Research & Practicum Handbook
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This handbook supplements the ACOM Higher Education, Undergraduate, and Postgraduate Handbooks.

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Overview

“At ACOM we encourage you to shape your own learning experience.”

ACOM has a long history of providing innovative, transformational learning experiences. Research is one learning vehicle designed to integrate theory and practice producing well-formed thought leaders who will provide solutions to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Learning how to do useful research helps students discover how to identify a problem that needs a solution, ask effective questions, challenge assumptions, collect data, and establish clear conclusions. These are essential skills for leaders who must adapt quickly to a complex and changing community context. This process is linked to rigorous scholarship and deep personal spiritual formation.

ACOM students are provided the flexibility to customise their own learning journey through the inclusion of coursework research or practicum units. The focus of research at ACOM is designed to:

- be useful for life and ministry,
- provide thought leadership for innovation and deep theological understanding, and
- point people towards action in kingdom mission.

ACOM students conduct research within the context of their ministry passion: grounded in your local work, ministry or community situation. In doing so you will bring about change in three areas:

- you will make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge,
- your research process will be a catalyst for change in your local ministry/work context, and
- your own personal growth and development is a part of the outcomes of effective research.

This is about knowing, doing and being. It is an adventurous journey engaging the heart, mind and soul.

These coursework research or practicum units are useful where a student:

1. wants to focus on an area of special interest;
2. seeks additional units within a sub-discipline to qualify for a Specialisation, Major, or Sub-Major;
3. wants to link recognised academic learning with a practical field project (whether volunteering or employed); and
4. seeks to meet special criteria for further study in a higher research qualification.

The process for undertaking a coursework research or practicum unit is:

1. discuss your options with your Learning Support Manager
2. complete a proposal (a template is located at the back of this handbook)
3. you will be assigned an academic supervisor by ACOM’s Director of Research who will discuss your proposal with you, recommend changes, and/or approve for you to proceed
4. your supervisor will liaise with you on academic matters relating to your project until completion.
5. You will submit your final paper(s) to be graded.
Your Next Step: Talk to Your LSM

Every ACOM student has a Learning Support Manager (LSM) based on your geographical location. Our Learning Support Managers are:

**Edwina Blair**  
**Learning Support Manager NSW**  
Edwina (BSc Nuclear Medicine, GradDip Nuclear Medicine, BTh) has worked in local church ministry for more than ten years and is currently the Associate Pastor with Campbelltown Church of Christ in Sydney. She supports the learning experience of NSW students to ensure they have a high quality, transformational experience. Contact: eblair@acom.edu.au

**Stephen Parker**  
**Learning Support Manager QLD**  
Stephen (B Econ, B Th, MA, D Min Candidate) supports the learning experience of QLD students and assists in preparing coursework information and resources. He has previously served as State Youth Director for the Churches of Christ in Queensland and an Associate Minister for Springwood Church of Christ in Brisbane where he now serves as part of the leadership team. Contact: sparker@acom.edu.au

**Nicole Reeves**  
**Learning Support Manager VIC, TAS and SA**  
Nicole (BN, GradDipBus) is based in the ACOM office at One Community Church in Melbourne and supports the learning experience of students in VIC, TAS and SA. She also oversees much of our marketing, brand management and quality control systems. Contact: nreeves@acom.edu.au

**Pete Roberts**  
**Learning Support Manager WA**  
Pete (B Th) supports the learning of WA students. He is based at the Subiaco Church of Christ in Perth and is working on a new church plant in Perth’s northern suburbs. Contact: proberts@acom.edu.au

**Associate Professor Darren Cronshaw**  
**Director of Research**  
Darren (BA DipEd MLitt BTh(hons) TheolM DMin DTheol CertIVTAA GCertHE) supports the research and scholarship of students and staff. He is a Baptist pastor at Auburn Life in Melbourne, active in research and teaching, and is an Associate Professor in Missiology and Pastoral Theology and Practice with ACOM. Contact: dcronshaw@acom.edu.au  
Mobile: 0438 136 287  
Skype: darrencronshaw
Your Unit Choices

ACOM offers a selection of research or practicum course units in its undergraduate and postgraduate offerings.

In 2013 the units offered are:

**Undergraduate (Diploma and Bachelor)**
- PT384 - Pastoral Practicum (18 cps)
- xx391 - Research Project (9 cps)
- xx392 - Independent Guided Study (9 cps)
- xx393 - Independent Guided Study (18 cps)
- xx398 - Research Project (18 cps)

**Bachelor of Theology (Honours)**
- xx499 – Thesis (45 cps)

**Postgraduate (Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master of Arts and Master of Theology)**
- PT488 - Pastoral Practicum (18 cps)
- xx591 - Research Project (9 cps)
- xx691 - Research Project (9 cps)
- xx592 - Independent Guided Study (9 cps)
- xx593 - Independent Guided Study (18 cps)
- xx598 - Research Project (18 cps)
- xx692 - Independent Guided Study (9 cps)
- xx693 - Independent Guided Study (18 cps)
- xx696 - Research Essay (18 cps)
- xx698 – Research Project (18 cps)

Please note: All 18 credit point units are taken over two or three trimesters.

