Ridley College aspires to be a place of thought leadership to inform and form Christians through the development of a research community, conferences and a faculty that engages in research and writing.

As John Stott once remarked, your mind matters. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, he replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). The Apostle Paul believed that the way to transform behavior was by “the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Ridley College aspires to be a place of thought leadership. We are not merely a university. We aim to form students as well as inform them. Along with high academic standards, we are committed to student formation and the development of Christlike character. And we believe that these values are best served by a faculty that is engaged in international scholarship. We want to take seriously our responsibility to “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

When it comes to thought leadership, three areas of college life deserve to be mentioned. First, Ridley is seeking to develop our higher degree by research community. We have a strong and growing contingent of research students from Australia and overseas in biblical and theological studies. Such students keep the faculty sharp and will themselves be well-equipped to serve colleges and other ministries in the future. You can read of one example, Ronald, in article 5.

Second, Ridley organizes conferences for the professional development of Christian workers and scholars. There is a feast on offer in 2015. In May a pastoral seminar on aging and later life will take place. Our Annual Preachers’ Conference provides training for preachers. This year the Ridley Theology Conference, in partnership with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, is looking at the rich theme of being known by God. And this year too we will host the international Jonathan Edwards Congress.

Third, the Ridley faculty engage in research and writing. Between them the faculty have had six books published in the last two years, including titles on the historical Jesus, the Gospels, Paul and the law, systematic theology, Jonathan Edwards and Christian ministry. And we have several more due to appear in the next eighteen months. Look out for commentaries on Job and Romans, an exposition of the Apostles’ Creed, and studies on disputable matters, key figures in Church History, Christophanies in the Old Testament and women in Luke-Acts. In article 4 you will read about Michael Bird’s book on Jesus and the Gospels which received Christianity Today’s Biblical Studies Book of the Year award for 2015.

Thought leadership is not the whole story, but it has real benefits to the college because good scholarship leads to good teaching. And there are many opportunities to serve the church and world more broadly. This issue of The Ridley Report focuses on the ways in which God is enabling the college to contribute to the vital task of thought leadership.
Ridley Faculty take San Diego by Storm

Last year, eight Ridley faculty joined the world’s leading biblical scholars for a series of conferences.

SOCIETY FOR BIBLICAL LITERATURE CONFERENCE & EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

Tim Foster | Vice Principal

Every November the world’s leading biblical scholars gather for a series of conferences somewhere in the United States. The largest of these, the Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, has over 10,000 delegates. As many as 60 sessions are held simultaneously, each exploring significant issues in Christian scholarship.

This year eight Ridley faculty took advantage of the conferences being held on the west coast, attending in force. Most faculty presented papers. These will eventually become articles or book chapters, which are greatly enhanced by the vigorous debate that often ensues. The profile this gives Ridley is enormous, and the College and our contributions were well regarded.

Of special interest were three sessions focussed entirely on the output of Ridley faculty.

Principal Brian Rosner had a session devoted to his recent book, Paul and the Law at each of the conferences. Scholars from diverse backgrounds presented papers critiquing Brian’s thesis, to which Brian responded. Having your work critiqued by leading scholars in a context like this one is both threatening and reassuring. Brian was able to defend his book strongly, and won over many in the audience, although one respondent remained unconvinced!

Mike, who lectures in Systematic Theology and New Testament at Ridley, engaged each of the five respondents in an often humorous exchange. It is a testimony to his calibre as a scholar that so many people wanted to engage with his work, which is sure to gain wider usage as a result.

Ridley Vice-Principal Tim Foster presented a paper at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Conference, on the Nicodemus discourse in John 3. He offered a fresh interpretation of what it means to be ‘born of water and flesh’, and was not sure how it would be received. The feedback was extremely positive, with one attendee wanting to reference the paper in his commentary on John’s Gospel. The paper has now been submitted for publication.

Lindsay Wilson, Scott Harrower and Anthea McCall also presented. Papers were given by a number of Ridley PhD students, with six Ridley post graduate students joining the faculty for the week.

Of course, the conferences were not all work, and the evenings were spent at various functions making new friends, building networks and engaging in yet more theological conversations.

All this serves to improve Ridley’s academic quality, strengthen our international connections and enhance our reputation as a leading place for evangelical scholarship.

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It is good to know that when it comes to biblical scholarship Ridley is able to hold its own amongst the best.
Doing a research degree like an MTh or PhD doesn’t have to be a very laborious and lonely endeavour.

In the academic world, Post Graduate Research students are often left on their own for extended periods to read about dense theological debates or to delve into the minutia of biblical exegesis. Since research is often a solitary task it is hard to find friends and partners to bounce ideas off or to share discoveries and fresh insights.

