Exciting start to year

Exceptional VCE results, the occupation of a new $4 million 16-classroom complex, and list of other achievements have provided an exciting start to the new school year at Avila College.

Three of our 2011 Year 12 students gained ATARs of 99 and above, placing them in the top one per cent of the State. 2011 College Dux Fiona Canny attained 99.75, Georgia Delaney, 99.45, and Lauren Pecora, 99.00. Seventeen per cent of students achieved an ATAR above 90.

Congratulations also to students who gained perfect scores: Fiona Canny in History - Revolutions and English, Lauren Pecora in Business Management, and Marina Izman in Design and Technology. Congratulations to 2011 Year 11 students, Laura De Rango (Health and Human Development) and Meera Fernandes gained perfect scores in their Drama solo performance examination last October and as a result, were invited by the VCAA to audition their performances for the prestigious 2012 Top Class Drama.

A spectacular 65 per cent of Avila students achieved an ATAR of 70 or above, ranking them in the top 30 per cent of the state. This ensured that 105 students were offered their first preference in the round one offers for tertiary study. Those who gained entry to highly sought after courses included Allana Constance and Laura Anderson who were among more than 250, selected from 2000 applicants, for RMIT’s Photography degree course. See page 2 for more about our 2011 VCE results.

Testimony to Avila’s strong tradition of public speaking and debating, Kiara Goldsmith, Year 12, won the public speaking section in the Lions Youth of the Year competition for the Monash District. Kiara and Genevieve Townsend, Year 11, were two of the five finalists from the District. In addition, Katie Elliott, Year 9, has progressed to State level in the Rostrum competition while Olivia Condina-Hibon, Year 7, reached the semi finals in the DAV competition.

In sport, sprinter Nana-Adoma Owusu-Afriyie, Year 8, has become the Australian under-14 sprint queen. Gymnasts Brittany Davison, Brigette Snell and Emily Wright (reserve) have represented Victoria. Water polo player Rebecca Andrews was also selected at state level.

At a staff level, Mrs Christine Valladares was honoured with a prize for excellence in secondary teaching by the Australian National University in Canberra. She was nominated by Connie Chong, our 2004 College Captain, who has recently graduated from ANU with a Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery.

Also, English and RE teacher, Margaret Kelleher has been conferred with her Doctor of Philosophy post graduate degree. Dr Kelleher’s doctorate thesis was entitled ‘From Biblical Story to Biblical Interpretation - A Critical Transition’.

High achievers from L-R, 2011 College Dux, Fiona Canny (ATAR of 99.75; 50 for English and History Revolutions) , Georgia Delaney (99.45), and Lauren Pecora (99.00; 50 - Business Management) and Emily Rebbchei (50 - Visual Communication and Design) and Laura De Rango (50 - Health and Human Development). Inset: Marina Izman (50 - Design and Technology).
High achievers - ATAR of 95+

Fifteen of our Class of 2011 students achieved an ATAR above 95, placing them in the top five per cent of the state.

Their impressive results reflect their hard work and commitment to study, and earned them choice, and entry, to an exciting range of career options, as can be seen by their choice of tertiary studies in this acknowledgement of our high achievers.

Gabrielle Bourke 98.95
International Studies/ RMIT

Margaret Hezkial 98.25

Dineshki Silva 97.7
Science
Melbourne

Michelle Andrews 97.35
Arts
Monash

Neethu Pynadath 97.3
Biomedicine
Monash

Melissa Chila 96.65
Commerce
Monash

Cindy Punta 96.5
Science at the Uni of California - awaiting offer

Stella Harianto 96
Radiology/ Medical Imaging
Monash

Mary Canagaratnam 96.65
Environments (Architecture)
Monash

Ella Gasowski 95.45
Primary Teaching
Deakin

Sarah Chan 95.4
Textiles
RMIT

Lillian Smith 95.25
Physical & Health Education
Monash

2011 ATAR results & Round 1 offers/placements

Round 1 tertiary placement offers for 2012

2010 Dux address

2010 College Dux, Alexandra Saltis, was an inspiring guest speaker at the 2011 Presentation Evening.

See page 5 to read how much Alexandra, who is undertaking an Arts/Law Degree at Monash, values the way in which her time at Avila has prepared her for adulthood.
Term two 2012 saw the much anticipated occupation of Avila’ College’s new 16-classroom building at the northern end of the playing field (near the canteen).

