



The Yarning Circle

Spring 2022 | Edition #10

Artwork by Chris Edward (2010)
Swimmy Creek [Mixed media on Latvian
linen 100cm x 145cm Western Sydney
University Art Collection Image in
Western Red].

Acknowledgement

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support for its work in their lands in Greater Western Sydney and beyond.

Disclaimers

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following magazine may contain images or names of deceased persons.

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Blak Douglas. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

Western Sydney University Alumni, Blak Douglas, wins the 2022 Archibald Prize

Western would like to congratulate our alumni Blak Douglas, who has been named the winner of the highly prestigious 2022 Archibald Prize. Douglas is a proud Dunghutti artist born in Blacktown on Darug Country. Douglas graduated from a Bachelor of Arts Graphic Design at Western in 1994.

For artist Blak Douglas coming first in the Archibald Prize means everything. He has previously been a finalist in this competition five times out of the seven times he has entered.

This year's Archibald prize, which has been awarded annually since 1921, saw a record number of entries from Aboriginal artists and the highest number of Aboriginal finalists across all three competitions- the Sulman Prize, Wynne Prize and the Archibald. Blak Douglas joins Vincent Namatjira who won the Archibald Prize in 2020 for his portrait of Adam Goodes.

Blak Douglas' winning portrait is titled 'Moby Dickens'.

(continued overleaf)

It was the largest entry in this year's Archibald measuring three meters by two meters. However, Douglas' artwork did not need size to make an impact.

His painting features Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens knee-deep in floodwater in her hometown of Lismore. The portrait is flanked by foreboding rain clouds, one cloud for each day the rain fell and drowned the Northern Rivers. The painting is stark and poignant and as usual with Douglas' work, full of political symbolism. The expression on Dickens' face is captivating and demonstrates her steely determination as she carries two leaky buckets representing the government's failure to respond to the disaster.

Blak Douglas said winning the Archibald was a huge achievement.

"I self-taught myself (art) out of a Penrith factory and I have worked with school kids from lower socio-economic backgrounds in Western Sydney for decades. My heart is bursting because I feel I have become a trophy for a dream they can embrace, especially in Penrith where you are expected to become a tradie or footy player. I hope I put stars in the eyes of the young", said Douglas.

Blak Douglas plans to donate a percentage of his art prize to flood relief in Lismore. He has been busy promoting his win and in between he is trying to get ready for a solo exhibition in December at the Nanda Hobbs Gallery in Sydney.

To learn more about Douglas' art please follow <https://blakdouglas.com.au/>

Upcoming events

Western Sydney University has planned a number of face-to-face and digital events in the coming months to showcase Indigenous knowledges, success and stories and empower networking and learning opportunities across all teams and Schools. All events may be subject to change.

Please follow the link for updates on Western's calendar and upcoming events:

www.westernsydney.edu.au/aboriginaland-torres-strait-islander/events

MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of The Yarning Circle, our newsletter celebrating Indigenous excellence at Western Sydney University. This presents a timely moment to reflect on the last few months, which have been packed with excitement and activities. During NAIDOC Week we proudly celebrated Indigenous culture and people through various events held across a number of our campuses. Many thanks to the teams responsible for organising the events and ensuring everyone had an enjoyable time.

On the 7th July, I was honoured to participate as part of a panel at the 2022 Universities Australia Conference in Canberra. The Indigenous Strategy panel session was chaired by Professor Barney Glover AO, Vice-Chancellor and President at Western Sydney University. My esteemed colleagues, Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM from the University of Sydney and Professor Tracey Bunda from the University of Queensland provided important contributions to the discussion, sharing their insights from decades of experience in the sector to

provide a robust discussion with valuable insights on the Indigenous Strategy. The session was very well received by all who attended. A key outcome stemming from the session was the need for UA to dedicate time in the 2023 Conference to discuss the Uluru Statement from the Heart and a voice to parliament.

I had the opportunity to represent the Vice-Chancellor at a Deans Awards Ceremony held on the 18th July, where I was honoured to present the awards to the deserving recipients in front of their family and friends. One of the highlights of the evening was the opportunity to present awards to four of our high achieving Indigenous students. I would once again like to extend my sincerest congratulations to all award recipients as you make us all very proud.

In August, the University announced Jennifer Westacott AO as the incoming Chancellor who will commence this prestigious position on the 1st January 2023. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to Ms Westacott as I look very forward to working with her in the near future. It is also pertinent that I share my sincerest gratitude to Professor Peter Shergold AC who will retire in December after 12 years of distinguished service as Chancellor. Professor Shergold has been a strong advocate for Indigenous Australians for



Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership.
Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

many years and it has been an absolute pleasure to work with him during my time at Western. A personal highlight for me was the opportunity to be on the Chancellors winning soccer team in the 2022 Chancellors Challenge with proceeds going towards Indigenous scholarships.

I trust you will all enjoy reading about the many wonderful initiatives and achievements happening across WSU in this edition.

Professor Michelle Trudgett (BA, MPS, EdD)

Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Indigenous Leadership

BOLD

conversations

Renae Coleman

The Bold Conservation segment encourages Indigenous staff and students to share their honest perspectives and opinions about key topics and current issues in order to promote discussions in a culturally safe environment.

Renae Coleman. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.



Renae Coleman is a proud Boorooberongal woman from the Darug Nation, and a mother to three boys. Renae is a Registered Midwife and was the first Indigenous student to graduate from the Bachelor of Midwifery program at Western Sydney University. She is an Associate Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery (SoNM) and the SoNM Indigenous student and school liaison. Renae has almost completed her Honours thesis called *'Becoming a midwife without falling in the gap: The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bachelor of Midwifery students'*. She is also a Board Member, Treasurer, and Social Media Lead for the Rhodanthe Lipsett Indigenous Midwifery Charitable Fund, a charitable organisation who provide scholarships to support First Nations midwives and midwifery students. Renae is also the Co Editor-in-chief of the journal *'The Practising Midwife Australia'* which launches in September this year.

In the following segment Renae offers a personal insight into the personal toll of being a First Nations academic when marking culturally unsafe assessments.

It is a great honour to have been asked to write the Bold Conversations segment for this issue. I have decided to share with you my personal reflections of being a First Nations academic, and the personal toll felt when tasked with marking culturally unsafe papers.

We have all heard our colleagues make a joke about the strain we experience during those particularly heavy marking weeks. During these times, I even find myself involuntarily editing my kids school notes. After a long day of marking, the worst is when you go to bed and start dream-marking. As a new academic, I laughed about this to my colleagues, and they would share their stories of dream-marking. Who knew it was an actual thing?

