

Taking up a **Research Degree**

in The Faculty of Education, Arts and Social Sciences at

Alphacrucis College.

What?

If you have been a staff member in a school for some time, you will hopefully have had access to good, mentored development opportunities. Early career teachers are running hard, trying to just command the compliance and mission requirements of their craft. Middle and advanced career staff, however, have a serious choice to make. One can continue to see content knowledge and expertise from a 'consumer' perspective, always reaching for the latest textbook created by somebody else, or one can step forward and become an active participant in creativity and innovation. This, in broad terms, is the transition from coursework programs to higher degrees by research (or HDR). In a coursework program, you are invited into a pool of content and practice which is created and communicated by others. In a research program, you are being invited into the ongoing discourse of scholars in a particular area, whereby practitioners and academics expand upon the range of knowledge by investigating--in a disciplined way--the interplay of theory and practice. Education, of course, is not purely a body of theory. It is essentially a set of overlapping communities of practice aimed at the formation of humans and their social contexts.

Research degrees, furthermore, are essentially the gateway into becoming a member of a discipline. In a society which increasingly makes resource-decisions upon evidence-based research, becoming a researcher, and not simply reading about it, is becoming an essential part of organizational leadership. A research degree provides both the tools, and an understanding of what the tools are for, in engaging this new setting for school leadership. Inevitably, this evidence-based culture realigns the internal cultures of schools. Continuous professional development, the integration of action-learning and inquiry-based learning are remaking the modern workplace into a research-driven context. Whether one is aiming at leadership, or committed to improving your care and practice in a particular locale, Higher Degrees by Research will increasingly become the norm for staff in schools, churches, businesses, and other institutions of practice.

Why Alphacrucis?

For Christian leaders, the process of research is informed by our view of our place in the cosmos, the meaning of life, and the model of the perfect human, "God with us" Jesus Christ. We have a rich tradition of contributing to and practicing research so as to become better stewards of what we humans have been gifted by God. From Copernicus to Faraday to Francis Collins, Christians have been inveterate researchers, seekers for an understanding of "God's language" in the created order. As Peter Harrison has written,

Could modern science have arisen outside the theological matrix of Western Christendom? It is difficult to say. What can be said for certain is that it did arise in that environment, and that theological ideas underpinned some of its central assumptions. Those who argue for the incompatibility of science and religion will draw little comfort from history. (Peter Harrison, “Setting the record straight: Christianity and the rise of modern science”, ABC Religion and Ethics, 20 Aug 2013.)

For Christian Educational leaders desiring to pursue discipline thought within a broader campus of integrated faith and learning, therefore, Christian higher educational institutions such as Alphacrucis provide insights which are not available elsewhere. Methodological naturalism has been a powerful tool. The related assumption, however, that one can pursue the full range of meanings in things without the aid of theological and biblical reflection—without reference to the community and mission of the Church, and supervisors skilled in making the connections between these domains-- detaches the process of research from its great tradition, and produces something which is ultimately stunted.

Alphacrucis is the largest Protestant Christian liberal arts college in Australia, and features a research culture which is unmatched in range by any other situation in its sector. Featuring world-class Christian thinkers across a range of disciplines from ministry through business to education and the social sciences, Alphacrucis can facilitate research programs which are uniquely integrative and interdisciplinary. Alphacrucis College is also uniquely connected to the local church, working with hundreds of churches and schools around the country to connect theory with practice, within a coherent model of reflection. Simply put, there are things that you can do here which you can do nowhere else in the country.

Research with Practical Applications.

In addition to our *breadth*, Alphacrucis Education, Arts and Social Science research has *focus*. Our research concentrates on the theoretical and practical value of research for human flourishing. Research programs may be taken in two modes: Open and Clustered. The quality frameworks and delivery are identical, but how the candidate chooses and pursues a research question can differ.

Open enrolments follow the traditional “solitary researcher” track, aiming largely to contribute to the discipline, and to participate after a time of isolation and reflection in the larger discipline embraced. At Alphacrucis, your supervisor will be a person known and respected in their discipline, and sees it as part of their role to bring you with them into the forums and conferences, publications and seminars, which make up the lifeblood of academic communities. Generally, they will encourage applications from candidates interested in developing the Faculty’s emphasis on “flourishing” (see model 2 below).

Clustered enrolments are research programs participating in the life and culture of inquiry of a specified local community. Here, the supervisor works with a School, Church or other institution to determine their strategic research interests. The College then gathers a group of candidates and explores suitable questions which relate to those research interests, in ways which directly impact on improvement, better understanding and an increase in knowledge about particular issues or programs.

The following “early phase” flowchart demonstrates the difference.

