



Australian
University College
of Divinity

2025–2027

Strategic Intent



“The Australian University College of Divinity is a leading theological education provider, equipping people for effective professional and lay ministry in a rapidly changing environment.”



Looking Ahead to 31st December 2027

A *strategic intent* is about direction. While it is clear about *ends* it is flexible as to *means* – it leaves room for improvisation, and does not rule out exploring alternative means to achieve the *Australian University College of Divinity's* strategic goals.

A significant challenge for the *University College* is the urgent need to equip students for times of uncertainty. Their world is changing rapidly. The broad western culture is predominantly postmodern – a worldview in which values and truth can seem relative and negotiable.

In today's complex world we cannot teach everything that a student will need to know. Rather, we must help students *learn how to learn*, educating not merely for *competence* (skills, knowledge and attitudes), but for *capability* – the deeper formed values that allow reflection and the ability to change, generate new knowledge, and continuously improve performance.

The *University College* is equipping students to thrive, as life long learners, in ministry contexts that may not yet exist today. Over the life of a graduate they may transition through many ways to serve in the kingdom: they may lead a local church as pastor, minister, clergy or priest; volunteer to serve as an elder, councillor, deacon, or ministry leader; work in a Christian non-profit welfare organisation; and/or initiate a pioneering mission enterprise. Sometimes paid, sometimes bi-vocational, sometimes as a volunteer.

Thriving in a complex environment

The theological education sector is extremely competitive and volatile, so the likelihood of colleges closing, merging, or being acquired is probable. In this context it seems reasonable to expect that only the organisations who are forward thinking and innovative will survive (and thrive). Current thinking, capabilities and resources will not suffice. This forces the *University College* to be more inventive and sharper operationally, making the most of limited resources.

In some ways, one of our greatest strengths will be our agility—our ability to continuously adapt and change. In the same way. Our greatest enemy may be staleness—mindless compliance for its own sake, that does not improve quality, while losing the purpose of mission and service.

Numerical growth for its own sake is not the goal, but rather effectiveness in the mission.. While improving business-as-usual operations is essential, any strategy merely designed to recover costs and maintain position seems like a plan to fail. With margins low and fixed costs high, increasing unit numbers is not enough to ensure sustainability, let alone invest in innovation.

This *Strategic Intent* cannot be designed to merely find a safe niche within the existing market. Rather, with entrepreneurial vigour the *University College* must create new market spaces, uniquely suited to our strengths—potentially, spaces that are off the traditional industry map.

The *University College* will be guided by our member institutions on the general direction of strategy, ensuring alignment with their own long-term mission strategies. This does not lock in any specific decisions—it merely shapes the general direction that the *University College Council*, advised by the *Principal's Fellowship* and management team, will be exploring over the next three years.

The *Strategic Intent 2025–2027* is a pathway to address these highest and most urgent risks while also responding to the stated strategic needs of college members and the wider spiritual/social needs of Australian society. We are especially equipped to help develop Christian leaders for a rapidly changing world. For this reason, our calling is great, our opportunities are immense, and our horizons are boundless.

Kind regards,



Professor Stephen Smith
Dean and Chief Executive Officer
Australian University College of Divinity (AUCD)

Our Brand Pillars

AUCD is helping students to form: the heart of a missionary, the mind of a scholar, and the hands of a servant.

AUCD has three Brand Pillars:



Missional

We prepare leaders who are adept to lead and build up the Church in a culturally – contextualised way. Our desire is to see God’s word flourish through a broad range of individuals, churches and communities.



Academic

We are known for our academic excellence. We believe in the centrality of the bible, and the powerful transformation that comes from a theologically-sound understanding of it in our lives and churches.



Servant-Hearted

We desire to be deeply relational and real, embodying Christ with a servant-hearted attitude in our relationship with students, member institutions and the broader church community.



“I know the plans I have for you’, says the Lord... ‘to give you a future and a hope.’”

—Jeremiah 29:11

Our Strategy

The University College’s strategic intent has five elements:



Value

(Service Delivery)



Reputation

(Thought Leadership)



Quality

(Effective Governance)



Learning

(Graduate Outcomes)



Sustainability

(Financial Viability)

The University College’s strategic intent has one strategic pivot:



Broaden Scope of Delivery



 **Strategic Intent 1**

Value (Service Delivery)

The Australian University College of Divinity is known by member institutions as the clear choice of higher education provider because of academic quality, flexible delivery, collegial mindset, ecumenical ethos and economic value. We will delight our member colleges with our friendly service, proactive helpfulness, and collegial approach.