Built at a cost of $4 million, the two-storey building features 16 state-of-the-art classrooms fitted with electronic whiteboards, year-level offices, meeting room, learning support centre, and a lift. The classrooms have sliding walls to enable the creation of even larger learning areas. All lighting and heating are sensor controlled for energy efficiency and the interior design boasts aesthetically pleasing colour schemes and plenty of natural light.

The building is currently occupied by the Year 7 and 8 classes, with almost 200 students in each year level.

Members of the Avila community wishing to view the new building are most welcome to come along to our Open School mornings and campus tours. The remaining sessions for 2012 are on Tuesday, August 14 and Tuesday, October 30.

Pictured. Students enjoy the modern learning environment and facilities of the new building which was occupied at the commencement of Term Two.

40-year reunion for Class of ‘73

Planning is underway for a 40-year reunion of the Class of 1973 including those who were part of that cohort but who may have left before Year 12.

The reunion is to be in the second half of 2013. Planning has started early to give organisers plenty of time to make contact with as many of the class as possible.

Those interested in attending/helping organise the reunion are asked to contact Cathy Anning (Deveney) catha56@gmail.com/ 0419 350 152 or 03 97002383; or Sue Ball spb1108@gmail.com.

Pictured: Cathy Anning (nee Deveney) with some of her Avila memorabilia including her 1973 Speech Night program signed by others in her year level, class photographs and even a vinyl LP produced by the College’s talented musicians.

Past students provide inspiration

The Sowersby family has been part of the Avila College community since 1971. I began as a wide-eyed Form One student in 1971 and was followed by my sister, Megan, who was to later become School Captain. Even my brother, Tony, completed HSC Art with Sister Raymonde Taylor in 1976, when Avila offered HSC subjects to the wider community. My cousins, Clare and Leonie Sowersby, followed a few years later, and my nieces, Ellen, Anne and Marguerite Sowersby, continued the tradition in the 2000s.

Now, I am back at Avila as the Year 9 Co-ordinator ... We Sowersbys just can’t stay away. Why? Avila College was and is a wonderful school. It continues its tradition of producing intelligent, independent young women who have an overriding sense of social justice. Our community of past students includes women who have achieved amazing things, in their careers/communities and personal lives, and in all corners of the globe.

These women are testimony to Avila’s holistic approach to education and ‘can do’ philosophy. Their stories and choices in life provide inspiration and insights for our current students that they may not be exposed to otherwise.

To that end, I would like to encourage members of the Avila community to help further enrich the education of our current students by informing them of the many opportunities that are available in their lives beyond Avila.

It would be great to hear from anyone who would like to be added to our register of guest speakers to share with students your stories about your job, travels or life-experiences.

Please email me, Anne Stephens (Sowersby, Class of 1976), at annens@avilacollege.vic.edu.au. Please leave your contact details and the subject about which you could speak to the students.
Old Col mums lead way

There could be no higher recommendation for the quality education that Avila offers its students than for past students to choose to send their own daughters to the College.

Each year there is a steady flow of ‘Old Cols’ daughters commencing at the College and this year is no exception with 15 new Year 7 students whose mothers attended Avila. Currently there are almost 100 students at the College who are the daughters of past students.

To celebrate, and record, the growing tradition of mothers sending their daughters to Avila, group photographs are taken on the first day for Year 7s.

This gathering always proves to be quite a social occasion where the Avila spirit is alive. The conversation flows freely as the ‘Old Cols’ recognise faces from their own year levels or those of their sisters and share memories.

Without exception the past students are full of praise for the modern campus and the excellent educational and co-curricular program available to students.

Established in 1965, Avila College has grown tenfold from 110 students to 1120 in 2012.

