



## **The University of Notre Dame Australia Building Research**

### **BACKGROUND**

The University of Notre Dame Australia, established by an Act of the Western Australian Parliament in 1989 and a Canonical Statute in 1991, enrolled its first postgraduate education students in 1992 and its first undergraduate students on the Fremantle Campus in 1994. It now operates across three Campuses: in Fremantle, Western Australia (1992), in Broome, Western Australia (1994) and in Sydney, New South Wales (2005). It offers undergraduate and postgraduate awards on all Campuses and a number of Vocation Education and Training (V.E.T.) qualifications on its Broome Campus. The Colleges of the University are:

- Arts and Sciences
- Business
- Education
- Health Sciences
- Law
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Philosophy and Theology

#### ***The Objects of the University***

The University of Notre Dame Australia Act (Section 5), states the Objects of the University as:

*The provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values; and the provision of an excellent standard of:*

- *teaching, scholarship and research;*
- *training for the professions; and*
- *pastoral care for its students.*

For strategic reasons, UNDA has focussed its energies to date on achieving excellence in 'teaching and scholarship', 'training for the professions' and 'pastoral care for its students'. Research has not been ignored – but it has not been one of the primary goals. This prioritisation was both necessary and legitimate. Both our internal assessment and external benchmarking confirm the wisdom of these decisions. We are providing an excellent standard of teaching, scholarship, training for the professions and pastoral care for our students.

In order to fulfil all aspects of our mission, it is now time to build our research efforts to the same high standards achieved in other aspects of this mission. Achieving excellence in research does not mean we neglect our other goals; it does not in any way diminish their importance. Indeed, the increasing focus on research can and will be undertaken to complement our other goals.

## DEFINING TEACHING, SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH

### **Teaching**

“Teaching” at Notre Dame includes all aspects of a staff member’s responsibilities in planning, preparation, presentation and assessment of student achievements following lectures, tutorials and practical classes and in meeting the needs of students enrolled in these classes for professional advice and pastoral care.

### **Scholarship**

All academic staff members are expected to maintain the contemporary discipline and professional competence demanded by the development of students enrolled in all courses for which they are responsible. This scholarly capability requirement is not limited by the narrow confines of the syllabus but demands the knowledge to support exploration by individual students. This scholarly capability demands on-going self-development through informal and formal study and learning. This scholarly development can include active research participation but can be limited to maintaining contact with the scholarly literature relevant to a staff member’s teaching responsibilities. An understanding of research and the processes of research are essential elements of scholarship and enable contemporary and exciting teaching.

### **Research**

Research is the systematic pursuit of new knowledge and understanding in either or both a discipline area or in a professional practice. The outcomes of research are expressed in publications either as theses or in relevant refereed journals. In professional areas, it is expected that the dissemination of these research outcomes will affect professional practice and, in learning disciplines, will be cited by others. These endeavours will normally involve research students and will result in a gradual increase of graduate student numbers in the University.

## EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF

It is the academic staff of the University upon whom the responsibility of achieving excellence in research will fall. However, it is neither desirable nor necessary for all academic staff to engage in research to the same extent.

The expectations placed on academic staff reach across a number of areas:

- 1) teaching and scholarship
- 2) pastoral care for students
- 3) research
- 4) administrative requirements
- 5) professional/clinical expertise
- 6) social and professional outreach/community engagement

While Notre Dame seeks academic staff with potential and skills in all areas, the reality is that we need to look at the total staff picture and recruit and appoint academic staff whose combined competencies can realise the full mission of the University. In other words, the University must develop a staffing profile – and an employment structure – wherein academic staff can focus their skills / their talents and their roles. The university’s promotions policy must be sufficiently flexible to reward and recognise achievement in these differing roles.

Building in this flexibility to the employment structure recognises the community aspect of The University of Notre Dame Australia and will maximise our capacity to fulfil our Objects.

Consistent with Notre Dame's commitment to providing excellence in teaching to our students, the following principles are non negotiable:

- 1) All academic staff must be excellent and pursue excellence in teaching, scholarship and pastoral care. The variable or flexible component of their employment will relate to their professional work, higher level administration work and social and professional outreach/ community activities.
- 2) All academic staff will be required to undertake teaching at the University and to maintain their scholarly development, which is the required partner to university level teaching. There will be no ongoing 'research only' academic positions at Notre Dame.

### **HOW WILL WE BUILD OUR RESEARCH**

- 1) The first step is to commit ourselves to achieving excellence in research. This commitment must be expressed and conveyed to all staff.
- 2) Set achievable and realistic targets for our 'excellence in research' goal, which is based on the quality of the output, not simply the quantity of the output.
- 3) Determine how we will assess and measure the quality of output, with reference to external benchmarks developed nationally and internationally.
- 4) We will increase the quantity and quality of our activities based upon the following principles:
  - a) Ensuring our research has foundations in the philosophies that underpin the Objects of the University.
  - b) Building up our focus in applied research that focuses on the needs of the communities that support the University.
  - c) Encouraging those who have established and/or maintained significant research outcomes while working within the University.
  - d) Encouraging and supporting team research that provides the scale of activity capable of attracting professional interest outside the University, thus leading to financial support and partnerships.
  - e) Ensuring our research uses the existing investment in the University thereby multiplying the use of the investment and thus the returns to Notre Dame.

The emphasis on teams and applied research does not imply that the work of distinguished scholars working alone has no place in Notre Dame's future. Support for the work of those who tend to work alone and who are capable of changing for the better the way our society works is important. Notre Dame must seek community support for such people and their work.

- 5) Some specific actions we will take include the following:
  - a) Establishing a Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Research Development comprising the Deputy Vice Chancellors, Provosts and Associate Provosts, Heads of Research Centres and the Manager of the Research Office. This Committee will concentrate on strategic issues and, in the first instance, will develop the UNDA Strategic Plan for Research – building on the goals set in the University Strategic Plan. The Committee will also advise the Vice Chancellor on policy initiatives, funding decisions and such other matters as relate to building research at UNDA.

- b) Re-examining our employment practices, our conditions of academic employment and our promotions policy to ensure that the University can achieve the desired 'excellence' in research.
- c) Re-examining all of our research funding income and research expenditure to determine if the money could be allocated in more effective and efficient ways.
- d) Seeking to increase the number of Australian Postgraduate Awards allocated to Notre Dame and increase and diversify the range of independently sponsored scholarships and stipends for research students.
- e) Building our Research Centres into centres of excellence, wherein cross discipline and multi professional research is encouraged and developed.
- f) Recruit staff with PhD or Masters by Research qualifications and with continuing publication records, particularly in areas where research degrees are offered. Depending on the discipline area, this target number should be set at no less than 75% of the number of full-time and part-time staff. In setting this generic target, actively encourage and assist those staff undertaking research studies to complete these qualifications..
- g) Build up the number of postgraduate research students in key areas, such that their numbers are no less than 5% of the University student body by 2018. The key areas will be: Medicine, Education, Health Sciences, Nursing, Aboriginal Studies, Philosophy, Theology and Ethics.