



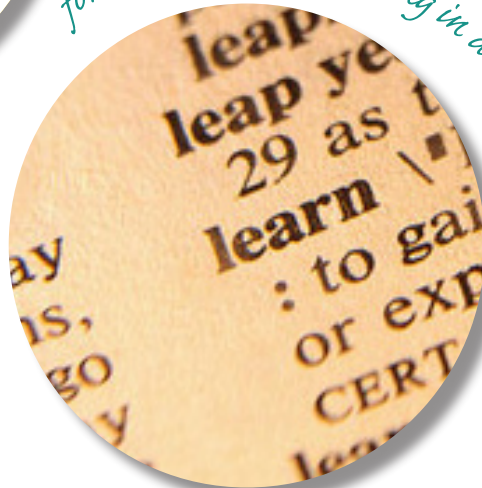
AUSTRALIAN
COLLEGE OF
THEOLOGY

Distance Education Handbook

2010



for ACT students studying in distance mode



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DISTANCE EDUCATION HANDBOOK FOR ACT STUDENTS STUDYING IN DISTANCE MODE

Our student database indicates that you are enrolled this semester in a unit delivered in distance mode by one of the affiliated colleges of the Australian College of Theology (ACT) that has been approved by our Board of Directors to deliver units in this mode of study.

We are very pleased to be able to facilitate the offering of units of study in distance mode through a number of our affiliates.

WHO ARE WE?

You are studying at an affiliated college of the Australian College of Theology. The ACT is known as the “provider”. The college at which you enrolled is approved to “deliver” the unit on our behalf.

The course in which you are enrolled has been accredited by the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) for the five-year period 2007–2011. The accreditation of our courses in NSW is recognised in the other states.

The College was established in 1891 by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia. Since the mid 1970s the College has operated as a consortium. This means that Anglican theological colleges and other Christian higher education institutions have sought and gained approval to deliver the courses of the College on its behalf. The College provides a quality process that assures students and college stakeholders that the standards of the educational services provided meets the requirements we have stipulated.

Make sure you are aware of the College’s regulations and the unit outlines in the course in which you have enrolled. Affiliated colleges teach a common curriculum. There is a set of units which are approved centrally by ACT Coursework Committee and Academic Board in each of the coursework awards of the College. The Handbooks also provide ACT graduate attributes and information about your particular course.

You can access the College Undergraduate and Postgraduate Handbooks on the ACT website—
www.acttheology.edu.au

The website contains information about the College as well as resources for students. In the resources section of the website you can download the bibliographic tool EndNote which we make available free of charge to all students enrolled in a bachelors degree of the College or higher. There is also a library search tool that will enable you to search a number of linked affiliated college libraries.

UNIT MATERIALS

As required by the College’s approval process, the unit materials that are supplied by your college should include:

- the layout of the materials and the language used promote stated ACT educational outcomes,
- the cycle of assessments are appropriate to the mode of delivery, and to the level and the award,
- the stated ACT syllabus is covered, and
- the technology used in the delivery actually works.

Your college is also required to provide the information to each student studying in distance mode that:

- introduces the unit and its place in the ACT course,
- introduces the unit preparer,
- introduces the lecturer and provide contact details,
- introduces the ethos of the delivering institution,
- details the workload expectations,
- stipulates the assessment events and their due dates,
- details the ACT learning outcomes and aim of the module,
- explains the marking scale and the expectations for each letter grade,
- explains the moderation process of the ACT,
- provides the text of the ACT's academic misconduct policy,
- provides the text of the ACT's academic appeals policy,
- lists the topics to be covered in the module outline,
- includes the supporting commentary and advisory notes for each topic, with questions and issues to be considered,
- provides a bibliography and references to the reading required for the topic.

Should on-line tutorials be provided or on-line discussions scheduled, all the necessary information for accessing these should be provided.

