for the major areas is given in brackets. Detailed statistics await further analyses.

The most prevalent disciplinary areas are science and medical and health sciences (55.4% of presentations). Medical and health sciences include studies at molecular levels (genetics, nanotechnology, biomedical science) and at system-wide levels (e.g. public health). Prevalent amongst the medical sciences are presentations examining a range of different diseases (e.g. alzheimer's, asthma, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, various cancers – brain, leukaemia) and conditions (e.g. transplants). A variety of applied and health sciences presentations are also evident (e.g. chiropractic, mental health, nursing, midwifery, nutrition, physiotherapy, paramedicine, pharmacy, radiation science, exercise and sports science).

A vast array of scientific disciplines is also evident. Chief amongst these is psychology (19% of total presentations). Other disciplines evident are astronomy and astrophysics, biological sciences, biochemistry, biology, (marine, human, plant), chemistry, computer science, dentistry, earth and environmental sciences, genetics, geology, mathematics, meteorology, neuroscience, physics, veterinary, zoology. A small number of presentations combine science with other areas (e.g. education, law, gender).

What is very evident in this analysis of student presentations is the large number that cross disciplinary boundaries. This is evident within the subdisciplines described above. But in assigning presentations in the humanities and social sciences it is sometimes difficult to separate out disciplinary areas. Nevertheless, presentations in a broad range of humanities and social sciences disciplines account for 35.5% of total research presentations. Law, History, (e.g. Ancient and modern, classical studies), linguistics, language and cultures, communication, and philosophy account for the majority of humanities presentations, while there are small numbers of presentations in, for example, literature and drama, religious studies, music, and visual art and design.

It is in the social sciences where most interdisciplinary work can be seen. Sociology, for example, often aligns with gender studies, social work, law, social justice, criminology, divinity and Indigenous studies. The largest single group of presentations in this category is education (4.5%) (tertiary, teaching and learning, student voice, early childhood), followed by a sizeable group of presentations categorised as International Studies. Political science, (Policy studies, politics) accounts for a small distinct group of presentations. And Business Studies (Actuarial studies, industry, economics, commerce) also accounts for a small number (2.4%).

Finally, approximately 80 presentations (6.7%) have been categorized as built environment disciplines. This includes engineering, construction management, architecture, and a number of presentations within the environmental studies domain.

Research requires hard work and a passion for the subject. So the topics of research clearly attest to the varied interests of the undergraduate presenters. It is also possible to see within these findings, the influences of individual academic supervisors and departments who have provided research opportunities, supervised projects and in many cases provided funding for students to attend. In doing this preliminary broad-brush analysis, it is clear that many undergraduate students' research interests lie in understanding the varied contemporary challenges facing the world today. In the next issue of URNA, I hope to bring you more detailed information on this. If you would like to be involved in this analysis. Please let me know.

Emeritus Professor Angela Brew
Chair, ACUR

New Publication

Transforming Academic Culture and Curriculum

Integrating and Scaffolding Research Throughout Undergraduate Education

Edited By Mitchell R. Malachowski, Elizabeth L. Ambos, Kerry K. Karukstis, Jillian L. Kinzie, & Jeffrey M. Osborn

Institutions across the higher education landscape vary, and each navigates change in its own way. This volume describes how institutions and departments influence the success of structural and cultural transformations to advance curricular reform. Click here for more information

ACUR New Initiatives - Medals, Member Profiles & Mentors

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis."

—Wenger et al. (2002) Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge.

Learn about new ACUR new initiatives designed to recognise and support undergraduate research in the Australasian region.

Undergraduate Research Medal

Exciting news for all our ACUR members and the broader academic community working to promote undergraduate research opportunities! It's time to shine a spotlight on those making a significant impact in undergraduate research across Australasia.

The ACUR Executive are 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. Self-nominations and nominations of staff and students are welcome. Further information and the application forms are available here.

For further queries, please contact Dr Lilia Mantai lilia.mantai@sydney.edu.au or Prof Rachel Spronken-Smith rachel.spronken-smith@otago.ac.nz.

Nominate your Undergraduate Research Superstar for a Medal

Perhaps you know of someone who has been a UG Research advocate and superstar in your research-learning or research-teaching journey – as a student or a colleague.

Given that UG Research Superstars might be super busy or super bashful....we do invite YOU to also nominate a person or a team within your institution or within external support networks – that have supported and inspired you to think of yourself as a life-long learner on an ongoing journey of research and discovery.

As we scout out this year's inaugural ACUR Medal winner, we want to hear your stories - who has inspired you and how, what opportunities or events did you participate in that shone a light on the potential of research.

Find out how you can nominate someone for the ACUR Medal on our website.

Medal Design Competition

Do you have what it takes to design the ACUR Undergraduate Research Medal? This is your chance to shine and win! The Prize is a $100 GIFT CARD!

