



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

**SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND LIFE SCIENCES**

**HONOURS PROGRAM 2024**

**FOR STUDENTS OF:**

**DEVELOPMENT STUDIES HONOURS**

**GEOGRAPHY HONOURS (Human Geography B. Sci)**

**HUMAN GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT HONOURS (B Soc. Sci)<sup>1</sup>**

Honours Coordinators

Associate Professors Kathy Mee and Michelle Duffy

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<sup>1</sup> Students from the Human Geography and the Environment Major of the BA are advised to enrol in BSoc Sci or BSci honours.

## Honours Program

There are many good reasons to do Honours. Here are some:

- Your university qualification is strengthened—substantially! This is good for your employment and further education prospects. Your chances of obtaining a rewarding job are considerably enhanced.
- Honours will expand your ability to think, analyse, write clearly and give sound advice—substantially! You'll never be the same again.
- Honours is a great credential for the years to come. It helps career changes because people know you can undertake a substantial project in a relatively short time frame. In addition, Honours gives you easy access to postgraduate courses across many faculties, and into universities and colleges around the world. A great education passport, so to speak!
- Honours is tough, but it's fun! Honours students build very strong friendships and support networks. It's a challenging year. But the personal and career rewards are very high.

Think about it. Entry requires good undergraduate grades (at least a credit average in your later years), commitment and a readiness to have a go!

The Honours Program in Development Studies or Human Geography and the Environment, produces students of the highest standing for securing future research and other career pathways.

Students who successfully complete the Honours Program in Development Studies, Geography, Human Geography and the Environment and demonstrate:

- A highly developed capacity to read, understand and evaluate a large body of social scientific literature
- The ability to communicate effectively using abstractions, theorisations and case-study material
- The ability to write effectively using a variety of appropriate styles
- Mastery of specific data collection techniques
- Higher order thinking skills involving the identification of research problems, selection of research techniques, evaluation of a variety of data forms, critical analysis and appropriate policy advice
- A capacity to devise and employ effective and creative strategies in problem solving.

## Eligibility For Honours

The Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies supervises the honours program for the following programs:

Bachelor of Science (Honours) (Geography major with a human geography focus)

Bachelor of Development Studies (Honours)

Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) (Human Geography and the Environment Major)

Students who completed their major in Human Geography and the Environment in the Bachelor of Arts are eligible to enroll in honours in Geography in either the Bachelor of Social Science or the Bachelor of Science.

## Entry requirements

No more than five years must have elapsed since completion of the undergraduate degree.

### **College of Engineering, Science and Environment (Development Studies/ Science)**

To qualify for Honours, students must have completed a relevant undergraduate degree, with a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of 5.0 or higher either (a) based on all studies undertaken in the program, or (b) across the approved major, or (c) in at least 80 units at 3000 level, in the approved major in which honours is to be undertaken. If students have not undertaken 80 units at 3000 level, they are required to have a GPA of 5.5 or higher in at least 60 units at 3000 level.

**We supervise all honours students from the Bachelor of Development Studies.**

**We supervise students with an interest in *human geography* from the Bachelor of Science.** Students interested in honours in physical geography enrol in Honours in Earth Science. These students should contact academic staff in the Discipline of Earth Science, in the first instance the honours coordinator Associate Professor Danielle Verdon-Kidd. Students in the Bachelor of Environmental Science and Management enrol in the BESM honours program. Interested students should contact the Program Convenor of the BESM Dr Michael Stat.

### **College of Human and Social Futures (Social Science)**

To qualify for Honours, students must have completed a relevant undergraduate degree, with normally at least a credit grade average based on all studies undertaken in the program and/or in the approved major in which Honours is to be undertaken and any additional work which may be prescribed.

### **How to apply**

Go to this page [https://askuon.newcastle.edu.au/app/apply/end\\_on\\_honours](https://askuon.newcastle.edu.au/app/apply/end_on_honours) and follow the links to apply for honours.