We will do this by:

-  *AUCD is one University College with many campuses. It is the accrediting body providing all leadership and holding all responsibility in academic quality and governance. However, it exists in service of the collegiate members who determine the mission and ministry needs of their communities. As such, the AUCD leads and supports, but does not compete with its members.*
-  *The AUCD holds the tensions of its role well: (1) being flexible, while maintaining the highest standards; (2) seeking steady asset growth, while only charging fair costs on to member institutions; and (3) seeking new potential college members, but not where there is the possibility of competitive interference with existing colleges.*
-  *The AUCD's Office of the Dean is committed to: communicating well (and often) to avoid confusion; always having a servant heart: being patient, kind and respectful in all our interactions; managing potential misunderstandings or disagreements relationally and with a gracious spirit.*

Measurable three-year milestones (by 31st December 2027):

-  **Accredit new degrees and units**
that meet market needs as identified by the member institutions within the rigorous academic standards of the *University College*.
-  **Member Institutions**
will report high levels of satisfaction when asked to rate the level of customer service provided by the *University College*.
-  **Office of the Dean** will create their own **aspirational service charter** to describe the what the experience by member institutions of delightful service should look like.
-  Further enhancing the **specialised culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)** offerings for students through discounted capitation fees for mission-oriented initiatives where students are socially disadvantaged.
-  **Members of representative committees** (Coursework and SSAC) provide positive feedback on the effectiveness of these committees as *useful communities of practice* and not simply a place for BAU compliance checks.
-  **Strategic partnerships**
or business alliances will be formed that mutually benefit the collective of member institutions.
-  **Member Institution feedback**
indicates user satisfaction with the feature improvements (including functionality like student interface, user friendliness, and automation) of the *Paradigm Student Management System* in streamlining administrative processes for registrars, report generation, and access to training and reference documentation.
-  Establish options for different **levels of service delivery**, including contracted centralised services, where this is deemed an appropriate option by a member institution and the *University College*.



 **Strategic Intent 2**

Quality (Effective Governance)

The Australian University College of Divinity is a mature organisation that demonstrates the highest standards of governance (corporate and academic) through self-assurance and regulatory compliance managed by capable and strategic leadership.

We will do this by:

- ✔ Meeting the ongoing requirements of the the Higher Education Standards Framework, the University College Provider Category, the TEQSA Act and the ESOS Act.
- ✔ Council, board and committee governance is in alignment with government and community standards, TEQSA guidance, and the recommendations of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (or Governance Institute of Australia) and ACNC.
- ✔ Monitoring the embedded self-assurance systems to ensure the standards of teaching and student support are implemented to enable quality and consistency for every student experience across the AUCD.
- ✔ Maturely balancing the requirements of compliance and procedure with the humanity of students to ensure the high standards of both student support and award integrity are maintained.
- ✔ Attracting and retaining highly capable personnel in the *Office of the Dean* who are industry leaders, and well-resourced to meet the strategic, academic and operational challenges of the AUCD.

Measurable three-year milestones (by 31st December 2027):

