



The Yarning Circle

Autumn 2025 | Edition #20

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 and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support for its work in their lands in Greater Western Sydney and beyond.

Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the University or the organisation to which the authors are affiliated. Statements of fact are believed to be true as at the date of publication, and the University accepts no liability for the truth or accuracy of such statements.

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

Publication Enquiries

Please contact Matilda Harry at M.Harry@westernsydney.edu.au

Western's Indigenous Students take the win at the second annual Indigenous Students versus Staff Basketball Match

On Friday 22nd November Western Sydney University's second annual Indigenous Student versus Staff Basketball Match took place at the Hills Basketball Stadium. It was an exciting match that saw Western's very talented Indigenous student team secure the win.

The event was much more than just a competition, it was a day of coming together and building valuable connections that foster community spirit and strengthen bonds between students, staff and our broader community. The event was well attended with Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Professor Michelle Trudgett, leading the cheer squad alongside the many community members in the grandstands. The staff team included Western's Director of Indigenous Research Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Badanami Director Josh Mason, Dean School of Social Sciences Professor Brian Stout, and many others from across the University. The Indigenous student team included undergraduate and post-graduate students from a range of schools and disciplines.



Caleb Kennedy and Tyson Binge jumping to start the match. Photography: Mike de Vera.

Despite a rigorous effort by the staff, students took a fast lead with the match score being 12-2 before anyone got the chance to look at the score board. In the second and third quarters the scores began to even out before the students came home strong in the last quarter with the final score being 59-48.

The referees were in awe of each team's sporting performances and camaraderie. They were particularly impressed by Kayden Edwards' and Kristy Bell's performances and awarded them the Best and Fairest Players of the match.

The Indigenous student team was captained by Arzycki (Ace) De Vera, a Doctor of Medicine student.

(continued overleaf)



Indigenous Student and Staff basketball teams and spectators. Photography: Mike de Vera.

“I was given an incredible opportunity to captain the student team for the 2024 Indigenous Students versus Staff Basketball Match. It was an absolutely deadly event where we all got to reconnect with mob and show our competitive sides on the court. The energy from everyone on the sidelines was incredible and it was great to see everyone involved and participating within each team. Both teams ended up playing extremely well, but the students had the edge and managed to scrape by with the win! Community has always been a strong part of Western’s culture and I would like to thank everyone who came to watch and cheer us on, including the Elders, , as well as family and friends. I will be looking forward to taking another win with the students in the next game,” said Ace De Vera.

Kristy Bell, captain of the staff team and Student Success Officer in the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education on Campbelltown Campus, said she felt honoured to captain the staff team and play alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues who are passionate about supporting Indigenous success at Western.

“For the second year the Indigenous staff took to the basketball court for an intense match against our amazing students. The Indigenous student team was too strong on the day, however the score is getting closer and I think the staff team can get the win next year to redeem ourselves. I have always loved being a part of these events as they allow staff to have

another level of engagement with our students, away from campus and the pressures of university life. I would like to thank all my team mates for getting out there and giving the students a run, to the students, congratulations and enjoy the win as the staff are coming closer. To Professor Trudgett and her team, thank you for organising and putting on such a fantastic event, if it was not for you and your team events like this do not happen,” said Kristy Bell.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Indigenous Leadership, would like to congratulate the Indigenous student team and thank everyone who contributed to what was a great game.



Professor Michelle Trudgett.
Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 20th edition of *The Yarning Circle*. This marks an incredible moment in time as the newsletter is now five years old. I must acknowledge the hard work of Matilda Harry who has arranged every edition since its inception. Also, a massive thanks goes to everyone who has contributed to this magazine over the years and also to our readers. Together we work to ensure that you stay informed about Indigenous excellence at Western Sydney University.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all commencing and returning Indigenous students. The dedicated team at Badanami – Centre for Indigenous Education is here to offer you exceptional advice and the resources to help you succeed. I strongly encourage you to connect with the Badanami team early in the year to discuss how they can collaborate with you on your unique learning journey.

I also want to extend a special welcome back to our Indigenous staff and express my gratitude for your ongoing dedication to Western Sydney University. Together,

we are making meaningful impacts in our communities. I am confident that 2025 will bring many moments of celebration and achievement for Indigenous people at Western Sydney University – stories that will undoubtedly be shared in future editions of *The Yarning Circle*.

Over the next couple of months, we have a number of exciting events coming up. I’m looking particularly forward to the official opening of the First Peoples Garden on our Campbelltown Campus, the Indigenous students versus staff soccer match, the first Elders Advisory Committee meeting of the year and the Restoring Country ceremony for the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. There are so many wonderful things happening at Western Sydney University, I encourage everyone to get involved and would like to thank the dedicated team who are working hard to ensure that we continue to make a real impact for our communities.