**Interested students should contact potential supervisors and discuss the possibilities of undertaking an honours project before the end of Semester 2.**

**You should be prepared to commence working on your honours project during January 2024.**

## **Attendance/ Assessment Requirements for Honours**

Honours can be undertaken full time (over 1 year) or part time (over 2 years).

Course work is 2 hours per week in the first semester you enrol plus at least 38 hours per week (if you are full time) working independently, guided by your supervisor on your project.

Course work component (with coursework classes) including 2 seminars (worth 5% each) and a coursework essay (worth 20%).

Thesis component (worth 70%)

The coursework will provide students with background to key methodological issues that will inform their honours progress. The coursework essay explores the relationship between theory, methods and outcomes in research. The proposal seminar provides an opportunity for staff and students to provide feedback on the development of the thesis topic. The final seminar allows students to share their honours findings and receive feedback prior to submitting the final thesis.

Honours students are expected to attend Centre for Urban and Regional Research seminars which are held on Thursdays during semester. We encourage Honours students to attend the Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies morning teas each Thursday morning so you get to interact more informally with academic staff and PhD students.

## Guide to Research Areas in Development Studies, Human Geography and the Environment,

This section has information on potential supervisors and projects in Development Studies, Human Geography and the Environment (by supervisors' name, in alphabetical order). It is also possible to propose a topic of your own or to work with a co-supervisor from another Discipline from Development Studies.

**Please contact any one of us for a chat. Sooner rather than later!**

### Associate Professor Michelle Duffy

#### Regional arts festivals as infrastructures of care

Local governments invest substantial resources in regional festivals, primarily for economic development gains; however, the potential social, cultural and commercial benefits of festivals and their contribution to community wellbeing are not always fully recognised or realised. This project explores regional festivals as a fundamental element of resilient social infrastructure (the places, spaces and people that support social connections), which are as essential to community life as physical infrastructure. This project seeks to understand the cultural, social, economic and wellbeing impacts of arts festivals.

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#### Mobilising emotions in times of change and crisis

The Anthropocene has pushed life and lives, human and more-than-human, to the edge of what can be endured. We have yet to address this in any adequate way – indeed, we appear to be standing still in the face of what scientists are telling us is an urgent need to address climate change immediately. The apparent lack of urgency suggests the difficulty may lie in attempting to come to terms with planet-scale change by thinking human thoughts and writing human words. The key question driving this project is, what does it *feel* like to engage in practices, processes and relations that help us understand and seek ways to address the changes wrought by the Anthropocene? The project draws on an emotional geographies framework and arts-based practices to explore people's emotional connections to "their" places and how these responses may inform ways to address the impacts of climate change.

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#### Living in new suburbia

Despite a recent trend towards denser cities, greenfield construction on the fringes remains crucial to urban development in Australia. Huntlee, a new development in the NSW Hunter Valley, is planned to be the biggest single urban development in NSW. The first residents have started to move into Huntlee, ahead of the construction of a range of services designed to increase the livability of this new urban place. This project will explore how placemaking happens in new urban developments. The project will involve considering the role of a range of actors, including residents, developers, local councils, the state government alongside non-human actors.

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## Dr Melina Ey

### **The everyday politics and possibilities of resistance, care and repair**

We often hear that our world is becoming an increasingly polarized, divisive, and damaged place. In these dominant narratives about our world, small, everyday acts of resistance, care and repair can often go unnoticed, or are dismissed as unable to address the complex challenges we face. However, when we only pay attention to this particular story about what is happening in our world, we miss out on a host of ways that people and places have (and are) *always* engaged in resistance, care and repair. We can also miss out on recognizing other possibilities and potentials which are “present in every situation – if only we are ready to encounter them” (Gibson-Graham 2006 p. xxxvii). A project that considers the everyday ways that people and places resist injustice, participate in care and repair, and enact other more care-full, generative and nourishing ways of being in/as the world together, could focus on some of these areas:

