ACU launches fast-track tech degree led by powerhouse female talent

Australian Catholic University (ACU) has unveiled a unique fast-track double degree in Computer and Data Science that will prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow through cutting-edge academic training and deep industry engagement.

The new four-year program, combining a Bachelor of Computer Science and Master of Data Science, is designed in collaboration with industry to equip students with the technical skills, ethical foundations and real-world experience needed to address complex global challenges and lead responsibly in the age of AI.

"This program is a vital part of our 10-year strategic plan, *Vision 2033*, which focuses on addressing Australia's most pressing social challenges and building workforce capacity in areas of critical need," said Professor Julie Cogin, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

"We're proud to launch a course that not only reimagines how we teach tech, but who leads it."

ACU's program is led by a powerhouse team of female academics at the forefront of responsible innovation, machine learning, cybersecurity, and ethical AI. It's a rare combination of high-impact teaching, applied research, and industry alignment, delivered with a mission to serve the common good.

Among the leadership team is Associate Professor Eila Erfani, an expert in data science, cybersecurity and digital ethics who joins ACU from UNSW and UTS. She has leadership experience across academia and industry and her work bridges research and social impact, advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through responsible innovation.

"At ACU, we're not just teaching code, we're shaping ethical innovators," Associate Professor Erfani said.

"By embedding responsible innovation into emerging technologies, we equip our graduates to lead with technical excellence and a deep sense of purpose."

Joining her is Associate Professor Varvara Vetrova, a machine learning researcher renowned for her contributions to environmental and biomedical applications. She co-founded the Association of AI Researchers in New Zealand and helped develop the Aotearoa Species Classifier, an AI tool for identifying native species. She joins ACU from the University of Canterbury.

"Our course is designed with industry for impact. Through co-creation, global engagement, and hands-on learning, our students will graduate ready to solve real-world challenges, ethically and effectively," Associate Professor Vetrova said.

The program was also shaped by early contributions from Associate Professor Niusha Shafiabady, Director of Women in AI for Social Good and Associate Professor Md Akhtaruzzaman, who supported the program's initial outreach and development.

Fast Facts

- Degree: Bachelor of Computer Science / Master of Data Science (4 years full-time)
- Location: North Sydney Campus
- Launch: First intake February 2026
- Distinction: Only fast-tracked Computer and Data Science double degree in NSW
- Focus: Industry co-design, ethical innovation, hands-on learning
- Leadership: Program led by women who are experts in AI, machine learning, data ethics, and the application of tech for good

Upcoming events and Engagement:

ACU is taking its bold new tech vision on the road, with a strong presence at key STEM events, including BiG Day In, #WithSTEMYouCAn Career Expo, a Hackathon being held 7-8 July, and many others.

ACU is committed to co-creating a vibrant, inclusive tech community with our partners and reimagining how we teach and lead in tech.

Professor Julie Cogin, Associate Professor Eila Erfani and Associate Professor Niusha Shafiabady are available for interview.

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