

# Made for the People by the People

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Parliament House, the Bogon moth, indigenous themes and colours are just some of the totems reflecting a modern Canberra on display for a potential coat of arms for the ACT.

University of Canberra students have showcased a range of potential designs that could represent the ACT as it moves one step closer to having its first coat of arms.

The drive for a Territory coat of arms evolved from a 2019 Assembly Committee inquiry that noted the importance of symbols and emblems as a reflection of a society's values.

Public submissions to the inquiry overwhelmingly supported the creation of a coat of arms for the ACT, distinct from the current Canberra City emblems. Following the inquiry, the public was encouraged to participate in the process by joining the YourSay Community Panel.

University of Canberra design students were asked to design a coat of arms that would reflect the ACT's inclusive, modern and diverse community. The top 15 were selected for display. Each model was supported by detailed information on the design elements and intent.

The exhibit at the University of Canberra in June allowed attendees to interact with and immerse themselves into each design which produced a wealth of positive feedback and meaningful discussion.

Tracy Ireland, Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research and Professor of Cultural Heritage, helped guide the students through the journey to create meaningful symbols.

"Symbols are very powerful and they can polarise opinions, but they also can bring people very strongly together," Tracey said.

"When the symbols are shared with the community, people will find a lot to love and engage with."

Many of the designs encompassed yin and yang elements of modern-day ACT and heritage symbols such as the Bogon moth, the Gang-gang cockatoo and eucalyptus leaves.

The designs also pay tribute to the ACT's unique wildlife and nature, and its Indigenous heritage.

Tracy highlighted how each student built their designs on a knowledge that this is Ngunnawal land, and how this aspect was incorporated into many design symbols.

"They started with the premiss that this is Ngunnawal land and respected the traditional owners," Tracey said.

Suggestions were put forward by the United Ngunnawal Elders Council; covering language, symbols, colours and shapes, were utilised by many students in their designs.

Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design, Jason Bainbridge, expressed the pride he had for UC's involvement in this initiative.

"It is a once in a century opportunity" Jason said. "We are the University of Canberra and for Canberra, so to have this opportunity to work on a coat of arms for the ACT is incredibly important; it goes to the heart of what this university is trying to do."

University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor, Paddy Nixon, said that at its core, this project has been about community, and that the university is an ideal place to produce these ideas because it is an independent, safe space with no specific political or community alignment.

"One of the things that defines a university is that you want to be able to have open, constructive, perhaps sometimes challenging debates, and there is nothing more challenging than: here's the symbol you're going to have to live with the next 100 years," Paddy said.

Paddy also noted that while the university is a wonderful place to contribute to such projects, it doesn't happen without the genuine support of the ACT government and engagement with key community groups.

The Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, expressed his delight with the level of engagement across all stakeholder groups and the involvement by UC students.

"I think it's a really clever way to bring forward a range of ideas from a generation of Canberrans who wouldn't necessarily be immediately engaged or given a huge amount of thought to the issue, a lot of people might not have even been aware the territory didn't have a coat of arms," Mr Barr said.

The design students brought their individual experiences to the task. Some, having lived in Canberra all their life, brought an element of local familiarity to their symbols, whereas those from other parts of Australia and the world brought new ideas and perspectives. All managed to incorporate the need for a modern design, representative of our current community.

UC design student, Osborne George, took the approach of building something contemporary and visually interesting, while still being representative of the ACT and meaningful to the community.

"Looking at the designs now, none of the ones I saw look like a traditional coat of arms....in my research, I looked at heaps of historical coats of arms and they all looked official, but in a way that felt a little stifled and only fit one particular group," Osborne said.

Osborne also reflected that many of the designs incorporated elements of multiculturalism in a way that is representative of everyone. "People looking at them can see a bit of their culture and a bit of their background," he said.

The Vice Chancellor encourages ongoing debate and consideration.

“It’s really important that people come along and see the designs, and express their views and perspectives, because this is not the end of a journey, it’s the start of one”

A shortlist of the designs will be selected by the Community Reference Group in August and presented to the Assembly for consideration. Their recommendations are scheduled for a public vote in late 2021.