- Creative, more-than-human and participatory acts of everyday resistance
- Feminist and alternate economic practices
- Growing and nourishing relations of care with (and as) more-than-human places
- Practices of repairing and re-forming collective and individual politics, practices and world(s)

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## Dr Paul Hodge

### **Decolonizing development (co-supervised by Professor Sarah Wright and Dr Lara Daley)**

Development must be decolonized. Yet, what this might look like and involve is far from clear. Topics and questions could include:

- Contemporary debates in critical development studies
- The radical possibilities of Strengths-based approaches
- Exploring what decolonisation actually means in the context of contemporary development theory and practice
- Considering how Indigenous-led geographies might inform pathways to decolonising development
- What decolonization as practice looks like in the context of Natural Resource Management in Australian?

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### **Country-led learning**

Increasingly, universities are embedding Indigenous-led curriculum into undergraduate courses. This development is transforming teaching practices as custodians and Country lead the learning with implications for life-long learning post-university. This honours project will involve focus groups and interviews of past and present GEOG3300 Rethinking Development students who have worked with custodians during this course.

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### **Settling well: a longitudinal study of refugees in regional Australia**

Regional humanitarian settlement has become a key priority across all levels of government in Australia, as leaders grapple with the problem of population distribution. Making this task more difficult is the limited evidence-base available to support decision-making. Specifically, most existing research on regional humanitarian settlement is cross-sectional (at one point in time), qualitative, urban-focused, small-scale and/or ethno-specific (Fozdar & Hartley 2013).

This honours project is situated within a large 5 year longitudinal study involving research with people from refugee backgrounds currently living in cities and rural places in QLD, NSW & Victoria. The longitudinal study is in its second year and aims to provide an evidence base to support people from refugee backgrounds to flourish in regional Australia. The focus of the honours project will be negotiated with the project chief investigators to develop a discreet research project.

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<b>Associate Professor Kathy Mee</b>
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### **Shadow care infrastructures**

Shadow care infrastructures mobilise the shadows as metaphor to direct attention to spaces, practices and resources that are obscured within dominant welfare discourses but play a vital role maintaining care practices. When light is shone on phenomena certain features are foregrounded, while others fall into the shadows, unseen or appearing differently to how they might if light were directed toward them. Shadows can obscure and distort otherwise familiar places and objects, sometimes hiding them from view, while looking into these places can reveal properties and textures that are otherwise less visible. Shadow care infrastructures plays with this idea to purposefully draw focus to spaces, practices and resources that enable survival between or beyond dominant political and research lenses. Thinking with shadows is to ask: what is there that is not readily seen or acknowledged? Shadow care infrastructures foregrounds a fuller range of practices that sustain life in a variety of places and contexts. This includes attention to the labours through which care infrastructures are maintained and held together as well as moments when they fall apart. It also requires attention to compromises in care.

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### **Care in community housing**

Social housing, comprising public housing and community housing, provides a stable and affordable home for some of the most vulnerable Australians. Community housing organisations provide more than just “bricks and mortar”, they also provide a range of spaces of care for vulnerable people. This project will explore practices of care by Home In Place, the one of the largest community housing organisations in Australia, which is based in the Hunter region. Kathy has an ongoing research relationship with Home in Place housing where Home in Place proposes applied research topics for honours students and supports the students in conducting their research. So far, this collaboration has generated 3 completed honours theses, one on community housing and older people, one on community housing and tenant engagement and another on spaces of care provided by community housing. One exciting aspect of undertaking this honours project is that your results will feed back directly to the provision of services for vulnerable people.

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### **Homelessness services as spaces of care**

Homelessness is on the rise in Australia. Homeless service providers attempt to meet the myriad of needs of homeless people through a range of models of service provision. This project would explore homeless service provision in the Hunter through the lens of care infrastructures. The research project would be part of a larger research agenda focused on housing as an infrastructure of care.