Submit your design in JPG, PNG or PDF format to admin@acur.org.au by 30 June 2024.

For other design specifications, click here. Unleash your creativity and be part of history! Don't miss out!

ACUR Member Profiles Online

What really makes ACUR thrive as an organisation is the community connected to it and the benefits of collegial support between the members of that community.

The establishment of the ACUR Members Profile area of the ACUR website is a way to support our ongoing community of practice and shared interest in undertaking and facilitating the value of undergraduate research.

Help to continue to build and strengthen this important area of knowledge and practice by sharing information about yourself on our ACUR Profile page.
https://www.acur.org.au/member-profiles/

ACUR2024 Conference 1–2 October

Details coming soon

With the date for the next ACUR UG Research Conference set now is a good time to begin encouraging your students to participate.

For more information contact ACUR at admin@acur.org.au

Why Undergraduate Students Need Mentors?

An interview with Seak Lin Ly,
Founder of ACUR UG Student Committee, current ACUR executive member, and current Professional Scientist.

To understand why Undergraduate students need research mentors you need to be introduced to Seak Lin Ly, who currently works as a professional scientist at Sydney Water.

Seak has had a long association with the Australasian Council for Undergradate Research (ACUR) having presented at conferences as a first year UG student and been instrumental in founding the first ACUR Student Committee in 2018. She has recently been working to establish an opportunity for UG students to be actively involved in developing ACUR's future for the betterment of UG research and ACUR conferences. As a current ACUR Executive Committee member Seak continues to strive in developing ACUR to provide better value support for UG students. Seak has developed the first pilot ACUR UG Mentor Project based on her experience of the benefits of UG research and the challenges she found through limited support in UG research.

There is no doubt that the encouragement Seak received to steer her own learning by pursuing research interests during her UG studies and presenting at ACUR and other national and international conferences, helped open-up her future career options. However, the continued support from numerous professional mentors in her current career role helped her to translate the research thinking capabilities acquired through UG research experiences – such as critical thinking, project management, communication, and team-work – into an industry ready skill set to drive innovation. Seak's mentors have given up-lifting support in her career and advice on managing a work-life balance as a full-time working mother and scientist.

> *"ACUR is seeking mentors who share in the value and importance of facilitating higher education outcomes that equip students with the scholarly thinking and problem-solving capabilities associated with engagement in all forms of research"*

The opportunities to meet both academic and professional researchers through these experiences were pivotal in Seak's journey and should be made available to UG students. The ACUR UG Mentor Project aims to facilitate and open-up the possibility of more regular touch points with a more expansive academic and professional network related to students' areas of inquiry or research interest. The student appetite for mentors was tested through a survey of attendees of the annual ACUR student research conference in 2023. It reaffirmed Seak's hunch that students who are proactively seeking to expand their learning through research engagement want more formative guidance from industry and academics. They want to be in touch with the living pulse of research as they know it will help them make the most of opportunities and choices available to them during their UG education.

ACUR is seeking mentors who share in the value and importance of facilitating higher education outcomes that equip students with the scholarly thinking and problem-solving capabilities associated with engagement in all forms of research. ACUR's UG Mentors will help students to consider how research skills are relevant to different industry groups and what types of skill sets are most in demand. Mentors can help UG students prepare for their first conference presentation through workshop offerings or help them to consider the benefits or pitfalls of different academic and industry career pathways in research.

ACUR will provide a facilitatory role, inviting and connecting students to prospective mentors. The program has been designed to provide a low stake, high value one on one networking opportunity between mentees and mentors, consisting of one hour meet-ups once a week over a month, or once a fortnight over two months. ACUR also wants to provide better value support for undergraduates by facilitating workshops and presentation opportunities in the future.

See this link for more information about the ACUR Mentor program and how you can register.

https://www.acur.org.au/mentoring/

For those that share the same beliefs in UG research and improving student employability, here is a link for more information on how to support ACUR.

https://www.acur.org.au/sponsors/

https://www.acur.org.au/membership-information/

Events announcements

HERDSA 2024 Conference - 8-11 July, Adelaide, South Australia

Registration still open for the peak Australian Conference aimed at fostering the advancement of higher and tertiary education.

View the full program here.

We thank HERDSA for their ongoing sponsorship of ACUR.

