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### Profile in Public Integrity: Adam Graycar

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## Profiles in Public Integrity: Adam Graycar

*Adam Graycar is Professor of Public Policy at the [Australian National University](#) (ANU), where he is also Director of the [Transnational Research Institute on Corruption](#). He joined ANU in 2010 when he became the Foundation Dean of the [Australian National Institute for Public Policy](#) for two years. He recently stepped down after four years as Director of the [Research School of Social Sciences](#) at ANU.*



*Graycar acquired extensive policy experience over 22 years in the senior posts he held in Australian government at state and federal levels. He has had long experience in both academia and in government. His most recent government position was Head of the Cabinet Office of the [Government of South Australia](#).*

*Previously, Graycar was Dean of the [School of Criminal Justice](#) at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. His latest book "[Understanding and Preventing Corruption](#)," coauthored with Tim Prenzler, was published in 2013.*

### How did you first become interested in anti-corruption work?

The rule of law is a fundamental part of the glue that holds societies together. We have rules and laws, and when people manipulate these to gain power or financial advantage, massive unfairness prevails. This is the essence of corruption. In all my research in many fields I have been concerned with good governance, good process, and good policy-driven outcomes, and these are distorted when corruption comes into play. Corruption affects everybody, but it hits the poorest and most dispossessed hardest.

Overall, there was no one light-bulb moment, but rather the research gap in a wide range of public policy and social policy activity cried out for a more focused and systematic study of corruption. At Rutgers University I established a research institute on corruption studies (there was plenty of corruption in New Jersey but nobody seemed to care much), and when I came to the Australian National University I established TRIC, the

Transnational Research Institute on Corruption, to bring together researchers across the corruption studies spectrum.

**You have directed the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. How can social science research assist in the fight against corruption?**

In my four years as director (dean) of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University—one of the leading social science schools in the world—we had many leading scholars who were at the top of their fields, but did not see corruption as an area of study. I pointed out that all the social science disciplines have a role to play in corruption studies, from history, to ethics and philosophy, through to sociology, political science and economics, law and public administration, as well as development studies and international relations. Even the anthropologists who study gifts in different societies have a lot to teach us all. The study of corruption is a truly multi-disciplinary activity, but alas it often gets marked off into different silos, with detrimental effects. I stepped down as director a few weeks ago, and can now concentrate on building research capacity across the disciplines.

**In your career, you have balanced roles in both government and academia. How does your governmental experience inform your scholarship, and vice versa?**

I came to government after more than a decade in academia, and my colleagues in government would say, “What would he know, he’s only an academic.” My academic colleagues would say “Well, he’s only a bureaucrat, and doesn’t do things in depth anymore.” Over 22 years in government I held very senior positions but was always able to keep up supervision of doctoral students, give lots of guest lectures, and promote research and engage with researchers, even if I did not have the time to conduct research. Also I spent a lot of time in government teaching in-house and trying to build policy capacity. Now that I am just a simple academic, I see building bridges between government and academia as one of my most pressing tasks.

**You have trained thousands of civil servants, in Australia and abroad, on improving oversight. What is the biggest misunderstanding about corruption that you encounter from the civil servants you teach?**

The civil servants I teach fall into two camps. In many of the rich countries they see corruption as an issue that happens elsewhere, and has no relevance to their situation. In other countries there is the view that corruption is rampant and entrenched, and little can be done about it. We therefore find

two perspectives: “It’s not a problem here, so there is nothing to be done” or “It is such an intractable problem here that there is nothing to be done.” I work through this by using case studies and examples and developing classifications that apply to different settings.

**What can other countries learn from Australia’s experiences with corruption control?**

Australia ranks very well on the Transparency International Index, but it has had spectacular examples of flagrant corruption over the years. Each state has an anti-corruption agency (ACA), and they all work differently. The key for all is building the preventive mechanisms. The most famous ACA, that in the state of New South Wales, has used high-profile hearings, to bring to light bad practice, collusion, greed, and program and policy manipulation. It has been less successful at having offenders prosecuted, but has named and shamed perpetrators, and they have chosen to remove themselves from political or business activities. I am reluctant to say that the Australian way is a good model for elsewhere as lessons learned in one jurisdiction do not necessarily translate into solutions in another.

**Now that you're back in New York for some time, what are you looking forward to most? (Besides your [event with CAPI](#), of course!)**

Apart from the exchanges with academic colleagues, the great vibrancy of New York is such an alluring magnet. I am overwhelmed by the prodigious talent in the performing arts—New York is an artistic feast and the creativity never ceases to amaze me. I am also looking forward to finding some good food. I know it is here, but it takes some time to find it, and this is part of the challenge of discovery in such a huge metropolis!