But there is another level of challenge that adds to this if you are a First Nations person, and the content you are marking is culturally incompetent, and offensive to Indigenous people. Sometimes it can be challenging to keep your professional hat on while you feel you have just been insulted. Keeping our professional hats on and providing feedback that help the student acknowledge their words, and use this experience as an opportunity for learning, personal growth and helping them commence their journey of cultural humility, can take its toll. Even if those words on the paper are not directly aimed at me, there is a sense of vicarious trauma being experienced. I guess I have chosen this topic to put a spotlight on this issue, to help non-Indigenous colleagues see through my lens, and to help support other First Nations academics experiencing this.

Very early in my midwifery training, we were introduced to vicarious trauma, to protect ourselves from harm when supporting women who have experienced trauma. Unfortunately, this can be quite common in midwifery. You never forget that harrowing scream of a mother who has just had her baby removed from her care, or the stories of childhood sexual abuse for young pregnant women in their teens, or the graphic recounts of previous birth trauma. As a midwife, I want to protect and care for the women I meet, but it is also important to protect yourself from harm. This is transferrable to supporting students at university. Helping them to unpack their own personal bias, stereotyping, and racism, is essential to build a workforce and health system that stops causing harm. Sometimes I think about where I'll be in ten years' time. Will I still be experiencing the same issues? Will I have become cold and be seen as the angry Blak woman? Will I have walked away from academia altogether? The

job of calling out and reorienting student thinking as they are guided to commence their life-long journey of cultural humility is so important. But how can do this in a way that is sustainable for our First Nations academics? How can we ensure they are not harmed in the process?

I was fortunate to have commenced my career as an academic with a deadly Wiradjuri woman, who has been my rock. During our heavy marking weeks, we would always make time for each other to sit and have a yarn about what we were experiencing. I guess this is similar to the non-Indigenous process of debriefing. But not all First Nations academics have this type of intimate support. The SoNM is currently in a very exciting time with new curriculums being accredited and mandates of embedding Indigenous content throughout the curriculum. Alison Barnes, Wiradjuri woman and Associate Lecturer is championing the movement to a strengths-based approach when embedding Indigenous content. This is such an important move for many reasons, but in relation to this article, having a strengths-based approach for content and assessments will help students write and think from a strengths-based approach, thus protecting First Nations academics. If you come across First Nations content in the subjects you teach or learn in, ask yourself if it is written from a strengths-based approach. If it is not or it could be improved, provide that feedback to the appropriate people. Cultural humility is everyone's responsibility.

To all academics, especially during those heavy marking weeks, make sure you take time for yourself and your wellbeing. As a mum of three, one with high care needs, I admit I find this challenging but still important. Ask for help when you need it, get out barefoot on Country, go for a bushwalk, eat nourishing food, and be kind to yourself.



Korinne Maree Bargiel's Deadly Challenge submission.



Aunty Norma, Uncle Greg, Aunty Rasme and Fiona Towney at Western Sydney University's Naidoc Week launch luncheon. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

Western celebrates NAIDOC week and Reconciliation Week

Western Sydney University recently celebrated National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

National Reconciliation Week was held from the 27th of May to the 3rd of June and saw all Western staff and students individually called to act – to call out racism, create culturally safe places, get to know local history and continue the conversation. This year, the theme for National Reconciliation Week was “Be brave. Make Change.” It challenges all to be brave and take action in their daily lives – where they live, work, play and socialise – so we can make change for the benefit of all Australians. To mark the week, the University hosted a range of activities across our campuses, including morning teas and a free film screening and Q&A session with two actors from ‘Smoke Between the Trees’ at Lithgow campus.

From the 3rd -10th of July, Western Sydney University and The Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership honoured the rich cultures and histories of Australia's Indigenous Peoples during NAIDOC Week. The stories, cultures and achievements of our country's First Nation Peoples were celebrated not only in Indigenous communities, but by all Australians. Western hosted several online and face-to-face events to celebrate this year's theme for NAIDOC Week is ‘Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!’ which calls for systemic change and continued rallying around our mob, our Elders, our communities.

To launch Western Sydney University's NAIDOC week activities the Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, together with the Parramatta South Provost, hosted a lunch at

Parramatta South Campus on Monday the 5th of July. Many Elders, executives, staff and students attended. On Wednesday the 6th of July the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education and the Campbelltown Provost hosted lunch and an Indigenous weaving workshop at Campbelltown campus. The event was a sell out and very well received by all Western staff and students. The weaving workshop was run by Dharawal women Shannon Foster. Feedback from the event was extremely positive with attendees highlighting how much they learnt from Shannon and the art of Indigenous weaving. The College also hosted a NAIDOC celebration and lunch at the Nirimba Campus where all students and staff were invited to attend and celebrate. On Thursday, the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership and Bankstown Provost organised for a local elder to deliver a traditional Welcome to Country, smoking, and didgeridoo performance at Bankstown Campus in front of the Library. The Didgeridoo player performed his unique experience with animals and stories through the didgeridoo and a Traditional Smoking Ceremony cleansing spirits, the land, and people for new beginnings. That night the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership was pleased to also host a free screening of ‘Smoke Between Trees’ at Penrith Campus. After the screening the Director and actors stayed for a question-and-answer segment and refreshments were served. To conclude the NAIDOC week celebrations the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education had planned to host a morning tea at Hawkesbury Campus on Friday, however due to unexpected wet weather conditions this event was postponed until Spring.



Western Sydney University's Naidoc Week launch luncheon. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

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Our talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff also competed in the Western Sydney University Deadly Challenge online wherein they celebrated their cultures and voices through a range of performances. Over 250 staff and students watched and voted for their favourite performances and the Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership would like to thank all who entered and congratulate the following winners:

- 1st Prize, Korinne Maree Bargie (IGNITE Indigenous Trainee in the School of Nursing and Midwifery)
- 2nd Prize, Kaiden Collins (9-year-old Wiradjuri student at St Joseph's Primary Kingswood)
- 3rd Prize, Bree Raymond (Western Sydney University student studying a Bachelor of Criminology)

Western's students and staff were also invited to test their knowledge and have fun while taking part in the annual NAIDOC Week quiz. Over 45 people answered multiple choice

quiz questions and reflected on the significance of NAIDOC week and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in short answer responses. The Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership would like to thank you for your entries and congratulate the following: Western Sydney University Staff Winners:

- 1st Prize, Chris Miller (Indigenous Engagement Project Officer)
- 2nd Prize, Adriana Ferkula-Cohen (Business Administration Trainee)
- 3rd Prize, Rebekah Brack (Student Welfare Officer)

Western Sydney University Student Winners:

- 1st Prize, Eliza Darcy (Western Sydney University student studying a Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology and Criminology))
- 2nd Prize, Shayanna McPherson (Western Sydney University student studying a Diploma in Criminal and Community Justice/Bachelor of Criminal and Community Justice)
- 3rd Prize, Sarah Loft (Western Sydney University student studying a Bachelor of Nursing)

To learn more about upcoming Indigenous events at Western Sydney University please follow

www.westernsydney.edu.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/events

The Yarning Circle sighted at the United Nations Conference of State Parties on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Earlier in the year Dr Scott Avery attended the United Nations Conference of State Parties on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in New York. It was in the conference hall where he was reading The Yarning Circle and capture the following photographs.



