



The University of the Third Age (U3A) in the ACT

Handbook

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Welcome to the University of the Third Age (U3A)

This publication is designed to help those interested to understand a little about U3A in the ACT and, in the second section, to provide a guide to new members to make the best of their membership.

If you have a hard copy of this handbook, please check that it is the current version. A current version is available on our website www.u3acanberra.org.au and our offices (see contact information at the end of this booklet).

Part 1: An introduction to the organisation

U3A ACT or simply U3A Canberra

The Third Age may be the best time of your life! Our First Age is childhood. Our Second Age is the mid part of our lives, with the responsibilities of work and family. Our Third Age is a time when we are free to explore, learn, and share knowledge. Now is the time to learn something new, rediscover old skills, to keep an active mind and to meet new friends. In common with U3As throughout Australia and many other countries, U3A ACT provides learning in a broad range of areas, always in a social context.

The ACT has a single U3A. It includes members living in Queanbeyan and Yass and surrounds. As such we are very large with over 5250 members.

U3A membership is open to people 50 and over. Most are no longer in full time employment but are enjoying the third age of their lives. We provide opportunities for learning by bringing together members with knowledge and skills and members who wish to learn. We also encourage members to organise learning opportunities by researching and drawing on the resources available in the wider community.

We offer a wide range of courses — over 300 a year. Some run all year while many run for shorter periods. We also offer a public lecture series with COTA from June to October; and there are tours, walks and outings to places of interest, open to all members. In addition, we have an agreement with the University of Canberra that allows members to attend classes there through a formal registration process.

How we operate

U3A is entirely organised and run by its members. We do not receive external funding and rely on membership fees and volunteers to keep U3A functioning.

U3A is an incorporated body under ACT law. The organisation's objects, rules and policies are on the website under Governance. We hold an annual general meeting in November and elect a committee to run the organisation. We have one standing sub-committee, the courses sub-committee, that is responsible for our courses activity. Other sub-committees and working groups are formed from time to time to manage specific tasks.

Members are encouraged to think about their contribution to the organisation and to offer to help when they are free to do so. There are many tasks to do and we have a policy of working in teams to make light the work and to cover for members when they are on holiday or not available. We think that volunteer roles should take no more time than members are comfortable giving. Some roles are more demanding than others but no-one should be doing more than the equivalent of a day a week and most people will put in that kind of time over a fortnight or a month. However, those who contribute are expected to show commitment and to be reliable in the service offered.

Whatever the skills and experience, U3A can probably find a role in making the organisation work! We need people to:

- serve on the committee, in secretariat, financial and policy roles
- run courses and support course leaders
- manage offices, assets, and equipment
- manage and develop our web presence and IT requirements, and
- organise and train volunteers.

Details of volunteer roles are outlined at the back of the Volunteers Handbook available on the website or from the offices. The volunteer liaison officer can help find suitable roles (volunteerliaison@u3acanberra.org.au).

Offices and meeting rooms

U3A leases two premises. We have offices and classrooms in Hughes Community Centre and at Cook Community Hub. These classrooms are well equipped with data projection and sound systems so that we can show films, slides, Powerpoint, play music, etc. Microphones are available in the larger rooms to alleviate hearing problems.

We can only accommodate about 40 per cent of our courses in Hughes and Cook so many classes take place in other community centres, church halls, clubs and private houses throughout the region.

Money matters

Members pay an annual fee, at present \$25 single and \$40 for two members of one household. The fees are used to provide public liability insurance for all our activities, copyright and performing rights fees, rent, equipment, the website and internet, maintenance, printing and office costs, etc.

Activities including courses, forums and tours are independently funded by those taking part in them.

How we communicate

U3A has a website (www.u3acanberra.org.au) that describes all our activities and policies. We also have a bi-monthly Newsletter available on the website and in hard copy. eBulletins go to all member email addresses (unless they unsubscribe) to provide

last minute information, reminders, etc. Updates on courses are notified in eBulletins issued on Fridays. The office staff can also help.

Activities

1. Courses

Most of our members are enrolled in courses. This term covers traditional classroom teaching including history, geology, politics and a range of languages. There are courses teaching practical skills such as pottery, playing bowls or folk dancing. U3A ACT has an orchestra, choirs, recorder groups and other music-making opportunities as well as a wide range of music appreciation courses. We have a range of art groups teaching drawing and painting. Some have tutors and others are self taught. There are also art appreciation classes and a camera club. U3A ACT also has many current affairs discussion groups and book clubs.