At the Opening of the School Year Mass, founding Principal, Sister Patricia Carroll, said that the Avila of the 21st century had far exceeded her dreams for the College, which she considered extremely ambitious back in the early 1960s.

Weekday Open Mornings

Avila has launched Open School Mornings for prospective students and their parents, replacing the Saturday information sessions.

The first two, in February and May, were extremely successful with many visitors admiring our College at work and our impressive modern campus and facilities, including the new classroom complex.

It was particularly wonderful to see past students attending with their daughters.

Principal, Ms Louise Gunther, commended our student tour guides, our greatest ambassadors.

Ms Gunther also extended an invitation to the wider school community to attend an Open Morning. The remaining 2012 dates are Tuesday, August 14 and Tuesday, October 30.
Firstly, it is genuinely such a pleasure to be back amongst the Avila community. In the excitement of moving on after Year 12, I did not consider how much I would miss the people and the atmosphere that helped transform me into a young woman.

My experiences at Avila were not something that I reflected on greatly during my six years as a secondary student. In casting my thoughts back to secondary school, which now feels so unbelievably long ago, it is the overall atmosphere that I have come to appreciate most; the mutual respect between pupils and teachers, the caring attitude that infiltrates activities and services, the compassion and the positive and pragmatic steps taken towards social justice. In the wider community, Avila girls are recognised for these qualities. I participated in an inter-faith program this year and the founder of the program, upon learning that I was a previous Avila student, commented that Avila girls always have such a respectful attitude towards diversity, and always participate willingly in acts of social justice. That comment was what I needed to help me understand that this was the greatest gift given to me by Avila College. All the subject-specific knowledge that we feed our minds, the formulas, the texts, the facts are all crucial. However, nothing is so important as the attitudes and beliefs that are formed, cultivated and strengthened by Avila. Ultimately, Avila showed me the importance of assisting others, which I hope will shape my professional and personal life. As past or present Avila girls, we should all try to fulfil the expectations that the wider community has of us - and rightly so, as we are more than capable of them.

Another element of my Avila experience that I did not reflect upon greatly was the strength that Avila gave me as a young woman. Avila taught me that underestimating young women is wholly unwise and that underestimating yourself as a young woman is even more so. Surely, that attitude was part of the Presentation Sister’s vision when they founded Avila College - the development of young women who are intellectually formidable and strong-minded. This attitude is what drove me to realise that I was capable of entering the course which I undertook this year - Arts/Law at Monash University. Arts/Law is something that I wished to pursue since the end of Year 9, and I know that my parents, teachers and peers saw the determination in me when I spoke of obtaining a place in the course. It is so gratifying to be studying the course that I dreamt of doing for more than half of my secondary schooling. However, your own hard work can only take you so far - the rest of your accomplishments must be attributed to the environment which fostered you and gave you confidence. This is the effect that Avila had on me, and what I have to thank the school for.

Of one thing I am certain - I would not have the same understanding of myself, my faith or my values if I had not been schooled at Avila, of that I am certain. To Avila girls, it is easy to undervalue what you do as part of a routine, but be thankful for what Avila has and will give you. To the Avila staff, thank you for seeing me along the path that fulfilled my ambitions. Without you all, I would not be able to appreciate the fortunate position in which I now stand.

The Avila effect

In her address to the 2011 Presentation Evening in November, our 2010 College Dux, Alexandra Saltis, spoke about how much she values her journey at Avila and what it is that makes Avila so unique and so special.
From pro squash to pro trainer

Who would have thought that a young girl with a passion for squash could follow her dreams to become 14th in the world in women’s squash? That is just what former Avila student, Meeghan Bell did and much more – she has drawn on her interest in health and fitness to establish her own thriving personal training business based in Mount Waverley.

Meeghan pursued squash at international level after secondary school and then successfully completed studies for a degree in Communications. After graduating from university, and to support herself while looking for a full-time job in the film and media industry, Meeghan worked part time at the Melbourne City Baths. She was initially employed as a customer service officer but was soon given an opportunity to study a certificate IV in fitness and started working in the gymnasium. Meeghan enjoyed the work so much she decided to pursue a career as a personal trainer where she could also be her own boss. In March 2008 Meeghan launched her business, ‘Forever Strong Fitness’, in Mount Waverley. Earlier this year she moved to more spacious premises in High Street Road, just around the corner from Avila.