- ✔ **TEQSA’s Annual Risk Assessment**
demonstrates the *University College* is low risk based on their relevant criteria.
- ✔ All member institutions will undergo **Institutional Moderation** during the four year period 2024–2027 which will be reported to Academic Board and Council.
- ✔ *Institutional Moderations* will continue to **assure quality control and consistency** but will be expanded to be broader and deeper: with expanded focus given to risks associated with financial viability, third-party arrangements, and international student obligations.
- ✔ Internal reviews indicate Council complies with its own *Council Terms of Reference*, and composition continuously moves towards the aspirations of its **Council Capability Matrix** and diversity mix as described in *Council Rule 001 – Council Characteristics*.
- ✔ Internal reviews **indicate that Council has adequate “line of sight”** to assure itself of the quality of all aspects of corporate and academic governance across the member institutions and broadening scope of delivery.
- ✔ Internal reviews indicate that the *University College* leadership possesses the requisite capability to provide suitable **academic and corporate governance oversight** for broader scopes of delivery outside ASCED 0917 (Philosophy and Religion).
- ✔ Independent audits indicate sufficient depth of **academic leadership** (not just teaching or research active, but demonstrated governance, academic quality and compliance know-how as it relates to the HE sector).
- ✔ **Independent audits** indicate Council, Board and Committee record keeping is up-to-date, accessible, and provides all required evidence demonstrating compliance with the HES Framework and *University College* Provider category.
- ✔ The capability of the *Office of the Dean* (including Council and Academic Board) is further developed through **ongoing professional development**.
- ✔ **Registers of interests**, identified risks, and risk mitigation strategies are reviewed regularly by Council and Academic Board.
- ✔ **Potential risks are identified**, managed and mitigated proactively and reported through the register of significant risks.
- ✔ **Cyber security** risk and privacy concerns are managed effectively through risk mitigation strategies, technology solutions, and staff training initiatives.
- ✔ With consultation through the **Principals Fellowship and Council**, the *University College* will adjust the constitution to ensure it is fit-for-purpose for future growth initiatives to enable: (a) the ability to continue to grow through the addition of new colleges without destabilising effective governance; and (b) agility by catering to, and supporting, a broader range of organisations at varied levels of maturity. This may involve diverse membership levels with different scopes of responsibility, delegation and service delivery.
- ✔ **Governance systems** are in place to ensure the possibility of international initiatives (study abroad, international campuses, and international partnerships/memberships) can be supported with guaranteed quality controls and consistent alignment with HESF.



Strategic Intent 3

Sustainability (Financial Viability)

*The Australian University College of Divinity has the **human and material resources** to give substance to the long-term aspirations of the University College. Through astute financial management it maintains an asset base well-equipped to: (1) respond to rapid environmental changes (political, economic, social and technological); (2) take strategic risks to invest in product innovation; and (3) ensure resilience to catastrophic events outside of the control of the University College.*

We will do this by:

- ✓ Astute financial management to produce ongoing operational profits (while keeping cost increases reasonable) to be invested in assets for steady capital growth.
- ✓ Growth in number of member institutions, students, and units.
- ✓ Exploring strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations with the possibility of mergers/acquisitions.
- ✓ Building a deep pipeline of highly capable leaders in all aspects of AUCD operations to ensure system redundancies should staff changes occur.
- ✓ Continuously developing further productivity gains through: (1) streamlining processes and costs of service delivery, product development, and administration through effective management; and (2) investing in potential breakthrough technology that put the AUCD in a leadership position within the education sector.

Measurable three-year milestones (by 31st December 2027):

- ✓ The equivalent **full time student load** (EFTSL) will increase from 333 (in 2022: 2587 units) to 1000 (in 2027: 8000 units).
- ✓ The number of **active doctoral candidates** in the *Graduate School of Research* will increase from 25 (in 2023) to 50 (in 2027).
- ✓ The number of **member institutions** in the *University College* will increase from 10 (in 2023) to 16 (in 2027).
- ✓ **TEQSA Annual Risk Assessment** lowers their financial risk rating in the year received from 'high' (in 2022) to 'low' (in 2027).
- ✓ **The Finance Committee and Council** will develop a Financial Strategy document as a road map to effectively pursue stable asset growth and liquidity for the long-term viability and mission-effectiveness of the *University College*.
- ✓ **Annual fee increases are balanced,** sharing the costs of regulatory compliance, service delivery, and risk management fairly across the member institutions.
- ✓ **A financial safety-net** is maintained, equivalent to one-year of operational revenue (excluding Fee-Help) as cash, investment portfolio, or real estate, to buffer against commercially destabilising events outside of the control of the *University College*.
- ✓ **\$100,000 in donations/grants** has been received to support strategically prioritised projects by 2027.
- ✓ Through **Institutional Moderations,** member institutions have been provided feedback and coaching on matters of business modelling, strategic planning, governance and risk management.



Strategic Intent 4

Reputation (Thought Leadership)

The Australian University College of Divinity is recognised as a premier provider of higher degrees in theology, ministry and the arts — a collegiate model known known as an innovative, mission-effective consortium built on a foundation of academic excellence, real-world practice-orientation, collegiate spirit, and research-led scholarship of learning and teaching.