Ridley has launched an annual program called RESCON which is short for “Research Conference” to create an engaging community for these researchers. RESCON provides research degree students and their mentors an opportunity to gather together for two intensive days of seminars, presentations, and tutorials. The first RESCON was held on campus in August last year with students in attendance from all over Australia, from the United States and Korea.

There were a range of seminars and activities designed to stimulate discussion and invigorate students, including seminars on academic writing, academic software, and how to present a paper at an academic conference.

Students heard an academic paper from Lindsay Wilson, which he had previously delivered at the SABS conference (Society of Asian Biblical Studies) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. After delivering the paper at RESCON, Lindsay also explained the strategy he used at SABS to promote evangelical scholarship in Asia, particularly given the post-colonial and ecotheological context, where evangelicals would not have felt comfortable.

Students had the opportunity to present their own research projects to the group in order to hone their skills in presenting research and to receive feedback on their most recent findings. Several meetings with their supervisors allowed students to take stock of the progress of their research to date.

A number of discussions were held as part of the program including a discussion about the biographies of well-known Christian scholars and how to integrate faith and scholarship. They also attended briefings on the examination process.

It was a productive time for students to share the progress in their studies and encourage one another in the trials of higher degrees research. RESCON will be held annually in August and we will host some of our best and brightest students coming together to share what they’ve learned from their studies in Bible, church history, and theology. RESCON is part of Ridley’s vision to continue mentoring Christian scholars in the making.

Christianity Today is a popular American evangelical magazine founded in 1956 with a circulation of over 130,000 and a web readership of over 250,000. It is considered to be a leading voice for the global evangelical church. Each year, it honours outstanding books of special interest to the Christian community. Its book awards are categorised into theology, apologetics, biblical studies, Christianity and culture, pastoral leadership, fiction, history, global affairs, and spirituality.

“This book covers the formation of the Gospels, asking and answering questions that have occupied undergraduate and seminary students, but in fresh ways” said Mary Veeneman, professor of Theology, North Park University on announcement of the award. “It will be of interest to students of the New Testament as well as anyone who takes an interest in the life of Jesus and the use of the New Testament in the early church.”

Mike is appreciative of the supportive comments that have been sent his way and grateful to have his peers recognise the quality of the volume. “My aim was simply to write an introductory textbook about the formation of the Gospels”, he says.

It was the second year in a row that an Australian took out the award for biblical studies. Last year’s winner for biblical studies was Con Campbell, for his book *Paul and Union with Christ*.

A limited number of copies of *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* are available for purchase at Ridley College reception. $30
A Humble Scholar

Ronald Lal Din Suah has completed his doctorate at Ridley after 4 and a half years, but it wasn’t easy, Lindsay Wilson writes.

Ronald Lal Din Suah, is one of the first Burmese scholars to have a research doctorate in Old Testament. It wasn’t easy. English is his fourth language, and in addition to his Burmese languages, he has had to learn Greek, Hebrew and German.

After completing his MDiv at Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST), Ronald was encouraged to study for the MTh at SAIACS, Bangalore, India, where he wrote a thesis on justice in the book of Amos. After returning to MEGST to teach Old Testament for a number of years, Ronald was sponsored by Langham Scholars and the Raggatt family to complete the Doctor of Theology degree at Ridley College.

His thesis on relational justice in the book of Hosea was examined in 2014 and conferred after only some minor corrections several months later. A senior Old Testament scholar who examined the thesis described it as ‘fresh and original’, ‘very well-written’ and making ‘a substantial contribution’ to scholarship on the book of Hosea. It has been accepted for publication in the Langham monograph series and will be published later in 2015.

All three international examiners said that this was a thesis in the top half of theses, and two of them said it was in the top 25%. What a remarkable achievement by a humble scholar from Myanmar, working in his fourth language, living away from his family for the first year, and in fairly cramped conditions with his wife Mary and three children for the following years.

In January 2015, Ronald was welcomed back to his college in Myanmar. His long-time friend and supporter, Paul Barker, prayed for him at a welcome home chapel, while his supervisor Lindsay Wilson preached at the service on the steadfast love of God in Psalm 33.

Ronald is a strategic figure for gospel growth in Myanmar, and his ministry there will help to equip future generations of Burmese Christians. He has a heart to serve God’s people, and to use the training he has received, to teach and train up others after him. His time in Australia allowed him to establish a fellowship of believers from his home tribe, in addition to his diligent academic work.

Due to the generosity of Langham Partnership, Ronald will be able to attend the Ridley graduation on April 18, and receive his doctoral degree in person.