In addition, each CD or hard copy of the unit materials devised by your college and used in the delivery of each unit in distance mode is required to carry the following information:

- (i) (if a CD) On the cover of the disk—

“This unit is offered as part of an accredited award of the Australian College of Theology”

- (ii) In the introductory content of each unit—

“This unit is offered as part of an accredited award of the Australian College of Theology”

Unit code is offered by Name of college as part of the Name of award authorised of distance delivery by the college, which is an accredited award of the Australian College of Theology (ACT).

The ACT was established under the auspices of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia in 1891. The ACT is a company limited by guarantee governed by a nine-member Board of Directors. The Anglican Primate of Australia presides as the chairman of meetings of the company which consists of 54 persons (in 2010).

The Australian College of Theology is an Australasian provider of state accredited higher education courses leading to awards in theology and other disciplines related to Christian ministry. The ACT operates as an ecumenical consortium of some 2,500 students enrolled in 19 Bible and theological colleges approved to teach the awards of the ACT. These awards range from two-year diplomas, three-year undergraduate and coursework masters degrees to masters and doctoral research degrees.

The ACT has a centrally devised and managed curriculum and a quality assurance process that are applied across the whole network of affiliated colleges. The day-to-day educational system is managed by the Dean from the ACT office in Sydney. Academic governance is the responsibility of the Academic Board which oversees all academic activities of the College. The standing committees of the Academic Board share this responsibility by monitoring the quality of delivery and resourcing, developing policy, and reviewing the course structure for research, coursework and diploma courses.

The membership of the Academic Board and its committees is comprised mostly of faculty members of affiliated colleges. A number of senior university academics are represented to help ensure that ACT practice (especially in the outcome of the consideration of research examiner's reports and general academic policy) remains comparable with the standards of and best practice in the university sector.

As a HEP under the Higher Education Support Act, the College was required to undergo a quality audit conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). The AUQA Audit Report was publicly released on the AUQA website in February 2007.

In 2010 the company consists of 54 members composed in the following way:

- (1) the Anglican Primate of Australia and the Dean of the ACT,
- (2) the principals of 10 Anglican Theological Colleges,
- (3) 21 persons elected by the House of Bishops of the General Synod,
- (4) the principals of 11 affiliated colleges approved to deliver the research degrees of the ACT,
- (5) 5 graduates holding an ACT research degree,
- (6) 5 graduates holding any other degree of the ACT.

HOW MUCH ACT STUDY CAN BE COMPLETED IN DISTANCE MODE?

An affiliated college may seek approval from the Board of Directors as a distance education deliverer. Students may undertake some units of the BTh (up to 33% of the whole course) or some or all of the Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in Theology and Ministry, Associate Degree of Theology, Bachelor of Ministry, Bachelor of Christian Studies and the Graduate Diplomas in distance mode.

Some units are also offered at MA level in distance mode.

The ACT office can give you further information about which colleges are approved distance education deliverers. Please call us on 02 9262 7890 or email us at info@acttheology.edu.au

MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS AND STUDENT RESULTS

The ACT has in place moderation processes designed to ensure that academic quality is maintained over units and over time, parity of esteem is maximized across college presentations, the objectives of each unit are addressed by the way students are assessed, stated ACT learning outcomes (or grade descriptors) for each unit are uniformly and consistently applied, and graduate attributes are likely to be attained.

The performance of students in each unit delivered in each semester is moderated. Sample scripts of the major assessment (or moderation instrument) are sent at the end of each semester to the ten external unit field moderators. Their task is to read sample scripts in each unit of study from each grade and from each college, and to compare student performance and the quality of teaching and learning across the whole ACT network as far as that can be ascertained by the sample scripts. Any recommendations for the raising or lowering of student marks is based on our grade descriptors and the extent to which the moderators are confident that markers are grading the moderation instrument in accordance with the agreed descriptors.

The moderators' comments are directed in the first instance to the Assessment and Moderation Committee. The comments of moderators and the resolutions of the Committee are sent to each college. For some units this process might result in student results increasing or decreasing. The ACT office releases the final results of students and mails unit result sheets to each student after authorisation by the Academic Quality Committee. The mail out happens towards the end of July for first semester results and the middle of December for second semester results.