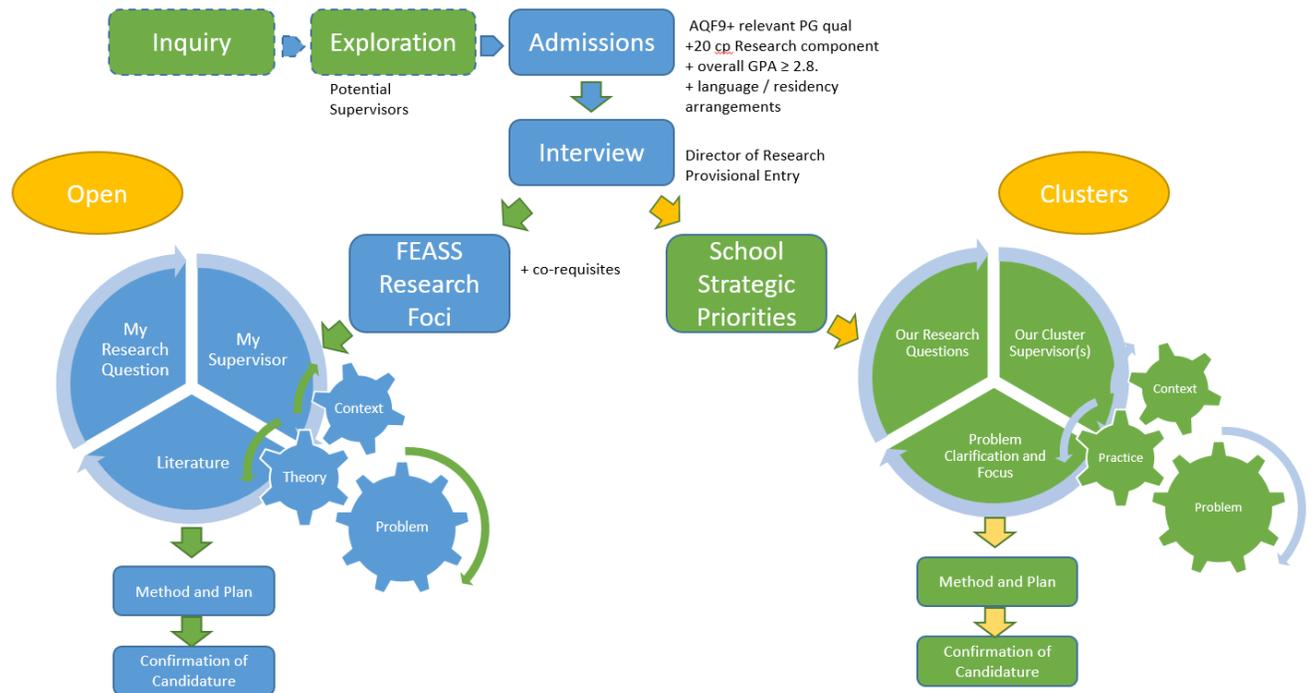


Figure 1 Early Phase HDR Program Flowchart.

Cluster HDR students will work with the same supervisor(s), on cognate problems, so permitting supportive courses such as RES601, resource and data collections, to be precisely calibrated to enriching research programs which are supported by the institution. Quality arrangements, expectations, and outcomes are identical to those in the Open enrolment programs.

Open HDR students will work with an identified supervisory panel on questions which converge upon the FEASS Research foci model. (See Figure 2, below)

Focusing on the task.

The FEASS Research Foci model is based on a core concern for promoting personal, organizational and communal wellness, or Shalom. This is not a model of wellness, but a range of disciplined approaches which will enable Christian leaders and organizations to study the sources of wellness in defined locations or cases, and to develop responses to non-wellness (educational and social “pathologies”). Among these sources is educational praxis and pedagogy, and social and personal context. The Faculty emphasizes the development of inquiry *loci* (the blue themes, pointing to the things about which we would like our research to produce knowledge) such as wellness analytics, maturation processes for personal and organizational wellness, strategy and value-oriented planning and structures for health lives and organizations, and health through the life span. As illustrated in Figure 2, these are interrogated by the methods and disciplinary approaches typical to the study of spirituality, psychology, biblical character reflection, and work and life (including in classroom practice, as the classroom too is a place of “work and life”) studies. So, is there a spirituality of Maturation which impacts on personal or organizational wellness? How do we know about it? Can it be measured/ elicited/ improved? Is there a

psychology which bears upon effective strategy and planning, resulting in better wellness outcomes? What does the Bible say about the relationship between physical health and personal wellness, and what is its effective role in laying the basis for personal/ communal wholeness?



Figure 2 FEASS Research Foci

The possible combinations are endless, and considerably expanded by the methodological approaches and different subject pools which are available to Christian communities. The key point is that they converge on improving our knowledge about, and practice towards, the development healthy persons, organizations and communities which reflect the life and intent of their Creator? It is not the intention of the Faculty to attempt to answer all questions, but rather, by creating a community of scholarship and inquiry, the intention is to add to the effectiveness of Christian lives and institutions, in ways which reflect what we can bring out of our ethos for the good of the societies of which we form part. Our MPhil and PhD students play an essential part in that community of scholarship.