**Professor Michelle Trudgett
(BA, MPS, EdD)**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and
Vice-President Indigenous Leadership

BOLD

conversations

Matthew Taylor, Badanami

The Bold Conservation segment encourages Indigenous staff and students to share their ideas to promote discussions in a culturally safe environment. They reflect the authors personal views and not that of the University.

Matthew Taylor.



Matthew Taylor is a Kamilaroi man and current Badanami Student Success Officer at Parramatta South (Burramattagal land). His family comes from a small mission town Walhallow outside of Quirindi NSW on Kamilaroi land. Matt has been living on Gadigal and Dharug land for the past 8 years to complete his degree and start his career. After battling, and winning, a fight with cancer during his HSC, Matt went on to complete his Chemistry degree at UNSW and getting involved extensively with Nura Gili, the Indigenous Support who helped Matt thrive throughout his degree. Matt is passionate about supporting, advocating for, and opening opportunities for the next generation of Indigenous students at Western Sydney University.

In the following segment, Matt discusses the importance of making time for what's most important by automating as much of your tedious and repetitive work as possible. In Matt's case, this additional time is spent supporting Indigenous Students at Western Sydney University and upskilling to be better prepared for supporting students.

Supporting Indigenous students in Higher Education requires commitment to their success. To ensure their success, there must be skilled support staff who can dedicate time and effort for what is most important and not get bogged down with administrative burden. We often spend most of our mental energy and time on administrative errands, rather than focusing on the work that would benefit from your brain power.

Imagine if we could create more time in our day to focus on meaningful work, learning, upskilling, and socialising? Well, we can - by freeing ourselves from tedious repetitive tasks.

However, it requires a commitment to thinking about what takes up our time and effort, and where our time and effort should be spent. We need to spend more of our time not bogged down by emails, forms, spreadsheets, and instead spend it on work that is more meaningful and impactful.

So that's all great talking about freeing up time, but how do you achieve it? Through automating those 'administrative errands', cutting down on administrative burden, and making processes more efficient in the long run.

One way to automate your work is by using a product called Microsoft Power Automate. All Western Sydney University staff and student accounts come with free access to Power Automate. It allows you to automate almost any Microsoft software, including your emails, calendar, OneDrive files, and more. It is a powerful tool that allows you to automate repetitive tasks and workflows, making your workday more efficient and productive. It saves time, eliminates manual data entry errors, and frees schedules to focus on more meaningful and impactful work. Plus, with its user-friendly interface, even those without a technical background can create automated workflows with ease.

One way I use automation is by creating and logging my email interactions with students by using 'mail merge', which is a functionality built right into Outlook. By spending less time on sending emails, I can spend more time on the content of the email such as focussing on the action items and creative elements.

Why spend hours manually logging hundreds of emails when I can have that information captured automatically? Additionally, the administrative burden could prevent you from completing tasks—if you knew you had to fill out a form hundreds of times after sending emails, you would be more hesitant to do it in the first place.

Freeing up time also allows for more upskilling. Upskilling through LinkedIn Learning (free for Western Sydney University staff and students) can help you develop both soft (interpersonal) and hard (technical) skills. Learning hard skills is a positive feedback loop: the more time you spend learning, the more tasks you can free up, which in turn gives you even more time to learn. Discovering tasks that can be automated or made more efficient is incredibly motivating. By freeing up time, you can tackle tasks that have been on the back burner.

For me, freeing up my time means connecting with students not only when things go wrong, but when things are going great - making that connection such that when there is an issue students feel comfortable coming to me for support. I have never had to tell a student I am too busy to have a chat with them.

I focus my time and efforts on what is most important by automating as much of the tedious work as possible; that is, my highest priority is always supporting Indigenous students at Western. I strive to ensure that Indigenous students at Western have a supportive and fulfilling university experience. You too can free up your time to spend it on what is most important for your role.



Western Sydney University celebrates Alexis Wright as its first Indigenous Distinguished Professor

Western Sydney University is proud to announce the conferral of the title of Distinguished Professor upon acclaimed Indigenous writer Alexis Wright, making her the University's first Indigenous academic to receive this prestigious honour.

A researcher from the Waanji People from the highlands of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, Distinguished Professor Wright was celebrated during the University's annual Professoriate Dinner, where her extraordinary contributions as a role model, activist, and researcher were acknowledged.

The title of Distinguished Professor is the highest Western Sydney University honour awarded to academics based on international influence, intellectual leadership, a commitment to excellence, and impact.



Distinguished Professor Alexis Wright.
Photography: ABC Arts, Danielle Bonica.

Distinguished Professor Wright's latest novel, *Praiseworthy*, has garnered critical acclaim, winning two of Australia's most prestigious literary awards – the Stella Prize and the Miles Franklin. The novel, published by Giramondo Publishing which is based within the University's Writing and Society Research Centre, joins her other celebrated works such as *Carpentaria*, *The Swan Book*, and *Tracker*.