Photography: Dr Scott Avery.



Photography: Dr Scott Avery. (continued overleaf)

What does this year's national reconciliation the "Be Brave. Make change" mean to me?

BY ALISON BARNES

Alison Barnes is a proud Wiradjuri woman and Associate Lecturer and First Nations Student Liaison in Western's School of Nursing and Midwifery. In the following speech Alison encourages each of us to question what it is that we are doing to be brave, to make change.

Change can be hard and challenging and scary; this year's theme is a reminder that things are still not quite right, and we need to keep trying.

At work mostly I keep talking, I keep turning up. Even when people are rolling their eyes so hard, I can hear it. The more I talk about issues relating to Aboriginal people and our health the more normalised it becomes, the closer it gets to the front of peoples minds.

Water can move mountains because it is persistent. So, I make like water.

When I talk about people dying because of systemic racism they aren't random strangers. It's my cousin, my friend, my friend from school's mother, the patient I sweated blood over teaching him how to manage his diabetes.

People. Real people. It is personal and raw and real.

This isn't easy for me; it doesn't come naturally. I would really rather not be here; I am much more at home as a nurse. But it wasn't enough. I couldn't do enough. But if I can be brave in my nurse uniform, I can be brave here.

When people ask me, what reconciliation looks like to me I tell them that I want to know that so many students have been through my classroom that there is a critical mass of nurses and midwives who understand the historical context and culture and health for Aboriginal people. Nurses and midwives who are on the road to being culturally competent and for whom reflection is second nature.

Those nurses and midwives can be the change I want to see in the health system. I am taking the long view. My beautiful friend Aunty Kerry Miller refers to my job as planting seeds.

How can we be brave when it comes to acts of reconciliation?

Reconciliation can be tough. Sometimes you have to deal with people who used to be part of the problem, so you need a big heart. That takes true courage. Luckily Aboriginal people have enormous, big strong hearts. We know that humans are capable of change, learning and growth. We can be better than we were.

How can we make change? Here on campus, in our courses and classrooms? Step one is always truth telling. Truth comes from not only speaking the truth but also from hearing the truth.

The First truth is that the Aboriginal community in greater western Sydney is the largest Aboriginal community in Australia. And you need to get to know us, to speak with us and learn our stories. We are right here, in your classrooms, working beside you.

We need to commit to real change not just fiddle about with tokens. The time for tokenism is past. If we have a government who has committed to a voice to parliament, we can have anything.

We need to teach to a strength's perspective. If we don't, if we continue to tell the same sad sorry story of all the bad things about Aboriginal people then Aboriginal people become bad and bad things happen to bad people. That story becomes an ugly truth. That ugly untruth is part of the reason systemic racism persists in the health care system.

A strengths perspective also allows us as nurses and midwives to tell a new story about ourselves. We can become the kind caring compassionate clever people we always wanted to be.

We need to acknowledge the emotional burden carried by Aboriginal academics, staff and students. Always being available, answering all the questions, doing all the Acknowledgements. I didn't mention this when I originally gave this talk but Michelle commented



Alison Barnes.

afterwards about it. I'd left it out because I had thought it would be too much. That's another part of the burden – always considering every word before you speak, monitoring other people's feelings repeatedly speaking about things you would rather never even think of. Dealing with other people's racist views. I want people to have the chance to be better just because I want people to be able to be the best versions of themselves, but it is exhausting. I don't want to appear ungrateful or unkind, so I focus on the learning, I look for the lesson.

We can acknowledge Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. We could start with Aboriginal pedagogy cause those kind of academic words might be easiest to digest but I'm hoping for a day when we can honour Aboriginal people for their cultural knowledge, for the non-academic bounty they bring to the table. I'm not sure yet quite how to do that but I'm thinking about it. Elders on campus is a great start. I don't want to squish Aboriginal people into academia I want academia to expand to allow more Aboriginal people to be here and to feel valued and respected. In the same way we need Aboriginal faces at every level of the health system we need that same representation here at WSU. We do a good job here, but we could always be better. I want to think big, to imagine the very best.

It's my fantasy I can imagine anything I want. But you know what? If I want change, if I can imagine it, then it can be reality. All I have to do is be brave.

So, what are you going to do to be brave, to make change?



(Left to right) Professor Bodkin Andrews, Professor Trudgett, Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik AO, Associate Professor Sullivan and Professor Page. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

Western awards an honorary doctorate to Djaru Leader and trailblazer, Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik, AO

Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik, AO received an honorary doctorate from Western Sydney University on Thursday 28th April to commemorate her lifetime commitment to Aboriginal education and advancement. Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik has a long-standing relationship with Western Sydney University and has only recently concluded her time as one of Western Sydney University's valued Board of Trustee members.

A Djaru woman from the East Kimberley, Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik is a highly distinguished scholar specialising in Indigenous studies and culture. Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik's life and career has involved many firsts, including the first Indigenous Australian to graduate as a nurse in Darwin, the first Aboriginal to work in the higher education sector in 1975 and the first Aboriginal Australian to receive a Doctorate from Harvard University. Before serving on Western Sydney University's Board of Trustees from 2016 to 2022, she also served as Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership at Western from the 1st of July to 31st of December 2015.

Western Sydney University Chancellor, Professor Peter Shergold AC, warmly congratulates Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik and thanks her for her distinguished service to the University.

"Western was very proud to present Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik with an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of her knowledge, and contributions to academia and community. She has made significant and sustained contributions to the governance of our University, and for this we offer her our appreciation and thanks," said Professor Shergold.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, had the pleasure of awarding an Honorary Doctorate to Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik her Honorary Doctorate.

"Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik is an absolute inspiration to many and true pioneer of Indigenous Education. She has been a leading voice in advancing Indigenous education, cultures, and heritage at this University and more broadly on a national scale. She has been involved in government, university, community advisory, and review groups that have greatly influenced education and equity policies for Indigenous Australians," said Professor Trudgett.

Delighted with the acknowledgement, Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik says she wants to continue to promote education as a path to fulfilment and self-determination.

"It was a great honour to receive the Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Western Sydney University. It was a privilege to watch Western grow over the years into a University which embraces multiculturalism and actively promotes Indigenous excellence and leadership. Its ethos is second to none," said Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik.