SRHE Seminar Series - Revisiting the Research-Teaching Nexus

Three seminars are being convened late 2024 to early 2025 by the Society for Research into Higher Education.
We are finalising dates and times for these seminars - watch this space!
https://srhe.ac.uk/networks/student-access-and-experience-network/

Swinburne BA students support ACUR

Work-integrated learning projects in support of ACUR's mission

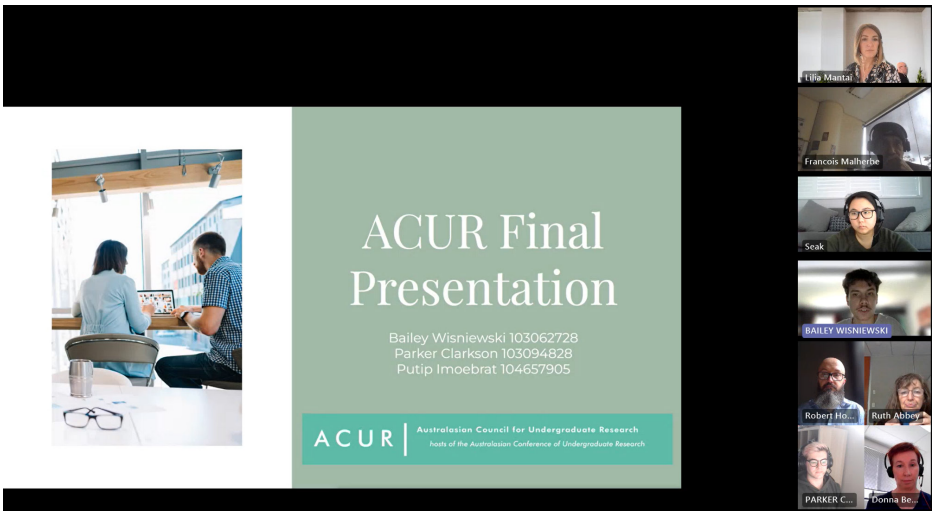
ACUR held its 2023 conference at Swinburne University, which prompted the Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education, James Verdon, to encourage some of the Swinburne staff to approach ACUR about a possible collaboration. Staff who teach in the BA were designing a brand new capstone core unit for a 2024 start. The unit's purpose was to enhance students' employability skills in the transition phase where they are completing their undergraduate studies and moving into the professional workplace. ACUR is one of several organizations Swinburne has approached to partner with them to create semester-long projects for students to work on for academic credit that would be of benefit to the partner organization.

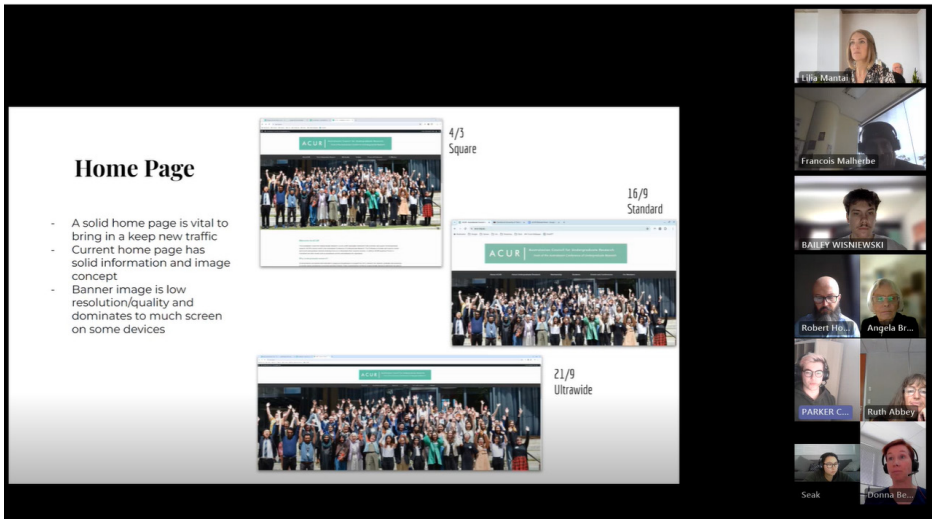
ACUR developed a brief, requesting review of its social media and feedback on enhanced communication and connectivity with stakeholders. This included an evaluation of the website and suggestions for improved design and content that accurately reflect the organization's goals, while also pitching the content to an undergraduate audience.

