

Community Counts

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Learning Together

Acting Principal, **Tim Foster**, looks at the importance and value of community.

QUALITY COMMUNITY

Rev Dr Tim Foster | Acting Principal

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Evangelical commitment, quality faculty and biblical teaching are the reasons most new students choose Ridley. But, if you ask a graduate what they appreciated most about their time at Ridley, most will reflect that what they really loved was the community. They come for the great teaching and stay for the community! You will hear this refrain echoed throughout this **Ridley Report** which focuses on the theme of community.

A quality community is vital for effective learning. Deep learning and commitment is a result of engaging with a wide range of ideas and perspectives. To do this well students need an environment where they feel secure enough to test, question and explore. A strong community also provides a context for collaborative learning, interactive classrooms and peer learning. Learning can be stressful as it challenges and often overturns assumptions, and a supportive community is able to nurture and sustain learners through these challenging times.

Where community is most important is in its contribution to spiritual formation. Christian character is caught as much as it is taught. The community at Ridley exudes a theological culture that is probably the most powerful force in shaping the values and character of our students. For this reason we must be very deliberate about the type and quality of the community that we build. Having a committed, full time faculty helps ensure that this culture is positive and healthy.

The challenge for Ridley is to maintain and build community at a time when it faces a great deal of pressure. Increasingly students study part time, amidst very full lives with work, family and church. This reduces the time, emotional energy and commitment that they can contribute to build and sustain community. This is being felt across higher education, with many universities finding that student participation in clubs and societies has fallen dramatically in the last decade.

Online learning poses the greatest challenge to a college that values community as highly as we do at Ridley. How do we reproduce what we have on the campus for our online students? Well moderated online forums can be surprisingly effective in emulating some of the dimensions of on campus community life. But we also have to recognise that the primary community for online students is their local church. With this in mind we have developed a number of ways to help students engage more intentionally with their church to support their learning and formation. The testimony of one of our online students in this issue will help you assess whether or not we have been successful.

Rev Dr Tim Foster
Acting Principal

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FOR THE CALENDAR**August 24 - 28**

Jonathan Edwards Congress

August 25 - 27

'A Passion for Truth'

Annual Preachers' Conference

September 11

Ridley / ISCAST Lecture

October 12

Marketplace Institute Lecture

Lecture by Robert Banks

October 23

Annual Dinner at Melbourne Zoo

Please check the Ridley website for times and locations: www.ridley.edu.au/events



Overwhelming Support

Student Committee Chair, **Stephen Urmston** talks about how community happens at the Parkville campus.

PARKVILLE CAMPUS LIFE

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Stephen Urmston | RSC Chair

Ridley student, Stephen Urmston is a strong believer in the value of the college community for a student's learning. "Students come to Ridley to prepare for a life of ministry in a range of contexts" he says. "We are best prepared by sharing the journey with others. The community reminds us that it is not a knowledge adventure we are on. Our fellow students keep us grounded and focussed".

As chair of the Ridley Student Committee (RSC) he recognises the contribution of this body to building community. "The RSC seeks to serve the community at Ridley in a number of ways, such as organising prayer on Tuesday and Thursday and looking after the student lounge and kitchen. The RSC organises social events and community building events, including end of semester dinners, launch camps, table tennis tournaments, and various movie and game nights. The RSC also collates and distributes student newspaper, known as 'The Log'".

Of all the community activities, Stephen believes that the weekly Life and Ministry Groups (LMGs) are especially significant. There are a range of Life and Ministry Groups, including groups for full-time first year students, and for students preparing for ordination, for cross cultural ministry, and for ministry roles outside of congregational leadership.

"Through my involvement in these groups I have been able to raise concerns, ask ministry related questions, consider life implications whilst in ministry and throughout all this, be prayed for. This has been a key part of my ministry formation. In each group, I have been guided by a members of faculty, whose wisdom I have called upon many times. Throughout my time at Ridley, whether learning from those wiser than me in the classroom or over lunch, listening to and praying with my fellow brothers and sisters in chapel, or through my own reading and studying, I have felt an overwhelming amount of support, and for that, I am truly grateful".

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Considered Interactions

Online student, **Heather Millard**, explains how online study allows time and space to consider and engage with fellow students deep questions.



ONLINE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Heather Millard | Ridley Student

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When I first began thinking about doing theological studies I knew I wouldn't be fortunate enough to study full-time and attend a campus. So my search for a college began by finding out which colleges offered online study. Ridley was recommended to me by a number of graduates and, as it turned out, offered the most flexible option for me to study online.

I wasn't really sure what to expect from my study, let alone online study, as it had been over a decade since I'd finished my first degree. In some ways I think I expected to be part of an 'always on' community much like Facebook. My fellow onliners and I did share our lives and silly things like where to find the best coffee (or hot chocolate in my case!), but it was actually the less-instant and more considered interactions that made the community special.

Each week we'd download our study guide, do our readings and work on an exercise to post on the forum. Being a mixed group of people – full-time students, retirees, people working in churches, people overseas on mission and the full-time worker/part-time students like me – meant that our timetables were all different.