Western Sydney University would once again like to congratulate Emeritus Professor Bin-Sallik on receiving her Honorary Doctorate of Letters and thank her for her commitment to Indigenous excellence in tertiary education.

Badanami team supports Western's Indigenous students' success

The back end of Autumn semester allowed time to stop, reflect and celebrate Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week at Western. Badanami staff attended Reconciliation Week events hosted by various campus Provost committees, these included a morning tea with Uncle Greg Simms at our Penrith Campus and colleagues coming together at our Parramatta City Campus to create a Sea of Hands, just to name a few. NAIDOC Week saw Badanami collaborate with campus Provost committees once again, as well as the Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership to hold a number of events throughout the week to Get Up! Stand Up!, Show Up!, to celebrate NAIDOC Week for 2022. The week was kicked off with a lunch held at Parramatta South Campus and followed by various morning teas, Indigenous basket weaving workshops and an Indigenous movie night held at different campuses across the week.

Now with Autumn semester behind us, everyone's attention turns to Spring semester, which has started busy for the team at Badanami. The Tutoring for Success Program has already seen a large number of students applying for tuition support this semester, with student Tutoring For Success applications up 57% in comparison to this time last semester. Badanami Student Success Officers have been reaching out to all Indigenous students via their commencement phone calls, making sure students are settling into semester and are aware of the wide range of support they have available. All Indigenous students are encouraged to reach out to Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education if they need any assistance or if they have any questions during their time here at Western.

Next time you are on campus, be sure to pop into your local Badanami Centre for a chat and get to know our staff and other Indigenous students here at Western.

Western is honoured to have Auntie Helen Riley and Uncle Chris Tobin join the Elders Advisory Committee

Western Sydney University's Elders Advisory Committee assists in building Indigenous cultural viability and knowledge across the University as they provide support to Indigenous staff and students as required. The Advisory committee is made up of highly respected community Elders who play a vital role in providing advice on matters that relate to Indigenous culture and people, and on matters impacting Greater Western Sydney's Indigenous community. In recent months Western Sydney University welcomed two Elders into the Indigenous Elders Advisory Committee. Auntie Helen Riley and Uncle Chris Tobin are committed to supporting Indigenous excellence and leadership at Western Sydney University and in our communities.

Auntie Helen is a proud Wiradjuri Elder. She continues to work with Lithgow City Council to assist the council's delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services across the region. She is a member of the Wiradjuri Elders Group and has been appointed to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee which reports directly to the Minister for the Environment and to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Auntie Helen has been involved in site awareness training on Country and rock art remedial works along with many community projects that promote a cultural of understanding of traditional practices.



Auntie Helen Riley.
Photography: Lithgow Mercury

Auntie Helen is thrilled to join the Indigenous Elders Advisory Council.

"I have been engaged with Western Sydney University for a while. I participated in the community consultation that resulted in the idea of a Community Transformation Hub for Lithgow. This resulted in one of the key themes for the Hub's activities to be Gateway to Wiradjuri – ensuring that Wiradjuri knowledge and perspectives are embedded in a vibrant and thriving future for Lithgow which sits at the gateway to the central west from Sydney and is the start of the beautiful lands and people that make up Wiradjuri Country," said Auntie Helen.

"I was also involved in gifting the name of the Hub 'Maldhan Ngurr Ngurra'. In Wiradjuri this term broadly translates to 'Working together side by side'. This name goes to the approach that the University is taking with the Hub to work in partnership with community, government and industry."

"As a Wiradjuri Elder and the Secretary of the Mingaan Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation I am excited to continue to engage with Western Sydney University to help support and advocate for our mob in tertiary education spaces. We need to keep our culture alive and keep encouraging our younger people to be interested in their culture and further education opportunities," said Auntie Helen.



Uncle Chris Tobin.
Photography: Blue Mountains Gazette.

Uncle Chris Tobin is a Darug man from Western Sydney who presently lives in the Blue Mountains. He works as an Aboriginal cultural presenter, artist and public speaker offering an insight into local Aboriginal history and heritage to all ages that wish to learn. Uncle Chris has served on a number of advisory boards, councils and committees over the years and was one of seven elected Darug representatives to meet with the State government in 2006 to establish Indigenous Land Use Agreement as part of the Native Title process. In 2017 Chris helped establish the Aboriginal room at the historic Woodford Academy and has made himself available to be there for people at the Academy's monthly open days. He also hosts art camps in the bush at Bell in the upper Blue Mountains for people who wish to connect better with the Country and learn more about local Aboriginal culture.

Uncle Chris said that he is honoured to join the Indigenous Elders Advisory Council.

"My previous engagements with Western Sydney University have been many but mostly back when it was the University of Western Sydney. I was at the Inaugural Yarramundi lecture and have attended a couple of those over the years. I have worked with Indigenous students and members of the university staff running programs attracting Indigenous students to environmental studies. I have been asked to speak to social ecology students, be part of environmental seminars and was involved with ceremonies and consultation for the millennial mound as well as other

Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan secures Western Sydney University's first Indigenous led Australian Research Council grant in a decade



Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan.
Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

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projects around the Hawkesbury and Kingswood campus. I provide Indigenous input, facilitate workshops and consultations. Most recently I engaged in a forum for Eucalyptusdom in May this year," said Uncle Chris.

"My reason for joining the Advisory Council is to assist in building a strong culture of support for our Indigenous students and staff as well as positively contributing to the overall cultural life and health of Western Sydney."

"I believe universities still wield great influence in mainstream society and feel that Western is in a strong position to shape a positive future for our people and our country by creating safe spaces on its various campuses for much needed cultural discussion, exploration and practice. Through its extensive partnerships and networks, the university is also well placed to model and encourage respectful relationships with Aboriginal people and our culture over vast areas of Western Sydney while advocating for social justice and the environmental health of our Country. Also, I get to hang out with Uncle Greg," said Uncle Chris.

Western Sydney University would once again like to thank all Elders on the Indigenous Elders Advisory Committee for their continued support, guidance and leadership in tertiary education.

Western Sydney University would like to congratulate researchers Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan and Professor Karen Soldatic on recently being awarded an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant valued at \$364,000. This grant was provided for their research project which is entitled 'Walking my path: NSW Indigenous LGBTIQ+ peoples' experiences and aspirations'. This is the first Indigenous led Australian Research Council grant secured by Western Sydney University in a decade.

Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan's and Professor Karen Soldatic's project will seek to inform the development of culturally and gender/sexuality appropriate service provision and promote social cohesion and community (re)connections through engagement with community, economy, and culture. In collaboration with local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, including project partner BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation, this project will create new knowledge about the key events and experiences shaping Indigenous gender/sexuality diverse peoples' immediate needs and longer-term aspirations in New South Wales. Finding out more about the lived experiences and needs of Indigenous gender and sexuality diverse peoples will provide project partners with invaluable information that will assist their efforts to provide appropriate services; advocate for changes in government and non-government policies; provide robust evidence to support their efforts to obtain funding to meet the needs of Indigenous gender/sexuality diverse peoples in NSW; provide information that will demonstrate community

diversity and the need for inclusion that will assist the partner organisation's work in Indigenous communities.

Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan, Associate Dean (Indigenous Education) in the School of Social Sciences, is incredibly proud to have been awarded the grant.

"Being awarded this grant provides us the opportunity to continue to work with our community partner, BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation to build evidence-based service models, to inform and advocate for policy change and development, and to celebrate and promote the diversity of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ people in NSW. It is very exciting to embark on this project, serving Indigenous LGBTIQ+ peoples is both an honour and a privilege, the team cannot wait to start," said Associate Professor Sullivan.

Professor Brian Stout, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, said he is delighted to see that this important project has received such a high level of funding.

"I congratulate Associate Professor Sullivan and Professor Soldatic on their success. The School of Social Sciences is immensely proud to be the recipient of this grant and we comment Associate Professor Sullivan for her leadership in Indigenous research in the School, the university and the sector," said Professor Stout.

Western Sydney University would once again like to congratulate and wish Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan and Professor Karen Soldatic the best of luck on their research journey.

Students

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ACHIEVE GREAT THINGS

Seven deadly questions: Introducing Monique Du Tait

Monique one of Western's IGNITE trainees where she is a student completing a certificate with The College and employee within the Engagement and Advancement portfolio

Who are you?

My name is Monique Tait-Owens and I am grateful to be a part of the 2022 cohort of Ignite Indigenous Business Administration Trainees.

Who is your mob?

I am a proud Gumbaynggirr woman. Along the Pacific coast, the Gumbaynggirr lands stretch from the Nambucca River in the South to around the Clarence River in the North and the Great Dividing Range in the West.

What community or cultural events have you been involved in lately?

I recently graduated from and was the former School Captain at Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School. Throughout my high school journey, I was lucky enough to immerse myself into programs such as Pathways To Dreaming, NRL School to Work and the Vocal Identification Program, in partnership with KARI. In 2021, I was proud to represent my school, culture and heritage as a Master of Ceremonies for the Nanga Mai Awards, which is in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education. On the 26th of May this year, the National Rugby League's, Indigenous Round kicked off. This year's 2022 NRL Indigenous Round was delivered by DoorDash, who donated \$50,000 to the NRL's School to Work program, which supports young Indigenous Australians with work



Monique Tait-Owens and Sophie Partridge (Director, Future Student Engagement)

experience, mentoring and leadership opportunities to help them successfully complete school and transition into further study, training or employment. I was honoured to be a part of a video in collaboration with NRL S2W and Door Dash, about my transition from high school to my traineeship here at Western Sydney University, which was played on various platforms throughout Indigenous Round.

www.nrl.com/news/2022/05/28/performing-artists-dreams-in-reach-with-school2work-program/

Why did you choose to study at Western Sydney University?

The opportunity to study at Western Sydney University The College as well as be a professional staff member at Western Sydney University is an opportunity like no other. I have firsthand experience in a professional Business Administration role, whilst attaining a certificate III in Business Administration. Western truly provides opportunities for Indigenous Students to learn and succeed in an environment that promotes Indigenous excellence.

Have you faced any challenges as an Indigenous student? If so, how did you overcome them?

I am confident in who I am and my cultural identity as an Indigenous woman. However, there will be the challenges of information I don't know in regards to some of the knowledge and language of my ancestors, due to it being sadly lost or undocumented over the many years. These are the missing gaps which I find challenging as an Indigenous person. Positively, Western is now a part of my journey. Since my time here at Western, my experience as an Indigenous staff and student, has been a positive one. The support network around me is something I couldn't ask more of. The Reconciliation Week afternoon tea held at Hawkesbury Campus has been a highlight. It was empowering listening to my fellow Indigenous staff members Amelia Corr, Chris Miller and Tania Shepherd share their journey and knowledge. Western holding events like this, gives me hope that we collectively can work together as one to bridge this gap.

When you graduate from Western Sydney University what do you hope to achieve?

I don't know what the future holds for me when my 12-month traineeship is up and I complete my course at Western Sydney University the College. But what I do know, is that I will make the most of my time in this traineeship, apply myself to every opportunity, meet and listen to other people's knowledge and journeys, and grow and develop to my fullest potential. I would love to see Western in my future professional career.

You are clearly a busy person with lots of commitments, what are your top tips towards success for other Indigenous Western Sydney University students?

1. Apply yourself to every opportunity that comes your way
2. Set and aim to achieve your goals
3. Stop and celebrate your achievements
4. Be positive
5. Know that everything happens for a reason

James Whiting, Wiradjuri Business student, was the standout performer in his team's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander T20 Cup triumph over the Melbourne Stars

James Whiting is a 21 year old Wiradjuri student in his second year of a Bachelor of Business at Western Sydney University. James is a highly engaged student and has represented Western at numerous events including Indigenous Nationals in 2021. He is also undertaking the Career Trackers Indigenous Internship Program where he is developing key knowledge, skills and networks when interning at Indigenous Business Australia.

James is not only achieving success academically and professionally, but he

is also a standout on the cricket pitch. He is the Sydney Thunder Captain in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander T20 Cup. He recently demonstrated his skills in his team's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander T20 Cup triumph over the Melbourne Stars. He nailed 68 runs as his team ran down the 130-runs needed for victory in the competition staged at Albury-Wodonga.

While he celebrated Thunder's successful defence of the trophy, James said it was awesome to see Cricket Victoria join Cricket NSW in expanding the game amongst our Indigenous community.

"It was great to be in a competitive environment with both new and familiar faces because it brings us closer as a group. Cricket is a great platform to not only bring our team together, but also people of all cultural heritages. I would like to thank would like to thank Cricket NSW, Cricket Albury Wodonga, Cricket Victoria, the players, volunteers, and officials who help ensure events such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

T20 Cup are delivered successfully," said James.

When reflecting on his study, James thanks all Western staff who supported his academic journey thus far.

"If I was to start university again, I would treat it like I treat my cricket! I train hard and play hard! The biggest lesson I have learnt is patience. I used to be really impatient with my studies and it showed at the start of degree. I have worked on my patience and now really enjoying studying and attending university. I worked out study strategies that allow me to be a lot less stressed. Now I am more focussed, and my grades are improving. I now realise that changes do not happen overnight but with training and practice great things will happen," said James.

Western Sydney University would once again like to congratulate James Whiting on captaining the winning Sydney Thunder team in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander T20 Cup and wish him the best of luck in his future academic and sporting endeavours.