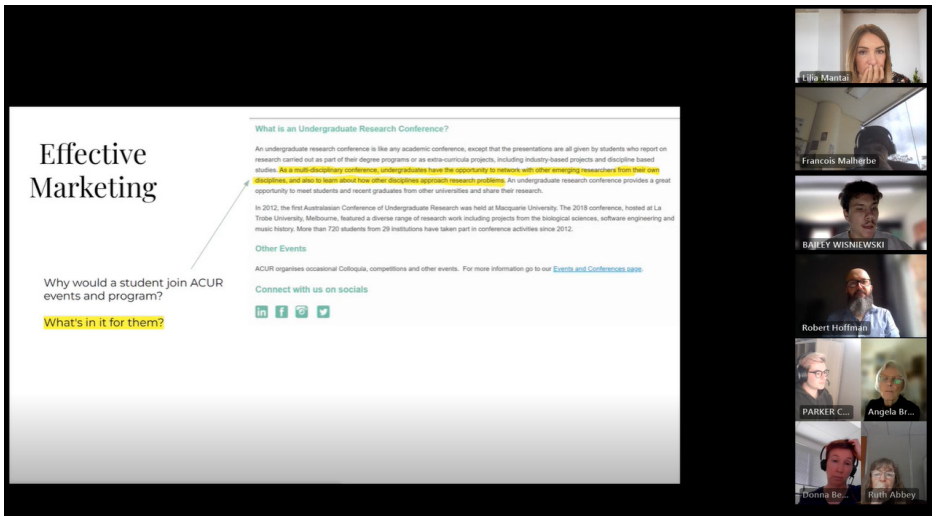
Led by academic supervisor, Dr Rob Hoffman, a group of three students (Bailey Wisniewski, Parker Clarkson, Putip Imoebrat) worked on this across the first semester and presented their suggestions for refreshed design and content in a written report to the ACUR Executive at the end of May. Two of the students also provided a preview and high level summary of the report in an online meeting.

This experience served the ACUR while fostering the students' verbal and written communication skills; their ability to work in a team; their attention to content, presentation, impact, detail and accuracy; their capacity for prioritising workload requirements and meet deadlines; and their facility for responding in a constructive and timely way to feedback.

Swinburne and ACUR are exploring further collaborations, to the benefit of both organisations to enhance higher education through inquiry and research-based learning experiences.







Ruth Abbey
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swinburne University

Student Committee Report

The ACUR Student Committee for 2023-2024 has been building upon the extensive work of previous committees, while initiating novel initiatives to push forward ACUR's mission of promoting and advancing the spread of undergraduate research in Australasia.

I selected an experienced team to make up this year's Student Committee that shares my passion for elevating the position and awareness of ACUR even further amongst Australasian undergraduate students. We have representation from the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, the University of New South Wales and the University of Queensland. Earlier in this issue you read about Sonali's, Ksenia's and Qifan's research journeys. Members undertake diverse research in public health, genetics and policy, mental health, user-led and population health research, mathematical modelling and statistical data analysis, and regional and town planning research. Please connect with us if you have any questions or would like to chat about our research.

Building upon previous committees' work, I am working with the Descending Head of the Student Committee, Charles O'Neill, to continue the process of archiving the ACUR conferences, beginning with last year's successful 11th Annual Conference. This will ensure that the hard work that our conference attendees put into their presentations and posters will last in perpetuity.

Another aim of this year's committee is to foster community within the undergraduate research space. We note that undergraduate research is still a new concept to many students and academics alike. Many people are curious as to how it works and how a student can become involved in the area. To satisfy this curiosity, we are working on building upon last year's ACUR Research Database Discord Server, and expanding this community further on other social media platforms. We are also broadening our reach to university student societies involved in undergraduate research, with whom we can run future research-based competitions. To consolidate this work, we are planning to create a handbook guide for students who want to be involved in undergraduate research that can be updated into the future. We also hope to help facilitate the student branch of the 2024 ACUR mentorship program to foster skill development and provide opportunities for networking between students and academics involved in this space.

We are very excited for our initiatives this year, celebrating and encouraging undergraduate research across Australasia, as we prepare for the 2024 ACUR conference in October.

Sara Wardak
Ascending Head of Student Committee

Letter from the Chair

Over the past few months, it has been an enormous pleasure to meet with new people who have expressed an interest in contributing to the work of ACUR. Since our last conference in December 2023, we have been working to increase the scope and size of the ACUR Executive to meet its current challenges and prepare for the future. Our new structure for the Executive Committee is focused on seven distinct and interrelated areas of work:

- Strategy and Influence
- Conferences
- Memberships
- Sponsorships and Partnerships
- Events and Publicity
- Students
- Research

Some new office-holders have already been co-opted and others will be joining us after our AGM in October. There are still opportunities available to contribute to the work of ACUR in many of these areas. Please contact us if you want to be involved.

It has become apparent recently that ACUR's funding model based on institutional, individual and student memberships is not sustainable in the longer term. You will see from accounts in this issue that we have recently launched some exciting new initiatives, for example, the new Mentoring Scheme and the ACUR Medals. But unless we develop additional sources of revenue, further planned initiatives that develop and support undergraduate research are unachievable.

Support for ACUR remains strong among Australasian student researchers, and among academics working to develop undergraduate research experiences in our member institutions, as demonstrated in this and previous issues of this newsletter. To now strengthen our mission to promote and advance undergraduate research in Australasia, we need to develop partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals who are also working in various ways to develop and strengthen undergraduate research. Will you join with us?

Emeritus Professor Angela Brew
Chair, ACUR

Contact Us

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