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### **Living in new suburbia**

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### **Potential Co-Supervisions with the Dr Ainsley Hughes (Liftago).**

#### **Public Transport and Place-making (Liftago project)**

Both transit planners and urban planners are increasingly recognising that public transport plays a critical role in influencing how individuals experience the places they live, work and move through. In



contemporary urban contexts in particular, planners are now utilizing a wide range of boutique and connected public transport modes in order to design transit networks that better meet the diverse demands of local communities. This project broadly explores the role of public transport in place-making, with potential topics including:

- Public transport, social equity and meeting the needs of vulnerable populations
- The digitization of transport infrastructure/environments and role of technology
- Safe public spaces, transport systems and atmospheres
- The diversification of public transport modes (eg Demand Responsive Transport)
- Greener cities, sustainability and reducing dependence on private vehicles

The project will involve considering the perspectives of a range of stakeholders including local communities, transit operators, planners and government agencies.

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### **Community Transport and Care Liftago Project**

Community Transport plays a critical role in providing everyday transport to those people in our communities who cannot otherwise access public or private transport. These individuals often face additional mobility challenges due to illness, disability or age. Community Transport operators and drivers (many of whom are volunteers) play a critical role in caring for these vulnerable individuals by helping them complete their everyday travels and connect to their local community/resources. The Community Transport industry is at a pivotal stage in its development in that operators are increasingly looking to digitize their services and operations, but are apprehensive about how this will impact their ability to provide their customers with quality care. This project will broadly investigate shadow infrastructures of care, with particular interest in how practices and relations of care are transforming as new digital mobility technologies are integrated into industry operations.

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### **Potential Co-Supervision Dr Debbi Long (Permaculture Australia/ Ausbale)**

#### **Permaculture Projects**

Permaculture – developed in Australia in the 1970s by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren from their work at the University of Tasmania – has become a worldwide movement encompassing a vast array of strategies and actions for sustainable living at individual, household, community and global levels. The central ethics of permaculture are Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share, with those ethics supported by a [set of 12 principles](#).

A number of possible projects on Permaculture could be undertaken, including:

- A qualitative and/or ethnographic study of one or more working permaculture properties.
- An organisational biography of the (fascinating) story of the founding of Permaculture Australia (the national peak body for permaculture).

- A study on the changing demographics of the permaculture movement, and the engagement or otherwise of young, Indigenous, migrant and/or queer communities in permaculture in Australia.
  - An in-depth study of a particular aspect of permaculture practice, such as no-waste food movements; seed saving; foraging; soil building; water harvesting; planting for fire retardation and/or flood mitigation and other disaster management strategies.
  - A study on the work of Permaculture for Refugees, which includes teaching permaculture food-growing and strategies for food security in international refugee camps.
  - A study on the impact of Transition Towns and/or Retrosurbia movements within Australia.
- Depending on the project, co-supervision and/or project advice may be available through Permaculture Australia and/or the broader Australian permaculture community.

### **Blow Your House Down: the gap between policy and practice in sustainable building in Australia**

Building with strawbales is a well-established building technique, and there is extensive expertise in the Australian strawbale building community. In spite of being supported in the Australian Federal Government's "Your Home: Australia's Guide to Environmentally Sustainable Homes", people wanting to undertake building with strawbales often face a challenging regulatory environment, with support for strawbale building varying widely between state regulations and local council areas.

This project involves a study of the gaps between policy and practice, with the aim of making recommendations for how this valuable sustainable building technique could be better supported by Australian regulatory bodies. The project would have access to the expertise of Ausbale, the peak body for strawbale building in Australia.

<b>Dr Meg Sherval</b>
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### **Everyday Ruralities: recounting situated knowledge**

As geographers, we know that the everyday matters. In rural situations, sometimes life can be mundane or at times extraordinary, and with each event comes renewed knowledge. The rural by definition represents a space where life is practiced in numerous and often diverse ways. Research which seeks to explore the myriad of experiences that occur in rural places as part of the lived experience of everyday life is welcomed.

