

Western Civilisation graduate wins prestigious scholarship to study in the US

One of the first graduates from ACU's unique Western Civilisation program has won a prestigious international scholarship to pursue her studies in the US.

Helena Skundric will join the famed 'Great Books' program at St John's College, a liberal arts college in Washington DC, thanks to a [Ramsay Centre Postgraduate Scholarship](#).

Helena has just completed a Bachelor of Arts (Western Civilisation) at ACU, where she was part of the first graduating class. She is one of just five Australian students to win a scholarship to the Master of Arts in Liberal Arts at St John's College.

"It has been a bit of a whirlwind. I start over there next month, so it's all happening very fast," she said.

"It's an incredible opportunity. I get to explore some of the greatest books ever written with students from all over the world. It's a bit of a dream to be honest, I know I'm immensely privileged.

"I'll be there during the Presidential campaign and inauguration, so it's like having a ringside seat to history in the making."

After graduating from Mercy Catholic College in Sydney, Helena considered everything from teaching to becoming an air hostess. She spent a semester studying international relations at Sydney University but found her place at ACU's new Bachelor of Arts (Western Civilisation).

"As soon as I saw it advertised, I knew it was what I wanted to do – it almost sounded too good to be true," she said.

"I was part of that first year and there was a sense that this was something unique.

"It was radically different from what I'd been doing at Sydney Uni. The Socratic method really changes the game, because you're trying to find out what other people think, you spark off each other and it leads the conversation in amazing directions.

"We also got to do a month of study in Rome – roaming around the city, reading Machiavelli, Seneca, Arendt. We got to see the city through the eyes of these amazing writers, which was a dream."

Helena and her older sister are the first in their family to go to university, making the next step of her academic journey a leap into the unknown.

"My parents were both born in Croatia, and they came over with their parents in the 70s. Neither of them went to university, so they are really fascinated by higher study and what it means to get a Master's or a PhD."

Helena is a proud advocate for the study of Western Civilisation and the arts.

“This is part of our society’s history and our intellectual inheritance,” she said.

“I think it's important to understand how our laws came to be, how democracy came to Australia, why we value poetry and literature. It's important to consider who we are, what is the world, and how else it can be. And I think that's what the arts offer.”

While exploring her love of English literature and the classics, Helena also rediscovered her faith. She became a Campus Ministry student assistant during her time at university, an experience she describes as “profound”.

“I went to a Catholic high school, but at ACU there were a lot of people interested in what you thought about the big questions and what you valued,” she said.

“I've never really had those conversations before, so it got me really serious about my faith and actually thinking through what I believe – it was really profound.

“I think it’s quite easy to grow up these days without knowing what you think or really caring, because you can always be distracted by something else.

“I really enjoyed talking to other students about their faith journeys and I loved our Campus Ministry reading group.

“At university, people want to share things and they want someone to talk to. But it's quite easy to come into class and leave and not really speak to anyone your own age. So, for me, it was great to be able to reach out to people and have these intense conversations about their faith and their lives and how they're going and who they are as people.”