Until the moderation process is completed any results you may have received before the official ACT transcript are provisional.

Our moderation process has been adopted as a quality assurance measure in order to ensure that standards across the ACT network are being maintained and that each affiliated institution enjoys parity of esteem.

FEEES

Tuition fees for all ACT units of study are provided on your college website and in their information packages. ACT fees can also be accessed on the goingtouni website—

<http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/CoursesAndProviders/ProvidersAndCourses/HigherEducationProviders/NSW/AustralianCollegeOfTheology.htm>

and on the ACT website—

http://www.actheology.edu.au/students_tuitionfees.php

In consultation with affiliated colleges, each July the Board of Directors sets tuition fees for the forthcoming academic year.

All ACT students who are Australian citizens can take out a FEE-HELP income contingent loan for their fees. The FEE-HELP loans scheme is the result of the ACT getting Higher Education Provider (HEP) status under the Higher Education Support Act 2003.

POLICIES

One of the conditions of achieving approval to deliver in distance mode is the requirement that the college delivering distance units must publish in their student handbook or in the unit materials a number of policies that are required of all HEPs wishing to access the FEE-HELP loan scheme.

Handbooks developed by colleges for distance education students should contain the following ACT approved policies required under the Higher Education Support Act (2003) and by the Department of Education, Science and Training for Higher Education Provider status:

- Dispute Resolution Policy for Domestic Students
- Dispute Resolution Policy for International Students
- FEE-HELP Re-crediting Policy
- Cross-institutional Enrolment/Studies Policy

ACCESS TO LECTURERS AND UNIT CONVENORS

It is very important that students have reasonable access to their lecturer or unit coordinator. For students studying in distance mode, this is likely to be very important consideration given your geographic remove from the college campus. Email and on-line delivery has helped bridge such distances and has enhanced the delivery of units and the quality of the student experience.

The ACT takes seriously the commitment of colleges approved to deliver in distance mode to ensure that the quality of the student experience is equivalent to the experience of students studying in attendance mode.

The following statement about access is taken from the ACT's Institutional Approval Criteria (2007).

There must be a formal expectation included in all contracts or formal letters of offer stipulating that all unit convenors—whether full-time or part-time—must be available to students for advice and consultation during time in which lectures are delivered for at least 25% of the time devoted to lecturing the unit. If, for example, a staff member teaches nine hours per week on campus, just over two hours per week should be formally available to students. If the staff member does not have an office on the campus, a room for his or her use must be set aside by the college administrator.

Affiliated colleges must ensure that in cases where a lecturer is delivering to students in distance or on-line mode, hours of availability must be advertised that broadly correspond to the requirement stipulated above. Evidence that time for consultation and advice has been advertised to enrolled students should be tabled if an assessment panel requires confirmation that this criterion is being implemented.

All lecturers should provide their classes with the contact details of unit convenors (phone, email, fax). This is especially important where colleges are delivering in distance, on-line and intensive mode. Colleges should ensure that convenors respond to student emails within 24 hours of them being received.

COURSE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRES (CEQ)

From 2006 the ACT office has been surveying graduates about their experience in their ACT course. The data received is passed on to each college. This information is invaluable for ensuring that each affiliated college is attentive to the need to improve services and the quality of teaching and learning.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

From 2008 the ACT office will be making available a student evaluation form for one of the six compulsory core units to all students. Over the three years 2008–2010 we will evaluate the six units on a cycle of one per semester.

The data provided will also help affiliated colleges institute improvements in teaching and learning where required.

In addition, you should expect your college to provide you with the opportunity to evaluate your unit. Look for the unit evaluation document among the material provided to support the study of your unit.

We trust that your studies prove both enjoyable and challenging and highly commendable preparations for ministry and Christian vocation.



Mark Harding
Dean and CEO
Australian College of Theology
March 2010