We will do this by:

- ✔ Thought leadership and world-class research and scholarship shines through the AUCD's: Graduate School of Research, Centres for Excellence, Press, Conferences, Professional Development and faculty profiles.
- ✔ Academic staff in the Office of the Dean will continue to grow and develop through research and scholarship, publishing to enhance the reputation of the AUCD and further develop their expertise in their particular specialist fields of study.
- ✔ The AUCD is represented and known (through senior personnel) in relevant government and industry forums, and sought after by peer education providers for insight and expertise.

Measurable three-year milestones (by 31st December 2027):

- ✔ Website, social media, and print materials are all high-quality and on brand, consistent with the *University College's Marketing Plan*.
- ✔ The *University College* will manage any potential 'bad press' critical incidents by following the processes as outlined in the **Critical Incident Policy**.
- ✔ Opportunities for scholarship and research by academic leaders within the *Office of the Dean* have been supported through professional development, conferences, study leave and publishing.
- ✔ The quality of the **institutional facilities** will match the *University College* brand aspirations. We will maintain aesthetic, functional, efficient spaces worthy of a prestigious institution of higher education.
- ✔ A specific strategic plan will be developed to ensure the growth, effectiveness and viability of the *University College's* direct services (Graduate Research School, Press, Conferences, Centres of Excellence, GRS Scholarships and Professional Development Events). This is to ensure: cohesive coordination; relevance to the MIs and broader society; commercial viability; succession planning; and alignment with the *University College's 2024–2027 Strategic Intent*.
- ✔ Attendance at **University College Conferences** will increase by 50% from 2022 data and feedback will confirm the quality and usefulness of their contributions to industry-wide faculty development.
- ✔ Sales of **University College Press resources** will increase by 50% from 2022 data and will continue to release important scholarship that benefits the interests of member colleges, as well as providing a pathway for emerging scholars to pursue opportunities to present at conferences and publish in edited books, journals or magazines.
- ✔ **The University College Press** will ensure all works are print-on-demand and available as e-books to give global reach and reduce capital investment.
- ✔ **The Graduate School of Research** will ensure all doctoral theses are available digitally via the website to give global reach.
- ✔ A doctoral scholarship initiative will be established for member institutions to access fee-support for selected doctoral candidates affiliated with their institutions. A competitive application process with assessment criteria will be established based on capped financial resources of \$35,000 (in 2025) \$65,000 (in 2026) and \$100,000 (in 2027).
- ✔ Initiatives, networks or groups will be explored and established around common interests or goals for the purpose of: (1) enhancing the development of emerging scholars; (2) connecting the *University College* with the wider ecumenical community; and (3) creating wider awareness of the *University College*.
- ✔ **Centres for Excellence** will focus on areas of value to the *University College* as it broadens its scope of delivery where scholarly contributions may enhance the development of faculty, provide insights for students, and contribute to the body of knowledge in a way that benefits Australian society.
- ✔ **Champion the University College ecumenical community** by capturing: thoughtful scholarly insights; or, practice-based initiatives, from the perspectives of the various traditions in *occasional* publications. This is designed to capture 'who we are and what we are doing together' in a way that clarifies, celebrates, and promotes the *University College's* shared mission and values.



Strategic Intent 5

Learning (Graduate Outcomes)

