**Federalism in Australia**
*Chief Investigator: Dr AJ Brown*

**Brief Description:**
This project represents a program of research into federalism, regionalism and forces of stability and change in the structure of Australia's political institutions. Federalism and regionalism are intrinsically linked, both in international political theory, Australia's current constitutional traditions, and the day-to-day practice of politics and public policy. The aims are to undertake and present the highest quality research into the social, economic and political roots of Australian federalism, and likely or desirable directions for federalism to evolve in response to the challenges of the 21st century. It incorporates a number of interlinked projects, one of which is described below:

**Towards sustainable regional institutions: the nature, role and governance implications of contemporary Australian regionalism.** Subnational regionalism presents an enduring dilemma for the evolution of Australian public institutions. In response to globalisation, regionalism has returned to the fore in economic, environmental and social policy, renewing questions about how legitimate, durable regional institutions are to be fostered. Federalism has long provided one basis, but Australia's static number of states, historical weakness in local government and uncertainties about decentralisation have combined to restrict options and render a lasting response elusive. This project will extend regional governance research with a first-ever, empirically-based picture of regionalism's role in Australian political culture and meaning for regional institutional design.

This project is the first-ever national description of Australian regionalism, using insights from political and social science, constitutional theory and public administration. Built on successful pilots, this research will equip government, civil society, development agencies and regional policymakers with a region-by-region picture of the links between spatial variations in political culture, civic trust, social capital and challenges of regional institutional design. This new picture of Australian regional attitudes, expectations and possibilities will contribute directly to national environmental sustainability, sustainable urban and regional development, revitalised regional communities and a stronger social and economic fabric.

**Access to justice without lawyers: understanding legal self-help in Australia**
*Chief Investigators: Professor Jeff Giddings, Associate Professor Michael Robertson*

**Brief Description:**
This empirical study focuses on the contemporary phenomenon of legal self-help, which is an alternative means by which citizens attempt to gain access to justice in Australia. Presently, it is not known what factors facilitate or frustrate effective self-help legal work. This study will directly address and provide answers to the question of when is it reasonable, or not reasonable, to expect citizens to service their own legal needs, and why this may be so.

**How do Indigenous sentencing courts in New South Wales and Queensland address family violence offences and what role do Elders play in the process?**
*Chief Investigators: Dr Elena Marchetti, Professor Kathleen Daly*

**Brief Description:**
Not all Indigenous sentencing courts allow family violence offences to be heard in their jurisdiction. Queensland and New South Wales view family violence offences as being particularly suited to the Indigenous sentencing court process. This study will focus on the courts in Mt Isa, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Dubbo and Nowra to document how the Indigenous sentencing court process, which relies heavily on the knowledge and support of Elders and members of the Indigenous community, can assist in changing the behaviour of offenders of family violence. It provides the basis for a future comparative study between jurisdictions that either exclude or include family violence offences.