Matilda Harry wins Western Sydney University Academic Achievement Award

Western Sydney University offers its congratulations to Matilda Harry who was awarded the Western Sydney University Academic Achievement Award. As part of the prestigious 7NEWS Young Achiever Awards 2022, Matilda was acknowledged at a special gala on Friday, 13 May.

Professor Gregory Kolt, Dean of the School of Health Sciences, and Professor Simeon Simoff, Dean of the School of Computer, Data and Mathematical Sciences, presented the award on behalf of the University.

Matilda, who is a high achieving PhD candidate at the University and lives in the Hawkesbury, said she was incredibly proud to receive the honour.

"As a first in family young person to attend University, achieving this award

in recognition of my academic ability means a lot," said Matilda.

"For me and those who support me this award celebrates the hard work, dedication, love, and enthusiasm I put into achieving my aspirations and supporting my community."

Matilda is a student at the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University undertaking a thesis which aims to develop a best-practice mentorship framework for supporting Indigenous success. She also holds a Master of Teaching (Primary) from the University where she graduated with a GPA of 7.0 and is a Dean's Scholar, Citizen Scholar, Global Leader, and Golden Key International Leader at the University.

In recognition of her significant contributions to community and the education sector, she has received several awards including the highly prestigious Citizen Scholar Award from The Academy Awards of Excellence.

"Both of my parents were not given

the opportunity to access tertiary education, so my achievement of this award saw them beam with excitement. I cannot thank them enough for the support, guidance and advice they offer," said Matilda.

"I would also like to thank Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Professor Michelle Trudgett, Professor Susan Page, Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan, Dr Michelle Locke and Fiona Towney, who have all offered unwavering support along my academic journey from undergraduate through to my PhD."

"I wouldn't be who I am today without the mentorship and leadership of these women."

Matilda said she encourages other young people to get involved in 7NEWS Young Achiever Awards.

"It is a fantastic program which acknowledges, encourages and most importantly promotes the positive achievements of all young people in NSW and the ACT."

Staff

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S PASSIONATE INDIGENOUS STAFF

Seven deadly questions: Introducing Adrian Atkins

Who are you?

My name is Adrian Atkins, and I am a proud Gorrie man of the Anaiwan nation. I was born in Sydney on the land of the Eora peoples, grew up in Coraki on Bundjalung country, and worked and studied on Ngugi, Birrigubba Jiru and Ngunnawal country. I am the third generation of my family to have lived in Redfern, my mother was born in Redfern and my grandparents who once resided in a cottage in Rosehill Street where the present-day Native Title Services Corp building stands today.

Who is your mob?

My mob are the Anaiwan people from present day New England tablelands region encompassing Armidale, Walcha, Tingha, Inverell etc. Whilst I was born here is Sydney, I identify and maintain connections to family and country – this usually means a lot of driving on holidays etc. As I have matrilineal and patrilineal Anaiwan ancestors, family history is a big topic of discussion within the family particularly on the how and why we ended up where we did.

What community/cultural events have you been involved in lately?

A few weeks ago, I attended the formal handover of the Bulagaranda (Mt Yarrowyck) Aboriginal Area by the NSW Government to the Anaiwan people outside Armidale. The land encompasses men's sites, women's sites, rock art, nature walks etc. It was a proud and sad moment for my family: proud that after twenty-three years of negotiations it was finally over and sad because of the many Elders and family who did not live to see its fruition.

Prior to joining the Badanami team, I was working in the Reunification Team at Link-Up NSW where I was working with members of the Stolen Generation in researching, tracing, and locating their



Adrian Atkins.

family, community, and country. I am forever thankful for the opportunity to 'road-test' my research skills.

What is your current position at Western Sydney University and how long have you worked at the University?

I am a Student Success Officer in the Badanami Centre and I am based on the Bankstown Campus. I have been in this role for six months. Previously, I was a Student Engagement Officer in the Mana Yura Student Support Team (2017-2020), Student Support Services, and a Student and Academic Support Officer in the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry (SOPHI) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) (2005-2017) at the University of Sydney.

Have you always aspired to work in tertiary education?

Although I was not a strong student in senior high school, I did return to studies as a mature age student and successfully complete a bridging course to entry tertiary studies in Queensland before starting a law degree at the ANU the following year. At the time I was too old for most scholarships aimed at school leavers, so I was obliged to find work in order to support myself whilst studying. It was not until I moved back to Sydney that I started to get a better idea of what I really wanted to study. I dropped the law degree and found myself studying history majoring in Australian Social History (there was no Aboriginal Studies on offer at that time) after studying Asian Studies and Government in search Imperial Studies. That was the plan,

instead I met my wife in Indian Studies and had the first of our two children.

Despite the struggles I faced during my school years, I was fortunate to have supportive teachers, friends, and mentors along the way. In primary school my teacher in Year 3, Bob King, with the help of Ida Rhodes, the first AEA employed in the Northern Rivers, and Elaine Frost, the school librarian, introduced me to the school library and the Dewey Decimal System. At high school, Glen Cook, the first AEA at Lismore High, was instrumental in my completing secondary schooling.

Later I met Uncle Chicka Dixon, Stan McBride and John Newfong who became both my friends and mentors, showing me that there was more than one path to knowledge and how you make your way in life. Among other things, Uncle Chicka advised "all you need is two skinny ankles and a lot of cheek!" They encouraged my interest in history, politics and identity.

Years later, I worked briefly for Coca Cola and learnt their maxim "If your client can't ask you a question, you're not doing your job!" In the tertiary sector, I have applied it to my work in student services, therein building a good rapport with students and faculty colleagues: it breaks down barriers, frees up communication and achieves a better result.

What is your favourite thing about working at Western Sydney University?

The Elders at Western Sydney is a massive plus, I have met a few now and I think they are pretty special people to work with. Their diversity coupled with that of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and student body that reflects our families, communities, and history. It is a great source of inspiration and motivation.

Do you have any advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wanting to work at Western Sydney University?

There is always something going on at the University study-wise and workwise. I was late in discovering the benefits of secondments at Sydney University, I now realise that I was missing out! The opportunity to learn and work with different people and workplaces opened my eyes to new knowledge and experience. So keep it interesting, keep it fresh!

Dr Sarah Kennedy wins the School of Health Science's Research Impact Competition

Western would also like to congratulate Dr Sarah Kennedy who recently won Western Sydney University's School of Health Science's Research Impact Competition. To compete in this competition, she was required to present her research in just five minutes using a single PowerPoint slide.