Research projects that engage with theoretical, methodological and empirical considerations could take the form of but are not limited to:

- Everyday representations of rural life and different ways of understanding rurality
- How lives are grounded in particular rural places by traditional or changing activities
- How lives are disrupted in rural places through internal or external threats to amenity and the like, and what actions individuals or communities undertake to protect their rural spaces
- How rural citizenship is being redefined today.

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### **Legal Geographies of Energy Extraction: conflicts, trade-offs and situating resistance**

Rural and regional areas once recognised as hubs of agricultural production and sources of food security are being altered as land use transformation in the form of mining and hydrocarbon industries are

expanding their presence in traditional rural spaces. Growing energy demands have also seen many rural areas become spaces of social contestation, with conventional, renewable and unconventional energy production all becoming the focus of resistance and protest. Likewise, concerns over the impact of energy consumption on the world's climate have not only added to contestations over energy production but have also raised questions about sustainability of current practices of energy development and consumption of the countryside.

Research projects that engage with theoretical, methodological and empirical considerations could take the form of but are not limited to:

- Relations, conflicts and trade-offs between energy and other forms of land-use
- Gendered resistance to extractive practices
- Relations between energy security and the production of environmental and social insecurities (e.g. water insecurity, food insecurity, housing insecurity)
- The resource demands on the countryside and the role governments and corporations play in addressing community concerns
- Critiquing the value of the Social Licence to Operate and how it is framed
- Critiquing continued masculinised visions of mining

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### **Resistance to wind**

Onshore wind has been one of the most common sources of renewable energy in Australia for the past 20 years. Off-shore wind is still developing and is not without its critics. Potential projects under this theme might investigate, though are not limited to:

- the central arguments for and against onshore and offshore wind both from a community, industry and/or an environmental perspective.
- considering the new 'off-shore wind zone' plans released by the federal government and how these have been received in particular areas of NSW
- critiquing criticisms of onshore and/or offshore wind against social and scientific evidence from international case studies.

### **Reconsidering Environment justice and injustice**

Traditionally, the environmental justice movement has been associated with marginalisation and social vulnerability caused by events or decision-making outside one's control. Today, this can take many forms as the conditions surrounding environmental justice continue to expand to also consider the non-human. A project in this area might include:

- The ongoing conflict surround PFAS contamination locally and/or Australia-wide
- The expansion of definitions of environmental justice to include ecology etc.
- Critiquing mining and energy projects as continuing legacies of environmental injustice
- Considering the contest between development and the application of environmental law.

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### **How literature and geography intersect**

Literary geography is an emergent interdisciplinary field of research situated at the interface between human geography and literary studies. Human geographers have long been interested in what literature can teach them about the relationship between humans and the non-human environment; as well as the role of place and landscape can play in everyday life and how that is reflected in literary texts. A project in this area might include:

- Studying particular works of an author or a couple of authors (past or present) to reflect on the role geography plays in revealing meaning.
- Consider what authors past and present might offer us as ways to address issues of the Anthropocene.

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### **Unschooling and the Possibilities of Childhood**

Education in its idealized form is a process of self-discovery, an awakening to one's potential, and a desire to see such abilities realized. For many parents and children this ideal increasingly takes the form of unschooling. Often maligned, unschooling is not anti-education, but rather a response to authoritative and coercive schooling structures, and is more appropriately considered as a form of child-led learning. To ensure the absence of coercion in education children need opportunities to explore for themselves, making their own decisions about what their interests are, and how those curiosities might be fulfilled. Presenting a broad range of opportunities is crucial, but the decision about what path to follow should be determined by the child. When bound to a classroom we often mistake obedience for education.

- Why are more Australians opting to homeschool their children?
- What motivates an unschooling approach?
- What geographies do children engage when learning is shifted from the classroom to the wider world?
- What has been the response to unschooling by state authorizes and the wider community?
- How are social groups formed and maintained among unschooling families?
- What does a day in the life of an unschooling family look like?
- What are the outcomes of unschooling over the longer term?