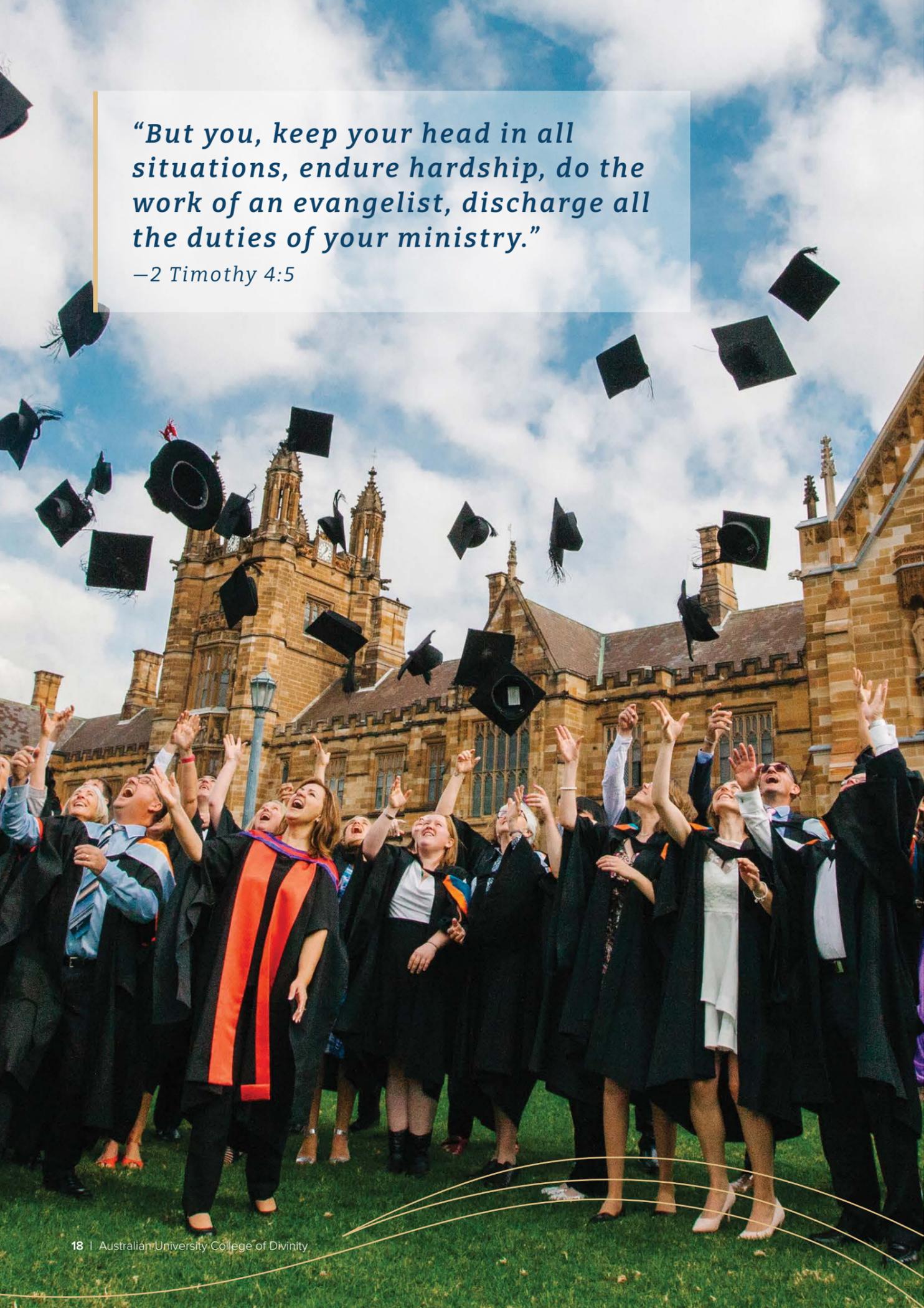
The Australian University College of Divinity is producing graduates able to meet the complex challenges of the modern world and attain suitable employment. Our faculty are committed to delivering exceptional learning experiences that includes the transmission of: the wisdom of the past; the discovery of new knowledge; and the application of insights to a society in need.

We will do this by:

- ✓ Attracting and supporting faculty devoted to student learning, who are scholar-teachers, committed to their own scholarship and equipping students to be lifelong learners.
- ✓ Continuing to build a learning community of faculty and students devoted to Christian values, ensuring these are embedded in the curriculum and all institutional practices.
- ✓ Continuing to support a spirit of innovation in teaching; to produce graduates who can inspire others to discover new ways of understanding the nature of God, and implications for serving society and the world.
- ✓ Prioritising student support of personal well-being and learning progression by creating student learning environments (whether online or face-to-face) to be of the highest quality; engage for knowledge, skills and application; and to be physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

Measurable three-year milestones (by 31st December 2027):

