

MEDIA RELEASE

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Global gathering maps future for universities in AI age

Academics and church leaders will discuss the impact of artificial intelligence at a gathering of Catholic Research Universities in Milan next week.

ACU Vice-Chancellor and Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU) President Professor Zlatko Skrbis will chair the 2023 SACRU Scientific Colloquium.

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, will deliver the keynote address.

As emerging and generative technologies have entered the mainstream, AI has impacted the global research landscape and changed what is required of graduates.

The Scientific Colloquium will provide a platform to reflect on the role of SACRU universities in addressing the challenges in the AI age.

The conference will help build a bridge between the hard and social sciences – bringing insights from the world of philosophy, law, computer science, informatics and theology.

ACU Professor of Philosophy Sam Baron will deliver a presentation on the opportunities and challenges posed by explainable AI.

“AI systems are being rolled out as a basis for decision-making across many domains of everyday life,” Professor Baron said.

“In many cases we don't understand how these algorithms work - we don't understand why they give the outputs they do, based on the inputs that they receive.

“The focus on work in explainable AI (XAI) is to identify methods by which we can explain how AI systems work.

“The need for XAI is becoming increasingly relevant at the level of regulation, where there is a push toward enshrining the demand for explanation in law.

“There is a real need for philosophical expertise to help shape the development of XAI, and an opportunity to draw on a wealth of philosophical knowledge to better the outcomes for individuals in the face of AI.

“A key thing to remember is that when discussing XAI we are not talking about the idea that machines become fully conscious, which may in the end be in the realm of science fiction.

“The problems that XAI is needed to address are real, and the harms that it is needed to ameliorate are already happening.”

The Colloquium will produce a position paper that reflects SACRU views on the future of higher education and university research in response to new societal challenges and technological innovation.

The Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities is a network of universities dedicated to research and teaching excellence, engagement and global collaboration informed by Catholic social teaching.

The 2023 SACRU Scientific Colloquium will be held on 13-14 July at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan.

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