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### **Vegan Political Ecologies**

Veganism is undeniably on the rise. For many the move towards veganism is informed by an ethics of care that extends not only to other animals, but also to the wider biosphere. Given the extraordinary depletion of water resources, widespread deforestation, intensified climate change, pervasive pollution, and extreme violence that all flow from contemporary animal agriculture, for vegans, our current food practices represent nothing short of ecocide. Increasing deforestation, methane and ammonia emissions, overuse of

antibiotics, and contamination of the water table with waste, are but a few of the deleterious effects of traditional animal agriculture. While a vegan diet doesn't solve all of our problems, there are significant implications for reducing the effects of climate change and moving towards greater sustainability.

- What would a shift towards veganism look like in terms of the impacts on our environment?
- How are vegans advocating for such changes, and what forms of activism are effective?
- What constraints exist in shifting towards veganism in terms of political will, economic imperatives, and social attitudes?
- How does veganism intersect with capitalism, and is this compatible with a more sustainable local and global outlook?
- How has a vegan outlook been approached within the local context, and how has the community responded?

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### **Climate Disasters and Mutual Aid**

The incidence of climate related disasters are unquestionably on the rise. Mutual aid and various practices of community care have evolved as key responses to recent and ongoing catastrophic climate events. Research into how mutual aid and reciprocity function in crises situations, particularly when and where government interventions fail, is essential to the prevention of loss of life and livelihoods. The more we know about community responses within contexts that have faced climate disasters, the better prepared we will be to offer meaningful supports, and likewise to assist ourselves within the context of our own communities to respond in meaningful ways that mitigate damage. In most disaster situations the actual event (i.e., a bushfire, a cyclone, drought) is only the beginning of a longer process. The severest consequences of homelessness, migration, and the outbreak of disease, typically arise in the aftermath when communities are not well organized to care for one another. Research into mutual aid networks offers a lens on how we are coping with the most prescient existential crisis that humans have ever faced.

- How are mutual aid networks organized following climate crisis events?
- What sorts of skills and community practices are mobilized to support each other?
- Why are governments so prone to fail when it comes to providing adequate supports in post-climate disaster scenarios?
- How does gender influence the way that community care is organized in climate related disaster situations?
- Why are people so effective at organizing themselves around non-hierarchical principles of mutual aid in disaster situations? What does this tell us about the ostensible need for the hierarchies that occupy our lives under usual circumstances?

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<b>Professor Sarah Wright</b>
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### **Sustainable Development through Youth-led and Farmer-led Agriculture**

This action research honours project involves being part of a broader collaborative effort to support a network of small-scale organic and subsistence farmers in the Philippines. Honours projects supporting this project could relate to: social enterprise, emotional geographies of development, diverse economies, knowledge production and/or social movement theory.

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Development must be decolonized. Yet, what this might look like and involve is far from clear. Topics and questions could include:

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- The radical possibilities of strengths-based approaches
- Exploring what decolonisation actually means in the context of contemporary development theory and practice
- Considering how Indigenous-led geographies might inform pathways to decolonising development
- Engaging the urban as Country

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**With any enquiries about other potential Honours opportunities in Geography, Human Geography and the Environment Honours, and Development Studies Honours, please contact Honours Coordinator Associate Professor Kathy Mee: [Kathy.mee@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Kathy.mee@newcastle.edu.au) .**

### **SCHOLARSHIPS**

The University offers a series of scholarships targeted at Honours students. For information go to <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/scholarships>. Click on the button on the left for Undergraduate honours scholarships. These are updated regularly, so check regularly.

The College of Engineering, Science and the Environment also offers \$3000 summer scholarships, including for students intending to start honours in 2024. Dr Meg Sherval (Resistance to wind) and Associate Professor Kathy Mee (Infrastructures of care) have projects available. See [https://www.newcastle.edu.au/scholarships/SUM\\_041](https://www.newcastle.edu.au/scholarships/SUM_041) Applications for summer scholarships close on October 15<sup>th</sup>.