

Coolamon College

1. INTRODUCTION

“With my business, I could not possibly have done anything like that if I had to travel to one of the major cities to attend a theological college. Now I want to do more.”

“My studies have definitely had a very positive effect on my ministry.”

“This subject has enriched my faith considerably.”

“I have been blessed in ways I did not even consider possible.”

“I can now read the Bible with a better understanding. The service provided by Coolamon is excellent.”

- 1.1 These are typical of some of the comments we receive regularly from students.
- 1.2 Coolamon College is the church's national provider of distance education.
- 1.3 Since Coolamon College began enrolling students in February 1993, we have enrolled over 1750 students. Now that Coolamon College is in its eighth year of teaching, it is very gratifying to see former and current students serving as Elders, Children's Ministry and Youth Leaders, Lay Preachers, Community Ministers, Moderators and in many other areas of church and community ministry. Many have gone on to study full time in one of the church's Theological Halls. One student is the Rabbi of a Messianic Jewish Community!

2. STAFF

2.1 National office staff

The staff members of Coolamon College are:

- Revd Dr Robert Bos
 - National Director (full time)
- Revd Dr Anita Monro
 - Dean of Post-graduate Studies (0.6 time)
- Ms Desleigh Byrne
 - Administrator (0.8 time)

2.2 Collegial agencies

We also value the cooperative arrangements we have with the ELM Centre in NSW, Otira College in Victoria and Parkin-Wesley College in Adelaide. Many of our students enrol through these agencies and their staff support our students.

2.3 Faculty

The current Coolamon College Handbook lists a highly qualified faculty of 86 people who prepare distance education materials and act as assessors. We also have 12 tutors for the Post-graduate students. Many of these people offer their services voluntarily or for small honoraria.

2.4 Reference Committee

Reference Committee members are nominated by the Synods and appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee. Current members are: Dr Marelle Harisun (Chairperson), Revd Dr Robert Bos (Secretary), Revd Jenny Byrnes, Revd Beth Hancock, Dr Peter Harris, Dr Paul Inglis, Revd Prof. Bill Loader, Dr Deidre Palmer, Mrs Edith McPhee, Mrs Evelyn Park, Revd Dr David Rankin, Mr Ian Richardson, Dr John Roulston, Dr Yoni Ryan.

2.5 Post-graduate Studies Committee

Members of the Post-graduate Studies Committee include people nominated by the Theological Halls of the Uniting Church: Revd Dr Geof Lilburne (Chairperson), Revd Dr Anita Monro (Secretary), Revd Dr Robert Bos, Revd Dr John Evans, Dr Paul Inglis, Revd Prof. Bill Loader, Revd Dr Peter Matheson, Revd Dr Robert McFarlane, Dr Deidre Palmer, Revd Dr Doug Purnell, Revd Dr David Rankin, Dr Yoni Ryan.

The College is indeed an Australia wide network of highly competent and committed people.

3. ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

3.1 Five Programs

Three years ago, we reported that we had two programs: one at Diploma standard and one at undergraduate Degree standard. This has now expanded to five programs:

- The **Discover...** Program is at Certificate level. Each unit requires eight group sessions of about 90 minutes plus some private study – 25 hours in total. We hope that many congregations will avail themselves of this new opportunity to enhance the biblical knowledge of their members, enhance skills for ministry and deepen spirituality. We are in the process of gaining approval as a Recognised Training Organisation to allow us to offer VETEC-approved Certificates. Otira College is arranging for the first two units to be translated into Indonesian, Fijian and Tongan.
- The **Explore...** Program is at Diploma level. Each unit requires about 70 hours of work. Many aspiring UCA lay preachers study within this Program. A Diploma in Theological Studies (Brisbane College of Theology) is an option.
- The **Develop...** Program is at undergraduate level. The Brisbane College of Theology Bachelor of Theology is an option within this Program.
- The **Expand...** Program is for graduates in any faculty. Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas and a Master of Arts (Theological Studies) are available. These are awarded by the Sydney College of Divinity.
- The **Focus...** Program includes the Master of Theology, Master of Theology Honours and the Doctor of Theology. Students enrol directly through the Sydney College of

Divinity, of which Coolamon College is an associate Member Institution.

3.2 Enrolments

In 1999, 452 students enrolled for 714 units. If we add in students who enrolled late in 1998 and completed their work in 1999, we probably dealt with over 600 individual students in the calendar year. The 452 new unit enrolments come from the following areas:

NSW/ACT	129 students
NT	13 students
Qld	130 students
Tasmania	18 students
Victoria	94 students
WA	36 students
SA	26 students
Overseas	6 students

Fifty-nine percent of our students are women.

3.3 Units available

At the time of writing, the number of units available in each program are:

Discover... 2

Explore... 26 plus a number of Practicum units

Develop... 32 plus up to 6 Practicum units

Expand... 14

Focus... 1

3.4 Links and memberships

The Brisbane College of Theology awards the Diploma in Theological Studies and the Bachelor of Theology.

Coolamon College is an Associate Member Institution of the Sydney College of Divinity and Coolamon College offers units leading to the following awards: Graduate Certificate in Theology, Graduate Certificate in Ministry, Graduate Diploma in Theology, Graduate Diploma in Ministry, Master of Arts (Theological Studies), Master of Theology. The Master of Theology Honours and Doctor of Theology degrees are also offered. A Doctor of Ministry is being planned.

Coolamon College is a member of the Australian New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) and the International Network of Distance Education Providers in Theology (INDEPTh).

3.5 "Friends of Coolamon College"

A "Friends of Coolamon College" group prays for and promotes Coolamon College around Australia. We are keen to hear from interested people.

4. FIVE YEAR PLAN

4.1 The goals in Coolamon College's rolling five year plan are:

- To have the College accepted as a Recognised Training Organisation within the TAFE sector;
- To continue to develop Certificate level units;

- To prepare further units in the **Explore...**, **Develop...** and **Expand...** Programs and revise older units;
- To seek new partnerships within the Uniting Church and outside the Uniting Church;
- To continue to increase enrolments by at least 10% per year;
- To ensure that Coolamon College is adequately resourced for its ministry.

5. CHALLENGES

5.1 Coolamon College helps the various sectors and agencies of the church to do together what can not be done alone. The College is important to the whole of Australia, but particularly to people in the less well-resourced Synods and people who cannot attend face-to-face classes. To have one national agency for distance theological education makes good educational sense. We can draw on the best people from around Australia to prepare study materials. We can build up in one agency a high degree of specialised expertise.

5.2 Furthermore, the more students who enrol, the lower the levels of subsidy which need to be found. The Assembly Standing Committee has declared the College to be the church's preferred provider of distance education. Currently just under 70% of our income is derived from student fees. Subsidies from the Assembly and the Queensland Synod help to reduce, but not eliminate, the deficit. Further enrolments will increase the percentage of income from fees. Meanwhile, fundraising is part of the challenge.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 We wish to pay tribute to the large army of people whose sacrificial commitment has made Coolamon College what it is today, a foremost provider of Distance Theological Education in this part of the world. These people include: local support persons for the students, people who make their scholarship and wisdom available through preparing study materials, assessors, tutors, committee members and of course the hardworking staff of the four offices through which students enrol. Without them all, we would not be able to provide this service to our students – equipping church members for Christian ministry in their own local churches and communities.

Dr Marelle Harisun
Chairperson, Reference Committee

Rev Dr Robert Bos
National Director