Real World Impact.

Of course, our HDR students are not just members of the community of scholars. Their primary interest is piqued by real world problems, worked out as they live real world lives. The College works with Schools and Churches to sponsor useful research. For busy executives and teachers, being able to align their work and community commitments with their research is an enormous advantage. The M.Phil Cluster in particular is designed to close the loop between theory, method and application. A school

might, for example, run special education programs. Instead of falling into the ‘brain drain’, the school might choose to gather 4 or 5 candidates, use the MPhil as their continuing professional development, and apply the findings of their research to institutional improvement in areas which build reputation, effectiveness and alignment. In many cases, schools can in this way release professional development funding for research which directly supports both their strategic intent, and the career development of their staff.

Our expertise:

	Professor Mark P. Hutchinson	Research Methods Strategic Planning in Schools Experiential Education History (Education, Migration)
	Assoc. Prof. Jennie Bickmore Brand <i>Director, Academic Advancement (Education) AC</i>	Mathematics Education Strategic Planning in Schools Mentoring the Developing Educational Leader
	Dr. Jim Twelves <i>Head of Education, AC</i>	Course design and improvement Biblical models for Christian teaching
	Stephen Brinton <i>Program Director: Bachelor of Education (Primary)</i>	Primary School pedagogy Biblical models for Christian teaching
	Dr Rebecca Loundar <i>Program Director, Social Sciences.</i>	Psychology and well-being Abuse and trauma treatment Residential care Counselling
	Dr Daniel Thornton <i>Program Director, Creative Arts</i>	

	<p>Assoc. Prof. Lily Arasaratnam <i>Director of Research; Head of Communication Studies.</i></p>	
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In addition, our joint and associate supervisor relationships significantly expand the options for prospective HDR candidates.

	<p>Dr Chris Simon, <i>Fellow of the College</i></p>	<p>Counselling and Pastoral Theology</p>
	<p>Dr Loy Lising, <i>University of Sydney</i></p>	<p>Languages, Migration and Education.</p>
	<p>Dr Bev Norsworthy <i>Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, NZ</i></p>	<p><i>imago dei</i> and biblical character development. Work and Life Course evaluation and assessment Professional Practice</p>

	<p>Professor Edwin Judge AM FAHA <i>Emeritus Professor, Macquarie University</i></p>	<p>The historical context for Christian education Ancient History</p>
	<p>Dr David Hastie <i>Anglican Schools Corporation</i></p>	<p>Religion and education Australian schooling systems History of Australian Education International Education</p>
	<p>Dr Dreu Harrison <i>Director of Strategic Innovation at Pivot</i></p>	<p>Strategic dialogue and planning Design research, invention, and prototyping Humanities and design</p>

Degrees:

The main HDR programs at Alphacrucis College operate through our Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs. In addition, there are long-essay and research options inside the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.), Master of Theology (MTh) and Master of Leadership (M.Lead.) programs. Which program one chooses will depend on a number of factors:

1. Where do I want to go?

The MPhil program is both an excellent research extension to previous postgraduate coursework, and a pathway into the PhD. The M.Lead program is a postgraduate coursework program with research facility provision, which can lead onto the MPhil. The DMin tends to be a degree for those who are oriented towards peak executive roles in schools or churches, and has a practical orientation. The PhD tends to be for those who seek peak executive or academic roles, and might see themselves at some stage overseeing others on the research pathway.

2. What do I have in the bag already?

For people who have completed a course work Masters degree, which includes a significant piece of research preparation, the next degree will generally speaking be the MPhil. The cluster organisation of school-based research makes this a logical progression. For those seeking to

move towards a research degree, who have not yet completed coursework Masters degree, it would be worthwhile sitting down and talking to one of our supervisors, in order to trace a pathway forward.

3. What am I passionate about?

Research degrees are time-consuming and rigorous. They impact on personal, family, and work life. As the peak degrees in the academic pathway, they are an invitation to join a disciplinary conversation at the highest level. The “Time, Cost and Commitment” factors should not be underestimated. On the other hand, Alphacrucis works closely with Christian institutions throughout the country in order to encourage, support, and assist passionate people to research in areas of their interest. If one of your passions aligns with one of ours, Alphacrucis may well be the scholarly community you have been seeking for. If one of your passions aligns with a cluster embedded in one of Alphacrucis’s partners, then we would be excited to walk with you in developing Research Questions relating to that context.

More information about our research degrees and related requirements, costs, etc., can be found at: <https://www.ac.edu.au/awards/>.

Contacts:

If you are interested in exploring a higher degree by research in our Faculty, or in developing a ‘cluster’ Masters program in your school/ institution, please contact the Dean, Professor Mark Hutchinson:

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