Meeghan finds her work extremely rewarding, especially when clients, ranging in age from 15 years to 80, achieve their goals. She also thrives on owning and running her own business, embracing every challenge as an opportunity for growth. ‘When I’m faced with a challenge or a problem I try to see it as an opportunity to learn and grow,’ Meeghan said. ‘It is important to be creative and flexible in the way you solve each problem as it arises.’

While Meeghan, (Class of 1990) only attended Avila for her final two years of secondary schooling, she said the experience greatly contributed to what she has achieved. She said Avila was an empowering environment where students were encouraged to be independent and to work hard towards achieving their goals and aspirations. It was during her time at Avila that Meeghan discovered her passion for squash. Meeghan believes it is important for young women to be involved in leadership and during her time at Avila she started the College’s first environment club.

Meeghan’s message for young girls who aren’t sure of a future career is ‘to do the things you love, and enjoy life ... most importantly, follow your heart’.

Avila golf proves to be corporate asset

It is amazing how golf lessons during her Avila days have proven to be an extremely handy skill for Pamela Anderson (nee Addicott-Whyte, Class of 1997)) in her role as a marketing executive in the finance services industry - and yes, Avila once offered golf lessons. Working in a male dominated environment, Pamela, 32, has found it beneficial to be able to join her colleagues and associates on the golf course where so much corporate networking and relationship building occurs.

Pamela is a marketing executive with Australian Financial Services (AFS), one of Australia’s leading financial planning groups with a growing number of representative offices around Australia. Her role involves developing, promoting and protecting the AFS brand; and planning and delivery of all training events in Australia and overseas. Pamela also supports the AFS’s 86 practices Australia-wide to assist them with their marketing needs. In addition, Pamela was part of a project team that recently launched two new financial products and brands. Pamela mentioned that some of the international conferences she organises are in countries such as Portugal, Egypt, Vietnam and Thailand. She loves the challenge of ensuring everything runs smoothly; her only lament is that given the efficiency of electronic communication, she does not always get to attend the conferences herself.

Apart from learning how to play golf, and win colours for hockey, Pamela noted that her experiences at Avila were empowering and helped shape her into the person she is today. She values the encouragement and guidance she received to work to achieve, and the friendships and strong sense of community.

Having completed a Bachelor of Business Marketing and a Diploma of Financial Services, Pamela said it was important for people to pursue their dreams and to use constructive criticism to rise above and overcome any negativity.
Leading orthoptist humbled by courage of young patients

Orthoptist and past student, Sandra Elfride Staffieri (nee Penso) is constantly inspired and humbled by the many children she works with who have blinding eye disease.

‘Despite their condition these children just get on with it,’ said Sandra, Clinical Research Orthoptist at the Centre for Eye Research Australia. ‘Their courage and resilience is humbling.’

The Class of 1981 graduate is a highly respected and award-winning orthoptist – as a researcher, educator and clinician. Her research findings have been presented at both national and international conferences, she lectures to students of orthoptics, ophthalmology and medicine, as well as continuing the clinical care of children with eye disease.

At Avila, Sandra was a focused student keenly interested in a career in the medical field. She said she benefited greatly from the Avila tradition of nurturing students to become independent young women capable of attaining any goal they were prepared to work towards.

‘I was terrified of boys so glad I was at an all girls school!’ Sandra added.

Sandra provided the following insights into her work:

What does your work involve?
Currently I spend most of my time undertaking genetic eye research looking for the genes that cause eye disease. Some of the conditions I have been studying include congenital cataract, glaucoma, strabismus (eye turns) and retinoblastoma (RB, children’s eye cancer). This work often requires both interstate and international travel, so it is very busy and varied. As my background is in the clinical aspects of these diseases, I co-ordinate the projects, examine all the participants and collect their DNA samples which are then sent to the various laboratories with whom we are collaborating.