While a student may undertake 18 credit points of Independent Guided Study or 18 credit points in Research Projects or an 18 credit point Research Essay, the Sydney College of Divinity permits no more than 36 credit points to be taken from these units combined towards a Bachelor of Theology or Master of Arts or Master of Theology degree.

The “Research Essay” and “Honours Thesis” are examined externally through the Sydney College of Divinity and are suitable pathways for students seeking admission to the Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Ministry, Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Theology (subject to achieving certain minimum grade levels, usually at least Distinction-75%+).
There are four different tailored projects the student can undertake, depending on the degree in which they are enrolled. They are:

**Independent Guided Study**

In these units the student independently pursues a topic of interest that has been approved by ACOM. A maximum of 18 credit points may be obtained in this way.

Independent Guided Study units are advanced level units and can be taken in a range of disciplines. It affords the student an opportunity to develop independent research and study skills. Before an Independent Guided Study can be undertaken, a student must have completed at least 27 credit points in the discipline in which the Independent Guided Study is to be taken.

In the Bachelor of Theology the requirements and nominal demand hours for a 9 credit point Independent Guided Study are:

- 40 hours of ministry, workplace or community placement (which in some instances may require the submission of a placement journal).
- 62 hours of reading and assignment preparation (equivalent to 775 pages of reading).
- A 2000 word reflective paper on the field placement.
- A 3000 word academic assignment.

Independent Guided Study units are available in the Graduate Certificate of Arts, the Graduate Diploma of Arts, the Master of Arts and the Master of Theology. The requirements and nominal demand hours for a 9 credit point Independent Guided Study are:

- 102 hours of reading and assignment preparation (equivalent to 1000 pages of reading).
- A 2500 word reflective paper on the field placement.
- A 3500 word academic assignment.

Reading and assignment topics are negotiated between the student and their Supervisor appointed by ACOM. The amount of reading and assessment may be reduced by documented participation in approved relevant seminars or courses.

Independent Guided Study applications should be approved before trimester registration deadlines. However, in those circumstances where students are able to do so, they can do most of the course unit work prior to formally enrolling, such as readings and assignment topic negotiation, and even starting work on draft assignments.

**Research Project**

Students considered capable of doing so may complete up to 18 credit points of Independent Research, taken either as one 18 credit point Research Project unit or two 9 credit point Research Project units.

These course units build on the theological background, capacity and interests of a student enabling the pursuit of broad research, often of a survey nature, into an area or topic within a discipline or across disciplines. This research cannot usually be done within the constraints of individual coursework units or the focused study of a particular topic.
Before a Research Project can be undertaken, a student must have completed at least 36 credit points in the sub-discipline in which the Research Project is to be taken and 108 credit points overall in the BTh and 54 credit points overall in the Masters degree.

**Research Essay**

This course unit enables students who have generally excelled in their coursework to research and write in an area of specialisation and to demonstrate an ability to pursue further research at the Masters, BTh Honours and Doctoral levels. Applicants for Sydney College of Divinity research degree programs are required to have completed this unit at Distinction level or demonstrate equivalence in achievement.

To be taken over two semesters this 18 credit point unit can be studied at Masters level only and requires submission of a 12,000 word paper.

Students may only enrol in a Research Essay if they have achieved a grade point average of 2.5 or better, except in those Masters programs where the Research Essay is a compulsory component.

The unit permits students to research a topic of their own choosing in consultation with a supervisor. The essay proposal requires the approval of the Sydney College of Divinity Research Committee.

**Pastoral Practicum**

This double-unit applies theological models of mission to a local church, ministry, community group, and/or workplace, and is designed to develop the student’s understanding and experience of the nature of pioneering ministry. It is a partnership between student, ACOM, and the student’s chosen ministry organization.

Possibilities are field work in a local church, community organisation, or mission agency. Prerequisites for undertaking Pastoral Practicum are 27 credit points in the sub-discipline of Pastoral Theology and Practice. Students should speak to their Learning Support Manager when they have selected a possible partner organization to work or volunteer with as part of their practicum.
The Role of ACOM Faculty

ACOM has a range of staff who will be involved in support of your research or practicum units. These include the Academic Dean, the Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching, the Dean of Students, and the Registrar. However your Learning Support Manager and your Supervisor will liaise with you to help you through the research process and any administrative requirements along the way.