Her presentation summarised the impact of a school-based resistance training program, *Resistance Training for Teens*, which was delivered across New South Wales secondary schools. This training program saw teachers upskilled to deliver the program and provided with resources to aid delivery. Almost half of all secondary

schools in New South Wales now have a teacher trained to deliver the program, which equates to approximately 10,000 reached by the program. These students have improved their muscular fitness, their resistance training skill competency, and their resistance training self-efficacy. The next steps for Dr Kennedy's research are to move into the next phase of implementation – funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council partnership grant, working with the New South Wales Department of Education and New South Wales Health. This will strive to improve the program and get it out to more students and teachers in more schools, to further enhance impact.

We wish Dr Kennedy the best of luck in Western's Research Impact Competition University final which will be held later in the year where she will compete against researchers from other schools and institutes in the competition.

Staff Updates

Western Sydney University would like to congratulate Michelle Halliday on recently being appointed as an Indigenous Education Officer.

The University would also like to congratulate Gabby Talbot-Mundine on her recent transition from the Future Student Engagement Team to the Indigenous Employment Co-ordinator position in the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership.

Western Sydney University would also like to thank all of the Indigenous staff who continuously demonstrate excellence and the Universities values ensuring Western is the place to be.

Research

CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH AT WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Western Sydney University is very proud of our Indigenous academics and higher degree research students. Please read about some of their outstanding research that was completed late last year and this year.

Corrinne Sullivan, Duy Tran, William Trewlynn, Kim Spurway, John Leha, Linda Briskman & Karen Soldatić. (2022). 'We Want to Help but We Don't Know What to Do': Service Providers Working with Indigenous LGBTIQ+ Youth in Australia. *Sexes*, 3(2), p.308-324. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sexes3020024>

Corrinne Sullivan, Georgia Coe, Kim Spurway, Linda Briskman, William Trewlynn, John Leha & Karen Soldatić. (2022). Mobility Tactics: Young LGBTIQ+ Indigenous Australians' Belonging and Connectedness. *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 6(1), 36064. <https://www.journalofglobalindigeneity.com/article/36064.pdf>

Linda Briskman, **Corrinne Sullivan**, Kim Spurway, John Leha, William Trewlynn & Karen Soldatić. (2022). (Re) Claiming Health: The Human Rights of Young LGBTIQ+ Indigenous People in Australia. *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 24(1), p.35-47. <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2469/2022/06/briskman.pdf>

Michelle Locke, **Michelle Trudgett** & **Susan Page**. (2022). Beyond the doctorate: Exploring Indigenous Early Career Research trajectories. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 51(1), 1-16. <https://ajie.atsis.uq.edu.au/ajie/article/view/13/273>

Rhonda Povey, **Michelle Trudgett**, **Susan Page**, **Michelle Lea Locke** & **Matilda Harry**. (2022). Raising an Indigenous academic community: a strength based approach to Indigenous early career mentoring in higher education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00542-3>

Stacey Kim Coates, **Michelle Trudgett** & **Susan Page**. (2022). Ain't No Mountain High Enough: Perceived Impact of Senior Indigenous Leadership on Aspiring of Indigenous Academics within Australian Universities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2068186>

Stacey Kim Coates, **Michelle Trudgett** & **Susan Page**. (2022). Indigenous Institutional Theory: A New Theoretical Framework and Methodological Tool. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00533-4>

Elders

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S ELDERS

Seven deadly questions: Uncle Harry of Western's Elders Advisory Committee

Please tell us about yourself.

My name is Harry Allie, I was born and grew up in the Charters Towers, Townsville area. I have now lived in Sydney for 32 years and I enjoy working with the community across Western Sydney. Earlier in my life, I was inspired to join the Australian Defence Forces by my uncles and an aunt who served in the services during WWII. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in 1966 at Townsville North Queensland and served for 23 years at a number of units throughout Australia, the US, and Malaysia. Then I worked in the Defence Industry for 11 years, before joining the Commonwealth Public Service for a further seven years.

I still hold many community positions at the local and state level, and I am lucky enough to have been awarded one of five prestigious Elders Awards by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council for my contribution to higher Indigenous education in Australia. I am the chair of the Indigenous Veterans Ceremony Committee and a member of the Canterbury-Bankstown Council Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee. I am passionate about mentoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander younger generations and have had a voice in shaping the national government policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment. I advocate for equality and the removal of all discrimination.

Who is your mob, and where are you from?

I am a proud descendant of the Gudjala Tribal group in North Queensland.

What does it mean to be an Elder?

Firstly, I am honoured to be recognised as an Elder by community. It is our responsibility to advocate for our communities and share our stories,



Uncle Harry Allie. Photography: Royal Australian Air Force.

cultures and knowledge with the next generation. Being an Elder is a privilege and a huge responsibility.

Who inspires you?

My Mother, Father and whole family inspire me as they provided unconditional love and support throughout my life. Throughout hard times they had strength and resilience. My Mother always taught me to follow my dreams and to push myself to become the best I can be. Growing up in Charters Towers at the time a lot of Aboriginal men and young people worked on the cattle stations, but my Mother always supported me to follow my goals. My family supported my enlistment in the Royal Australian Air Force, and I will forever be grateful for the encouragement they provided me.

Why have you joined the Elder's Advisory Committee of Western Sydney University?

Living in Sydney for the last 32 years of my life has allowed me to develop some really valuable community connections. I have met incredible mob across Greater Western Sydney and am blessed to be recognised as an Elder and knowledge holder in the region. When I was first asked to join the Elder's Advisory Committee of Western Sydney University I was honoured. Being an active voice on this committee has allowed me to

connect with other highly prestigious Elders and also it has empowered me to assist Western to achieve their vision which is outlined in their 2020-2025 Indigenous Strategy.

What are your hopes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in years to come?

I hope all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equitable access to quality education. I hope our communities become more aware of opportunities available to them. There is a lot of opportunities and support available to our mob, for example Western Sydney University offers a lot of assistance and many different pathways for our mob that support many in tertiary education.

Do you have any advice for the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are striving to make change in community?

Everyone has an incredible story, so my advice is to own your journey. Stay strong in your culture and continue to build community connections. No matter what career pathway you choose, apply yourself and do it in best possible way! Be passionate. Get inspired. Stay respectful. Connect to Country.

Alumni

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S INDIGENOUS ALUMNI

Western Sydney University celebrates the next generation of Indigenous doctors

Western Sydney University is delighted to celebrate a group of medical students – Amanda Cooksley-Davis, Brandon Kober-Brown, Kate Jeffery, Mikaela Hartley, and Shayne Miller – who proudly donned the Indigenous sash to cross the stage at their recent graduation ceremony.

Distinguished Professor Annemarie Hennessy AM, Dean of the School of Medicine, said the inspiring students represent the next generation of Indigenous doctors and medical professionals.