This meant that some students were able to quickly post their work and comment on the questions from others, while some students weren't able to participate until the end of our 'interaction window'.

Not sitting in a classroom having a 'real-time' discussion meant that we were able to more deeply consider the questions posed by our fellow students. It was clear that the questions had also been quite thoughtfully asked. Spending extra time researching and learning about a topic after the initial work was done was very rewarding and often led to a topic being added to my 'learn more about in semester break' list!

A number of weekly topics also opened the door to extracurricular discussions. Although Ridley is an Anglican college, not all the students come from an Anglican background. I found the different perspectives and theologies which prompted questions and fuelled discussions highly educative. While there were some topics that students had to agree to disagree on, every word was typed with love, respect and a genuine desire to learn from each other.

This care also came from the lecturers as they encouraged and guided discussions. I greatly enjoyed the occasional live-chat time with a lecturer and students – it was just like having that conversation in the classroom or over lunch! We used these chats to talk about our thoughts on essays or upcoming exams, to practice thinking through an argument, or to follow up on topics we felt we hadn't grasped during the tutorial week.

We were also encouraged to include members of our church in our study. A number of the units I studied provided the opportunity to either complete course work in situ – such as the prac for Chaplaincy in Educational Settings – or to apply recent learnings to my service in my church. By keeping the ministry team up-to-date with my study, they were able to both support me as I raided their libraries and to learn from me as I tested theories and new practices.

So while it wasn't a social media type community, Ridley Online students and lecturers definitely became part of my family for our time together – and whenever our paths may cross in 'real life'!



ONLY 6 PLACES REMAINING!

2016

Visit Biblical Turkey with Ridley
24 April to 12 May

This unique experience will bring the Bible and early church history to life. See some of the most amazing cities and landscapes in the world, cruise the Greek Islands, visit stunning Cappadocia, and enjoy the culture and cuisine of fascinating cities. Walk in the footsteps of Paul.

Brochure & Bookings: www.ridley.edu.au/tour16



Exchanging Walls for Wheels

This June a group of 27 Ridley students toured together through **Turkey & Greece** led by Ridley Vice-Principal Tim Foster.



TURKEY AND GREECE STUDY TOUR

Kirrily Drew, Anne Pickering and Lachie Zammit | Students on Tour

Community doesn't happen only on campus. Study tours are a regular part of Ridley life, offering community on wheels. Travelling together gives students time and opportunity to form relationships and build community – over meals, on the bus, sharing accommodation and socialising.

This was certainly the experience of Kirrily Drew during the recent study tour. She comments that "it was great to make so many new friends, and so encouraging to hear about how God is shaping them and using them for his glory. I also got to spend lots of time with friends I already knew from Ridley – it was lovely to share in new experiences together."

Anne Pickering is a distance student and so was also grateful for the opportunities the trip provided to feel more connected with the student body, "I enjoyed the walks which included genuine and thoughtful conversations (and maybe gelato too)". Lachie Zammit had a similar experience, "it was really nice to form some strong friendships in such a short time, especially with people who I only sort of knew from Ridley, and now we're great friends!"

Tim Foster says that he is very deliberate about managing the group dynamics to ensure a strong community develops. "I have some experience in Christian camping from my youth ministry days and running a tour is

very similar to leading a camp. In particular, it is important to help the group navigate through the stages of forming, storming, norming and performing. It is one of the great challenges of leading a tour."

As a distance student, Anne Pickering found joining the tour group particularly daunting. "Initially I felt overwhelmed by the sea of faces. I was the only one who didn't know anyone," she says. But that quickly changed. "By the end of the afternoon I had talked to many of the group who were open and inclusive."

Sophie Timothy says that free time on the first day with a small group provided a good opportunity to settle into the tour. "A small group of us went for a walk downtown through the beautiful Gülhane Park, ending up at a cafe which overlooked the Bosphorous", she says. "We had Turkish coffee, apple tea and Turkish delight. It was a great way to orient ourselves to the city, experience summer in Istanbul and enjoy a sunny day in each other's company. Over that simple experience we shared what had been going on in our lives, how we were feeling about the weeks ahead and got to know each other better".

Deep relationships can be formed through shared experiences and having to depend on each other as they navigate a new and challenging culture. Tim provides

some experiences that give students the opportunity to work with others to navigate this unfamiliar territory. This creates confidence and builds community. It also opens up the possibility of experiences that are significant and memorable.

Anne described one such experience from her first day in Istanbul. "I became lost with two others and had to navigate to get through a university graduation crowd to find our way back to the hotel."

Kirrily also found herself having to depend on others. "There was a bus trip in Rhodes, where we weren't sure whether we were on the right bus or whether we would be able to get back to our cruise ship on time", she says. "On our own, I imagine that situation would have caused anxiety and distress, but being together meant that we could keep each other calm and even joke around about an otherwise stressful situation!"

Study tours offer rich learning experiences and opportunities to grow as a person through the communities they create. Living in community, especially an intensive one, has its challenges. Differences emerge, things go wrong and conflict can happen. These are learning opportunities as well, and help students develop tolerance and grow in their self-understanding.