New ideas for courses are always welcome, be it new subjects or new ways of learning.

Our courses are registered centrally but run independently. The course leader or a volunteer appointed by this leader enrolls members. The class must elect a treasurer to take responsibility for collecting fees from participants, paying room rent and other expenses associated with running the course. Our course leaders are volunteers too and are not paid but any reasonable costs they incur such as teaching aids, photocopying, etc., are reimbursed by the class.

Details of courses are to be found in the online Prospectus on the website. Print-outs of courses that will soon be open to enrolment are available from the offices.

Course leaders

Course leaders are key to all courses activity in U3A. We encourage members with particular interests either from their working life or as a result of their leisure activities to consider sharing their knowledge and skills with other members.

We also have members who want to develop an interest and gather around them other members with whom they can learn. Such an interest group can draw from the breadth of knowledge and skill available in the Canberra community in our universities, think tanks, etc.

Similarly, members offer to convene a book group, reading books of mutual interest. There are also current affairs discussion groups finding out more about matters discussed in the media.

The limiting factor in the growth of U3A is finding more volunteers willing to put in the time and effort to prepare and present a course. The courses sub-committee would love to hear from more members who are interested in leading courses (chaircsc@u3acanberra.org.au). We provide assistance in developing a course and finding a suitable venue. New course leaders meetings are held from time to time for those thinking about being course leaders. These are advertised in the eBulletin.

2. Whole-of-U3A activities

Lunchtime forums

Since 1999, U3A ACT and COTA have run a program of Tuesday lunchtime BYO forums. They are held at 12.30 p.m. in the Main Hall at Hughes Community Centre from the first Tuesday in June to the last Tuesday in October. These forums have speakers covering a wide range of subjects. There is a \$2 attendance fee and tea and coffee are provided. The BYO refers to bring your own cup and lunch.

The forums are advertised in the April, June and September Newsletters, in eBulletins, on the website (www.u3acanberra.org.au/activities) and on notice-boards in the Hughes and Cook offices. No booking is required; just turn up! For further information, contact forums@u3acanberra.org.au.

Tours and walks

U3A ACT has a program of walks and travel opportunities, some of which are run in conjunction with the National Trust of Australia (ACT).

These activities include

- Tours to shows, concerts, opera, and ballet in Sydney and Melbourne
- Walks in local and interstate areas
- Tours of one day to several weeks duration, to a range of destinations.

These activities are advertised in the U3A Newsletter and eBulletin and on the website (www.u3acanberra.org.au/activities) and need to be booked in advance. More information is available on the website and can be obtained from the tour leader.

University of Canberra auditing

U3A ACT has a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Canberra. This allows U3A financial members to audit units at the University of Canberra at its Bruce campus.

Auditing is defined as listening. U3A members have audited a variety of units and have found the experience rewarding, saying that the units have been of a high quality and very interesting.

U3A members must register to audit courses by the date advised prior to each semester and will be accepted if space permits. Members may attend lectures and access the unit's learning management system (Canvas) website. Frequently members are invited to take part in the unit's tutorials and workshops but this is at the unit convener's discretion. Assignments and exams are not included and no certificates are awarded or accreditation given.

Registration takes place on the University's website, where the process is clearly outlined. The University website for U3A members is <http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/learning-at-uc/university-of-the-third-age-u3a-members> (or search its website for U3A). In each semester, members can enrol for up to three units although most members just do one unit at a time. The University website has links for searching for available units of study, a link to timetables and to a

registration form. There is also a link to a short list of units not available for auditing. The Frequently Asked Questions section also gives a lot of useful information.

A registration form for the specific semester or winter term is posted on the University website a few weeks before class starts and this form needs to be completed and submitted in good time for registration processes to take place.

More information is available on the website and by emailing U3A/UC liaison at ucanberra@u3acanberra.org.au.

History of U3A ACT

The University of the Third Age was founded in 1972 in Toulouse France when the French government decreed universities should extend their role into the communities around them to improve the quality of life for older people through contact with academic programs run by the university. The terms 'third age' and 'active retirement' became accepted. In England they decided that older people could organise learning groups on their own and the first U3A was started in Cambridge in 1981. The first Australian U3A was formed in Melbourne in 1984.