“Western Sydney University is incredibly proud to support Indigenous students to achieve their aspirations in the field of medicine,” said Distinguished Professor Hennessy.

“Amanda, Brandon, Kate, Mikaela, and Shayne have made unique and valued contributions as students, and we look forward to watching them excel in their careers.”

A proud Aboriginal man from the Dja Dja Wurrung clan, Brandon Kober-Brown graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery – in future to be known as the Doctor of Medicine – alongside his peers.

Currently working as a medical intern at Royal North Shore Hospital, Brandon is preparing to sit the General Practice college (RACGP) entrance exam with hopes of becoming a GP.

“Growing up in regional New South Wales, I saw firsthand the health deficit faced by people in rural and remote areas. If you needed to see a specialist medical doctor, you would often need to travel to Orange or even Sydney or Dubbo. Something I thought was unacceptable,” said Brandon.

“I consider myself a pragmatic person, and I am a big believer in the phrase ‘if you want something done, do it yourself’. And that’s what I did! I have decided that



Indigenous medical graduates.
Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

GP is the career path that I am going to go down. I believe that GPs can make a genuine difference in their communities and the health of their patients.”

Attending University wasn’t always a pathway that Brandon considered, but after completing work experience at Aboriginal Medical Service during his final year of high school, he realised the positive impact a culturally safe health environment can have on communities.

“I felt a real sense of commitment to studying medicine because I wanted to do good in the world and leave it a better place for the next generation. This was multifactorial and included the need to help Aboriginal people, address the health crisis that rural and remote Australians face, and I wanted to challenge myself,” he said.

“Having First Nations doctors is critically important to the Australian health system, and it promotes a culturally safe environment and fosters a sense of community. Currently, in Australia, there is population parity in medical student numbers. But only about 400 First Nations doctors are registered in Australia, far from population parity. Thus, the continued injection of First Nations doctors is so important to help close the gap and ensure we don’t go backwards.”

Brandon said studying medicine wouldn’t have been possible without essential support including from his closest friends. He also was the proud recipient of the Brenton Banfield Medical Scholarship and School of Medicine Rural Accommodation Scholarship during his studies.

“I think that higher education is a holistic experience. It’s not just about coming out on the other side and having a fancy piece of paper. It’s the journey you go through



Brandon Kober-Brown.
Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

to get to that point. Studying at University teaches you how to live in the “real world”. It’s about the connections and friendships you make along the way, and that’s just as important as the degree at the end.”

“Finishing medicine has been my greatest achievement in life thus far, and it was the culmination of years of sacrifices, concessions, hard work, and academic success. The day I finished, I remember saying to myself, ‘I did it.’”

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership, said Indigenous doctors contribute greatly to our society and more needs to be done to support their ambitions.

“Indigenous doctors bring with them their unique cultural knowledge and understanding to our health system,” said Professor Trudgett.

“Their perspectives and care can help contribute to more positive health outcomes for Indigenous people, and we are very proud of the achievements of this group of exemplary graduates.”

During the University’s April ceremonies, 97 Indigenous students graduated from a variety of disciplines.

The University also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters to Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik AO – a Djaru Elder and pioneer for Indigenous participation in higher education.

“Western Sydney University is committed to supporting Indigenous success and increasing Indigenous representation in education, research and leadership roles,” added Professor Trudgett.

Read more about the University’s [Indigenous Strategy 2020-2025](#) here.

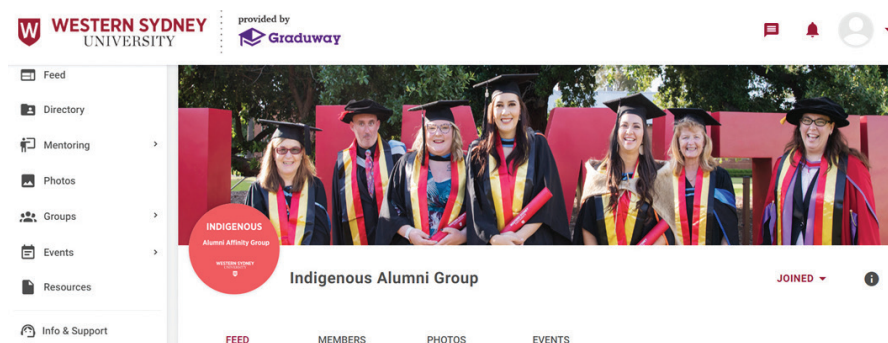
Alumni

Launching Western's Indigenous Alumni Affinity Group

Western Sydney University is committed to empowering and supporting Indigenous students as they study and graduate from the degrees of their choice. Western is proud of our incredible community of more than 1,470 Indigenous alumni who have graduated from a variety of degrees across the University's range of schools. Since graduating, our Indigenous alumni have made significant global impact – from teaching to social work to medicine to engineering to showing their generous support for life-changing research.

As noted in Western Sydney University's 2020-2025 Indigenous Strategy, we are committed to further developing relationships with our Indigenous alumni and encouraging them to maintain lifelong relationships with the University. A key strategic action set out in the strategy was to establish an Indigenous Alumni Network and to establish new communication channels to provide regular information to the network.

Western Sydney University is extremely excited to announce that have established our own Indigenous Alumni Group to make it easier for our Indigenous alumni community to



Western's Indigenous Alumni Affinity Group Gradway platform.

connect. As an exclusive member of this group, Indigenous alumni will be able to enhance their social network, share experiences with fellow alumni, create professional opportunities, organise local events, and spark new possibilities for existing students. The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership is utilising the Gradway platform to share some successes from the past years and introduce our Indigenous Strategy 2020 – 2025, which reflects the renewed commitment to Indigenous Australians in research, employment, students and opportunities.

Additionally, the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership is pleased to announce that an official launch event will be held mid-October for the Indigenous Alumni Affinity Group. This will be a great networking event for alumni with prestigious guest speakers presenting, and canapes and drinks being served.

Stacey Kim Coates, Manager of Indigenous Employment, said that at Western our Indigenous alumni do not stop learning when they graduate.

“Long after graduation our Indigenous alumni continue to be a part of our University community. I encourage all Indigenous alumni to join the network as you may be surprised by the range of graduate resources and benefits to help build your career, develop new skills, grow your networks, expand your thinking, and continue your passion for learning,” said Stacey Kim Coates.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, said that Western's Indigenous Alumni Group is a very exciting initiative.

“For those graduates who would like to take their career further there has never been a better time to improve your career prospects or pursue a passion. Western has a wide range of postgraduate study options that provide access to industry networks, real-world experience and support that will allow you to take the next step in your career, upskill or change directions to open future opportunities,” said Professor Trudgett.

To learn more about Western's opportunities for alumni please follow: www.westernsydney.edu.au/alumni



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