

Networks

ARC networks bring leading experts together

■ Connecting with the past

The University of Western Australia-led ARC Network for Early European Research (NEER) provides a national framework for enhancing and supporting innovative research into European histories and their place in the development of Australian society and culture.

“The fundamental social, political and legal structures underlying Australian society have their origins in early modern Europe,” Network Convenor Dr Anne Scott says.

“NEER aims to build on existing networks, encourage and coordinate Australia’s involvement in national and international partnerships in key areas of early modern European research, foster new cross-disciplinary connections and nurture the next generation of researchers in related disciplines.”

The Network’s research agenda focuses on five key areas: cultural memory; social fabric; intellectual formations in science, medicine and philosophy; early European/Australasian connections; and religion and spirituality. Its membership includes representatives from universities, industry and the wider community, including cultural heritage organisations.

Since its establishment two-and-a-half years ago, NEER has been involved in several important events, including as host of an international conference called *Networks, communities and continuities: Europe 400-1850* in Perth in July this year and a meeting of the Cooperative for the Advancement of Research through a Medieval European Network (CARMEN) to be held in Prato, Italy in September 2007.

Among NEER’s achievements during its short history, Dr Scott counts:

- establishing a collaborative software environment
- establishing two publication series
- funding 19 events and 14 research clusters
- publishing six books
- sponsoring visits of six international researchers to Australia, who contributed to high-level symposia, postgraduate training and community education
- making progress towards establishing a digital research repository
- substantially increasing the number of Network participants, who include established researchers, postgraduates and international participants.

Dr Scott says NEER’s long-term challenges include positioning itself as the key networking facilitator for early European research in the Asia-Pacific region and promoting Australian and New Zealand involvement in collaborative projects and funding applications with European centres and research groups.

For more information, visit www.neer.arts.uwa.edu.au.

■ Branching out

In 2006, NEER introduced a seed-funding scheme for research clusters working towards collaborative research outcomes consistent with NEER’s aims.

One of these clusters is the British Enlightenment Research Network (BERN), convened by Dr Mike Davis from the Cradle Coast Campus of the University of Tasmania, where he plans to host a range of events, such as public lectures, symposia and workshops.

“BERN represents a new approach to historical research and demonstrates the global reach and capacity of regional universities to be at the hub of international research and intellectual exchange,” Dr Davis says.

“Our core business is to develop Australia’s research capacity in the field of British Enlightenment. Our innovative approach to the research involves constructing competitive team-based projects in various ‘nodes’ of study, including politics, medicine, philosophy, literature, law, culture and religion.”

As part of the BERN agenda, an international symposium on the 1790s—a foundation period in the birth of modernity—will be held at Cradle Coast in September 2007. Three of the world’s leading humanities scholars have committed to the symposium. They are Professor John Barrell, the University of York; Professor Gregory Claeys, Royal Holloway College, London; and ARC Professorial Fellow Cassandra Pybus, The University of Sydney.

“It is a rare opportunity in Australia to have scholars of this calibre convened at the same time and place,” Dr Davis says.

“The symposium will mark the beginning of BERN achieving a broader goal to bring together a team of international scholars to undertake the largest ever assessment of the historical significance of the 1790s to the birth of modernity.”

For more information, visit www.utas.edu.au/history_classics/bern