U3A in the ACT was an outcome of a meeting convened in late 1986 by COTA in Canberra to assess interest in this form of organisation. There was an immediate positive response and a committee was formed to organise courses to start in 1987. Since that time, U3A has grown every year and continues to grow.

To celebrate 21 years, a book was produced about those first years and a few copies remain and are available from the Hughes office.

Thirty years on we are still dependent on volunteers to offer courses and manage the organisation.

U3A in Australia

U3A ACT is a member of the **NSW Network of U3As** and enjoys sharing its experiences with other U3As. The Network is a loose collection of local U3A organisations that all support the general aims and directions of providing lifelong learning opportunities for their members in their third age. The Network helps with legal and financial matters relevant to U3As such as copyright fees (<http://www.nsw.u3anet.org.au/>).

U3A ACT is also part of the **U3A Alliance Australia** (<http://www.u3aaa.org/>). This group exists to promote within the Australian community and to the national government the contribution that the U3A movement makes to positive ageing and the benefit of lifelong learning to mental and physical health and social engagement.

Another related organisation is **U3A Online**. This is an autonomous U3A and the world-first virtual University of the Third Age delivering online learning via the internet. It offers short online courses and many other useful resources for older people, especially those who are geographically, physically or socially isolated. Topics vary from time to time and the range of courses is regularly updated. Study is done at home via the internet (www.u3aonline.org.au). As a separate organisation, a separate joining fee is required.

Part 2: Joining U3A and enrolling in courses

Joining U3A

Who can be a member?

Membership is open to people aged 50 and over who are interested in being part of our organisation.

Before joining you need to agree to U3A's code of conduct.

Code of Conduct U3A ACT Inc.

U3A ACT is a volunteer association that is built upon the contributions of our members. In order to support the objects of the association members are expected to:

- Work cooperatively with other members
- Value what each member contributes to the association
- Display respect and courtesy for fellow members and refrain from any form of harassment
- Behave with honesty and integrity
- Act responsibly so the reputation of our association is maintained
- Follow the rules, policies and procedures of our association particularly our safety and wellbeing obligations
- Respect the confidentiality of members' information
- Use U3A ACT Inc. resources appropriately, noting that all our funds come from membership fees
- Resolve any disputes as quickly and informally as possible

You also need to agree to our privacy policy and health and wellbeing policies. These are available on the website and in our offices.

Membership fees

We operate an annual membership system on a calendar year basis. For those joining after October, however, membership includes the following calendar year. Fees at present are \$25 single and \$40 household membership per annum.

It is easy to join and pay securely online, or just download and print the application form and pay by cash, cheque, credit card or EFTPOS at the offices; or mail to the Hughes office; or you can visit the Hughes or Cook offices and join there.

If you pay online, you can use Visa and Mastercard credit and debit cards. (Note that only debit cards which do not require a PIN can be accepted.) All online payments are made via a secure site. U3A ACT does not retain any of your credit or debit card details.

If you apply and pay online, you will be asked to opt to either have your receipt and membership card mailed to you, or to have them delivered direct to your email inbox for you to print. (Check your spam box in case the email has been diverted there.) There

is no difference between the mailed documents and the emailed ones, so emailing is better, provided that you have a printer.

Renewing members can also pay online or by mail or through the offices. If your address has changed or any other information needs updating, log onto the website to make changes or email the membership secretary (membership@u3acanberra.org.au). Should you lose your membership card, ask the office staff to print another one or email the membership secretary.

Should your membership lapse for a year or more, you join again as a new member.

Newsletters and eBulletins

When you apply to join U3A, you can subscribe to the emailed eBulletin, and elect to read the bimonthly Newsletter on the website or have it mailed to your home address. An eBulletin alerts members to the arrival of a new Newsletter on the website.

Membership cards

Your membership card is important. It carries your name, membership number that you will need for enrolling in courses, and the current year.

Please write on the back the name and contact number of your next of kin just in case it is ever needed. We do not store this information; it is your responsibility.

Please wear the membership card at all U3A meetings. It is a way of introducing yourself and indicating that you are a current member.

Enrolling in courses

Information on courses

Information about courses is found in the Prospectus. This is an online database on our website (<https://www.u3acanberra.org.au/courses.html>) which is updated progressively as required. Each course description contains contact information for the course leader or a contact person. Make sure you read the course description carefully. Some course leaders provide additional information or an opportunity to discuss the course in advance.

