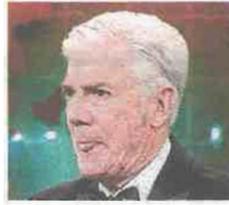




Sydney COVID-19 cluster grows

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A class of their own

For most students, 2020 - marked by disruption, home schooling and stress - will be a year to forget. But two of the ACT's brightest managed to turn adversity to opportunity as they scored some of the highest university entrance scores in the country.

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Nada Vidyattama of Narrabundah College and Jamie Boyd of Dickson College who both achieved ATARs above 99. Picture: Elesa Kurtz



Students rise to COVID challenge to achieve ATAR of 99

Sarah Lansdown

THEIR final year of school was tossed upside down thanks to a pandemic, but these year 12 students managed to weather the storm and excel in their studies.

Jamie Boyd of Dickson College and Nada Vidyattama of Narrabundah College discovered on Wednesday they had achieved an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) of 99 and 99.65 respectively. The maximum rank was 99.95.

Nada never imagined she would achieve a rank that high during such a disorienting year.

"It felt a bit unreal. I knew I could do well but I thought that I'd be getting 97 or 98 at most," she said.

Nada found it difficult at times to stay on track as time became a blur during the period of remote learning.

"Sometimes it felt like I was stumbling through everything and trying to stay afloat," she said.

Nada managed to keep a balance in her life by volunteering in the Narrabundah Interact Club and the stu-

dent governance group as well as playing badminton and holding down a casual pharmacy job.

Going into year 11, some people urged her to load up on high-scaling subjects, like high-level maths, physics and chemistry.

Instead she chose a diverse range of subjects, including beginning Chinese

and biology, which was something she'd encourage other students starting year 11 to do.

"Pair high-scaling subjects with something you like so you don't get too burnt out too soon," she said.

"Trust yourself rather than be pressured to do something you don't enjoy and won't work out."

Jamie said having to pare back on music and theatre commitments during the pandemic allowed them to put more time into assignments, saying: "I like doing creative responses to science assignments and things like that.

They put their academic success down to having a supportive and high-achiev-

ing friendship group and an inspiring physics teacher in Chris Hammerer.

Jamie was able to express their creative side in two Canberra Repertory Society productions this year, *Grapes of Wrath* and *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and also played violin with the Canberra Youth Orchestra.

The ATAR is usually used by universities to select students for undergraduate courses, however, this year because of the pandemic universities gave many early offers based on year 11 results from August.

Nada knew she had an early offer to Australian National University for a flexible double degree in sciences and arts and social sciences but maintained her focus nonetheless.

"I wanted to stay on top of everything and do my best in my subjects until the very end," she said.

Jamie was waiting to be accepted into a bachelor of philosophy, which was a flexible, research-driven degree at the ANU.

It would give them a taste of the world of academic research but could also open

up opportunities to pursue science communication.

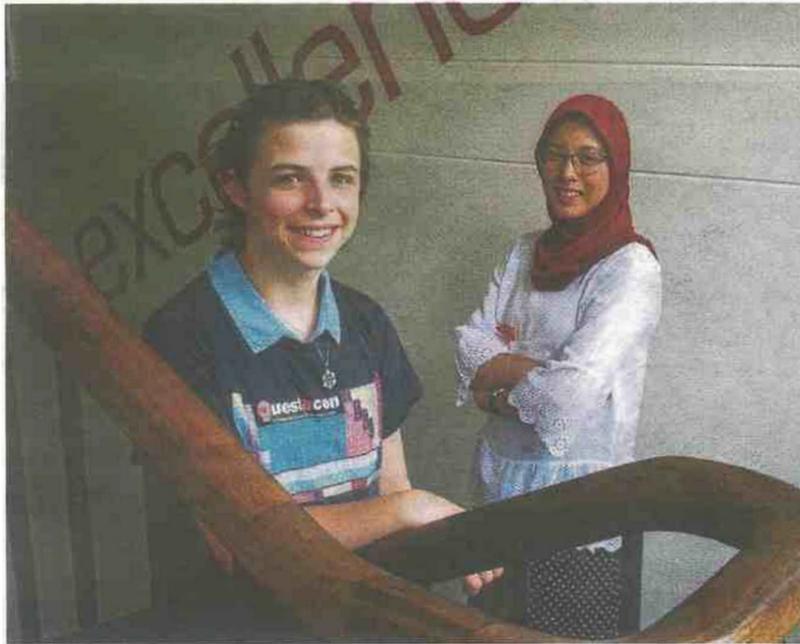
This year 4497 ACT students completed a senior secondary education program. Of this 2828 or 63 per cent of the cohort received an ATAR.

A total of 177 students included an extension course at a university on their certificate. Meanwhile, 1583 students were awarded a vocational qualification and 271 students underwent an Australian School Based Apprenticeship.

New courses completed for the first time included data science, robotics and mechatronics, networking and security, design and emerging technologies and Indigenous culture and languages.

Executive director of the Board of Senior Secondary Studies Martin Watson said the ACT education community had demonstrated remarkable persistence and flexibility in the face of adversity.

"It has been such a privilege for me and the team to work in partnership with them in support of our young people through these trying times," he said.



Dickson College's Jamie Boyd and Narrabundah College's Nada Vidyattama.