Ethical Considerations

When ACOM approves your research or practicum proposal consideration will be given to the ethical implications of the research method you are using. All research involving living human subjects must be carried out in such a way that protects the welfare and rights of the participants in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. This includes:

- information collected directly from or through a person (e.g. via interviews, questionnaires, observations of an individual, focus groups)
- accessing secondary sources or non-public materials (e.g. interviews about an individual, personnel records, student records)
- identifiable private information about a living individual (e.g. private papers).

Approval is required by the ACOM Ethics Committee for the use of the following research tools:

- questionnaires and surveys (paper or online)
- qualitative methodologies (tapes or notes from focus groups, interviews etc.)
- behavioural observation (whether known or unknown to participants)
- accessing data you, or another individual, have already collected for another purpose (e.g. from a database or archives etc.)
- psychological experiments
- psychiatric or clinical psychological studies
- other qualitative methods.

If necessary, your ACOM Supervisor will guide you through any ethics approval process. The ACOM Ethics Committee will determine if further approval is required by the Sydney College of Divinity Research Ethics Committee based on their current policies and guidelines.

Presentation Requirements

All materials presented for examination must adhere to the ACOM Assignment Writing Handbook.
Changes in 2014

The coursework research and practicum units provided for students will be changing from January 2014. This will not have any impact on students who have commenced units that cross-over from 2013 into 2014. These changes will provide students with a larger range of options. In 2014 the ACOM coursework and practicum units will be:

**Undergraduate (Diploma and Bachelor)**
- P7282 - Supervised Ministry 1 (9 cps)
- P7382 - Supervised Ministry 2 (9 cps)
- x7392 - Research Project (18 cps)
- x7393 - Independent Guided Study (9 cps)
- x7394 - Independent Guided Study (18 cps)
- x7398 - Action Research Project (18 cps)
- x7399 - Capstone Unit (9 cps)

**Bachelor of Theology (Honours) and Bachelor of Ministry (Honours)**
- x8598 - Honours Thesis (45 cps) requires x8500 Research Methodology as a prerequisite

**Postgraduate (Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master of Arts and Master of Theology)**
- P8582 - Theory and Practice of Ministry 1 (9 cps)
- P9682 - Theory and Practice of Ministry 2 (9 cps)
- x9684 - Supervised Ministry Practicum (9 cps)
- x9691 - Research Project (9 cps)
- x9692 - Research Project (18 cps)
- x9693 - Independent Guided Study (9 cps)
- x9694 - Independent Guided Study (18 cps)
- x9698 - Action Research Project (18 cps)
- x9699 - Capstone Unit (9 cps)
- x9696 - Research Essay (18 cps) requires x8500 Research Methodology as a prerequisite
Research Proposal

Your research proposal should give an impression of the strength and originality of your proposed research and its potential to make a contribution to the body of knowledge. It is vital that you demonstrate that your research is necessary. It is not enough that it happens to interest you. You should make clear how this will be useful to others.

Student Name:

Student Number:

Learning Support Manager:

Length of Research Project/Essay:
This will be determined by whether you are enrolled in: undergraduate or graduate, 9 or 18 credit point unit of study. Discuss this with your Learning Support Manager.

Proposed commencement date:

Proposed finishing date:

Supervisor (if provided yet):

Working Title:
This is a draft description of your project in less than 15 words.

Research Background:
This section describes the context of the research which may include historical, theological, social, cultural, personal or organisational information about the motivation for the research.

Research Contribution:
Describe how your research will make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge. It may be a contribution to theory and/or practice. It may change your organisation or you or the field of study. You will need to establish that it will be useful in some way that justifies your effort.

Review of Literature:
Very briefly identify the field of study within which your research will operate. You will demonstrate that you know enough about the area to commence your research. This is not intended to be extensive. Cite key literature and identify where you think you will make a unique contribution to the knowledge in that field. This section of the application will clarify the significance of your research in the context of what others have previously done.
Research Question(s) or Problem(s):
Your area of inquiry is framed as a clear question (usually what, how, why or if). You may include some supplementary questions included if necessary. To be clear, this section poses a question, it does not make a statement.

Methodology:
This section states the research approach you will use. It will vary greatly based on whether your focus is textual, theoretical, practical, social, historical etc. You may include some possible ways the project could develop as it emerges. If collecting human data describe how you will select participants, collect and analyse data, and validate your conclusions.

Ethical Considerations:
If there are any human research ethical considerations briefly describe them here and how you plan to deal with them.

Tentative Outline with Word Length of Each Section:
Include a proposed table of contents here including the approximate word length of each section in your paper.

Research Plan:
Propose a timeline for completion identifying the various stages of your research.

References:
Include a list of any references you have cited in the sections above and key texts your research will engage with. This is not a bibliography of general texts but a focused list of the most important literature your research will engage with.