Enrolment procedure

The description will also tell you how to enrol either by phone or email, and the first date and time for enrolment. The course leader or contact officer will ask for your membership number so you must have financial membership for the current year before you try to enrol.

A good policy is to have your membership number on hand and ring or email as soon as enrolments open as some courses are very popular and it may be hard to get in.

Waiting lists

Some course leaders operate a waiting list. This is a good idea as members sometimes find the course is not what they wanted or a health problem arises so they drop out and you may then be offered a place. Some waiting lists are maintained from year to year while others may just be for the first week or two. Check this when you ask to be put on the waiting list.

How many courses to attend

Members should not try to attend more than three courses at a time. We suggest this because demand for courses exceeds supply, particularly in the more popular courses, the limiting factor being course leaders willing to put in the huge voluntary effort to prepare and present a course. Limiting your participation to not more than three courses at a time provides more opportunities for others not to be disappointed when they try to enrol.

Similarly, not putting your name down for two courses in the same time slot provides more opportunities for others to be enrolled in courses they would like to join.

Checklist before enrolling in a course

- Is my membership current? What is my membership number? (If you have paid to become a member but do not have a number as yet, you may still enrol in a course using your receipt as proof and give your number when you receive it.)
- Are there prerequisites for the course I wish to attend?
 - Note that the Brindabella Orchestra has its own website which describes requirements for membership of the orchestra (www.brindabellaorchestra.net).
- Is there a homework requirement? Can I commit to doing the homework?
- Can I attend all classes? This is particularly important for short courses. If you have pre-planned absences on holiday or looking after grandchildren, etc., discuss these with the course leader. Missing classes can be disruptive to learning and is not fair to other members who were able to take part in all the classes. There may be another opportunity to do the course in future.

Long courses make provision for absence for health reasons, holidays or family emergencies.

- Have I checked the course fees and payment requirements?
 - Rental charges apply to rooms at U3A Cook and Hughes and to many other venues.
 - Courses taking place in clubs may have membership requirements. The seniors rate for membership is usually very low and covers the use of the clubs' facilities. Clubs may not charge room rent.

- Fees are normally paid in advance at the first or second meeting for the whole course if up to 12 weeks, or each term or semester for longer courses.
- The course leader sets the fees to cover the expenses of the class. The fees usually include the cost of a cup of tea or coffee if members of the class are willing to organise this.
- Fees are not negotiable.
- Is access to the venue an issue for me? A few venues may be upstairs or difficult for members with limited mobility. This should be part of the course description, but check if this is a concern for you.

Please note that U3A ACT Incorporated's program of courses of necessity involves a range of activities and the use of a range of venues. Some courses have specific mobility and fitness requirements. Others include excursions. Whilst U3A ACT Inc. maintains public liability insurance and will endeavour to protect your safety, it cannot remove all of the dangers.

Responsibilities of members attending courses

All our course leaders are volunteers. They have spent many hours in preparing course materials and it is the responsibility of members to support them in delivering the course.

For example, course members are expected to be prepared to take their turn in undertaking the role of class treasurer, or assisting the course leader in the various administrative tasks involved in running a course.

Members who are physically able to do so are expected to assist with the set up of the room as appropriate: tasks like opening blinds, putting out chairs, and ensuring that the room is left as you found it. Take a turn in coming a little earlier or staying a little later to contribute to these tasks.

Morning or afternoon tea arrangements are the responsibility of class members, not the course leader. It is a good idea to bring your own mug, and as there are usually no facilities for storage at the venues, any refreshments need to be stored at home between sessions.

Some of our long term courses appoint a committee to organise and manage the class.

Please let the course leader know in advance if you are unable to attend or want to withdraw from the class. An email or phone call is all that is required.

Contacts

Hughes Community Centre
2 Wisdom St, Hughes ACT 2605
Phone 6281 6998

Cook Community Hub
Templeton St Cook, ACT 2614
Phone 6251 8005

Office hours Monday to Friday 9.30 - 4.30
The offices close from mid December to mid January. The specific dates each year are available on the website.

Other contacts

A current list of officers and key volunteers is on the back page of the Newsletter (see website for the latest Newsletters) and the Contacts tab on the website.