What do you find most rewarding about your work?
It has been great fun marrying my past clinical expertise with research. The research is very interesting and it is exciting to meet new people. It is extremely satisfying when you publish your findings or are part of a major discovery which changes the way some eye diseases are treated. Most of all though, I love the challenges of examining children and being able to help them and their families through what is oft en a very diffi  cult time that can last several years. I have looked aft er many children from birth to adulthood and now I am starting to look aft er their children. I love the relationship that develops with the child and the parent and watching them grow and overcome their diffi culties. Also the opportunity to teach other doctors and clinicians is also great as you are part of the future, beyond your own working life.

Greatest challenges?
There is a lot of heartbreak when you can’t make a child ‘better’ and trying to be positive when you know the situation may not turn out in a positive way. It was also a very big decision to retire from my clinical work as Chief Orthoptist at the Royal Children’s Hospital (RCH) when I loved it so much. However the challenge of learning new skills and achieving things I never thought I would be capable of has been extremely rewarding. And of course, balancing raising a family (Julian, now 20 and Olivia, 15) and working full time ...

Career highlights to date?
Too many to count! Every time a child’s vision has improved, is a highlight. And having the privilege to be a part of a child’s treatment and involved in improving their vision, their appearance, or being able to support a family through the diagnosis and treatment of their child’s eye disease, particularly in my role as Retinoblastoma Care Co-ordinator at the RCH. It beats the prizes and awards every time.

Professional awards?
Most recently I was awarded the Brainwave Travelling Scholarship by the Department of Neurology at the RCH. This will enable me to attend the 2nd World Paediatric Ophthalmology Congress in Milan and present some of my research fi ndings into RB. I will also travel to Canada and the USA where I will meet other RB experts at major paediatric centres. I hope to see how they manage and co-ordinate the care of these children in the hope we can learn from their experiences and improve our care of Australian children, as well as foster international collaborations as RB is a rare disease.

If you had your time again, what would you have done?
I always wanted to be a paediatrician. I didn’t have the marks so I ended up in health sciences to see where it would take me. Alphabetically, orthoptics came before orthotics and speech therapy in the VTAC handbook – and that is where I stayed. I think if I had my time again, I would hope to be doing the same thing. I was very fortunate to have been encouraged and mentored by some great people early in my career and lucky enough that this continues.

Interview conducted towards the end of 2011 by Ashleigh McGregor for a VCAL assignment.
Welcome ‘AJ’

Personal assistant to the deputy principals, Mrs Jodie Dean and husband Cameron welcomed the safe arrival of their baby daughter, Arizona (AJ), on December 29. ‘AJ’, who weighed in at 3.4kg (7lb 6 oz) at birth, is a new playmate for her two-year old big brother, Jesse.

Pictured: Mrs Dean and ‘AJ’.

Avila family helps celebrate

It was quite an extended Avila affair for the marriage of Nadia Silvestre (Class of 2000) and Mark Liberta in August 2011.

In addition to family, the couple was joined by many of Nadia’s friends from Avila.

Following their wedding, Nadia and Mark enjoyed a romantic honeymoon in France and Italy.


Avila Old Collegians
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Fiona lines up world target

World-class archer and past student Fiona Guest (nee Larkins, Class of 1979) is about to head to France to represent Australia for the first time in the 2012 World Field Championships.

Fiona has achieved world standard quickly. She initially took up archery about six years ago as an activity to share with her youngest son who subsequently decided the sport was not for him but Fiona became hooked.

A member of the Waverley City Archers, Fiona holds a number of national and state records.

‘Archery is a terrific sport for people of all ages. You can easily see your progress and I have also met a lot of great people,’ Fiona added.

Always one to seek out a new challenge and broaden her horizons, Fiona is currently nearing the completion of her Bachelor of Business (Financial Planning) degree course with the hope of working in the broking/financial planning industry. She initially qualified with a Science degree, majoring in applied mathematics, specialising in meteorology with the CSIRO and working as a research assistant at Monash University.

Fiona and her husband John have two sons, Shane, 23, and Dean, 18. Her three younger sisters also attended Avila - Therese (1980), Majella (1981), Caroline (1985).