- ✓ The *University College's* student attrition will be **less than 25%**.
- ✓ The *University College's* student completions will be **more than 80%**.
- ✓ QILT student feedback indicates **positive student experiences**, and satisfaction in the top 20% of Australian higher education providers with measurable links to career outcomes.
- ✓ **Monitoring and benchmarking** with industry groups will continue in areas of high concern highlighted in recent years by government such as: student support; sexual assault and sexual harassment; the role of generative artificial intelligence; plagiarism; research integrity and intellectual freedom. This is for the purpose of continuous improvement.
- ✓ **Professional development** of faculty is enhanced through the delivery of the Graduate Certificate of Theological Education.
- ✓ Exploring methods for **micro-credential recognition** as units of awards with clear pathways towards award completion.
- ✓ Exploring the potentiality of a **block teaching approach**, where appropriate, recognising the potency of short-sharp single-unit-at-a-time delivery in delivering effective graduate professional development.
- ✓ **Reviews through institutional moderations**, discipline moderations, grade monitoring, student feedback loops, and curriculum are completed on schedule; and recommendations to improve quality and consistency will be implemented in a timely manner.
- ✓ **Graduate destination** (employment) data will be collected and provided to management and Council for analysis and planning.
- ✓ **High quality student experiences are evident** in feedback regularly reported to Academic Board and Council including: QILT reports, analysis of grades, integrity issues, student grievances, and demographic (diversity) indicators.



“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

—2 Timothy 4:5

Strategic Pivot

Broaden Scope of Delivery

Self-accrediting status was awarded to the *Australian University College of Divinity* in 2016 and since that time delivery has focused on the teaching of philosophy and religious studies as defined by the *Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED Narrow Field 0917)*. This has prioritised the preparation of students for work in ministry related professions.

Moving forward the University College wishes to ensure more students graduate with transferable skills to help them gain employment in the broadest possible settings in Australian society.

While the *University College* will always prioritise the preparation of students for roles working in local churches and missions, there is also a recognition of the shifting organisational needs of religious institutions as seen in the following trends.

Trends seen in Religious Institutions

- shifting from clergy/priest/minister roles as the primary employment opportunity arising from *University College* awards;
- growing employment opportunities in the religious not-for-profit sector where there are over 1.8m jobs. These religious charities (over 15,000) significantly support Australia's welfare and education infrastructure including hospitals, schools, refuges, affordable housing, aged care, mental health, family support, domestic violence care, homelessness, and services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders;
- growing pursuit of 'bi-vocational' ministry where a degree is earned that prepares graduates to be job-ready employees in many secular roles but allowing volunteering in Christian ministries for the benefit of societal needs;

- growing interest in multi-disciplinary degrees, particularly at graduate and doctoral level where the traditional 'narrow fields' approach is no longer adequate to cope with the interests of students, and also to prepare graduates with the multi-faceted knowledge and skills required for a rapidly changing world; and
- shifting Australian industry skills shortages such as: aged care support; disability support; school teaching; and various forms of health promotion.

In recognition of these trends the *University College* will seek to negotiate with TEQSA to broaden the self-accrediting range of delivery into the following educational fields:

- *Narrow Field 0803 Business and Management*
- *Narrow Field 0903 Studies in Human Society*
- *Narrow Field 0905 Human Welfare Studies and Services*
- *Narrow Field 0907 Behavioural Science*
- *Narrow Field 1007 Communication and Media Studies*

This will enable the *University College* to further meet the shifting needs of its member institutions through offering more diverse courses that will be relevant to their constituencies as they seek to make a positive contribution in Australian Society. These broader fields may be framed with reference to a Christian worldview, a distinctive feature of the *University College*.

These new narrow fields will allow the broadening and deepening of the arts-related elements of existing degrees, and sharpen the practical pastoral components with areas that are grounded in real world practice. In recognition of these needs the *University College* seeks to broaden its self-accrediting scope up to AQF 10 in these areas, reflecting the growing trend towards multidisciplinary doctoral research.

In particular, a broader self-accrediting scope will further enable the University College to:

- ✓ offer new courses that support learning needs identified by these societal trends and recognise that to achieve successful employment outcomes students need broader knowledge, skills, and experience to become leaders and managers (whether in secular, religious or charitable employment);
- ✓ offer broader research fields to enhance multidisciplinary research in the Graduate Research School where appropriate supervision and library resourcing can be provided;
- ✓ offer courses that provide students opportunities to study areas and seek employment related to the national skill shortage;
- ✓ offer courses that are multidisciplinary, or double-degrees, broadening learning experiences and enhancing employment opportunities (including innovative modes of delivery such as micro-credentialed pathways and block teaching options);
- ✓ enrich existing arts degrees to include areas broader in scope; and
- ✓ offer some new courses in a language other than English (LOTE), noting that the *University College* has more than a decade of experience in successfully teaching in the Korean language.





**Australian University
College of Divinity**

Formerly the Sydney College of Divinity

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