In addition to her many literary achievements, Distinguished Professor Wright is a longstanding member of the University's Writing and Society Research Centre. She also lectures in the School of Humanities, specialising in Aboriginal storytelling, story-making practices, and creative writing.

Reflecting on the honour, Distinguished Professor Wright said, "I am forever grateful to Western Sydney University for their recognition and ongoing support which has helped shape my career in Australian and World literature."

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Indigenous Leadership, congratulated Professor Wright on this well-deserved recognition, which reflects her outstanding contributions to both academia and the Indigenous community.

"Distinguished Professor Wright's unwavering commitment to inspiring the next generation of scholars and her passion for literary excellence in representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are truly commendable. We look forward to the profound impact she will continue to have on the future of education and research," said Professor Trudgett.

Western was awarded a prestigious SAGE Cygnet Award for Indigenous Staff

The SAGE accreditation pathway, Cygnet Awards are the primary mechanism for institutions to report on their actions implemented in the areas of gender equity, diversity and inclusion. The reporting includes the outcomes, impact and learnings achieved as a result of those actions. The application process provided an excellent opportunity for Western to showcase the extensive work being accomplished across our divisions.

In 2024 Western was awarded two prestigious SAGE Cygnet Awards. The University's commitment to advancing gender equity, diversity and inclusion was recognised with the Cygnet Award for Academic Promotions. Additionally, under the leadership of Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor

and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership, Western was recognised for fostering Indigenous excellence and building a more inclusive and culturally safe university for the Indigenous community at Western.

This achievement reflects the ambitious goals of Western's 2020-2025 Indigenous Strategy.

The milestones celebrated in the award application include:

- Becoming the first Australian university to implement both immediate and long-term Indigenous strategies
- Meeting Indigenous employment commitments ahead of schedule
- Increasing Indigenous academic and senior leadership representation, and
- Securing \$78.5 million for a landmark Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, congratulates all staff members involved in leading this work.



"While we celebrate this milestone, we remain focused on increasing equity at the highest levels. By refining processes, removing barriers and fostering an empowering culture, we'll continue to drive progress," said Professor Williams.

To learn more about Western's journey to receiving the SAGE Cygnet Award for Indigenous Staff read the following report: <https://sciencegenderequity.org.au/application/cygnet-award-application-supporting-indigenous-staff-western-sydney-university/>

Building a Brighter Future for Indigenous Students at Western's inaugural Divisional Staff Conference

On 14th and 15th November the Division of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership hosted the inaugural Divisional Staff Conference: *Building a Brighter Future for Indigenous Students*. This two-day event focused on Indigenous student engagement and provided an opportunity for professional development, collaboration, and insightful discussions.

The first day held a packed agenda including sessions on Indigenous student retention and insights into each Badanami Centre. The highlight of the day was the student panel where staff were given the opportunity to hear directly from our Indigenous students about their experiences and journeys here at Western.

Friday kicked off with cultural weaving, before the Division participated in



The Division of the Deputy-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership with the Indigenous student panel.

sessions on AI, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence, academic success programs and decision-making exercises. Finally, attendees came together to brainstorm and strategise for the Division's 2025 Indigenous student engagement program, ensuring our efforts are inclusive, sustainable, and impactful.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership, said it was a

great opportunity to reflect on the importance of becoming a Division.

"A huge thank you to everyone who contributed, and to those who attended. The collaborative energy was inspiring, and we look forward to continuing this important work in the years ahead. I would like to also thank Tatum Kenna for her incredible graphic recordings of some of our discussions," Professor Trudgett.



Lauren Castino, Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian.

The Library launches a new Indigenous Study Smart program

Western Sydney University's Library is excited to launch a new Study Smart program with regular drop-in services at selected Badanami centres. These services will be hosted by Lauren Castino. Lauren is employed at Western as the Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian. She is a proud Gamilaroi and Wiradjuri woman, and Western alumni of the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Teaching programs. Lauren is available to help our Indigenous students gain confidence with key academic skills needed to succeed at university, including:

- researching topics and finding scholarly resources
- writing in a clear, academic style
- delivering presentations with confidence

- using AI tools effectively and ethically
- developing individualised study strategies
- accurately using different referencing styles.

From the second week of the Autumn session Lauren can be found in the Badanami Centres at Parramatta South on Monday afternoons and Campbelltown campus on Wednesday mornings. If students at other campuses would like to book in any workshops or appointments with Lauren, they can do so through the 'Contact Us' page on the Library website. There are also 'how-to' guides, bookable one-on-one appointments and a range of workshops accessible through the Study Smart section of the Library website.

"As an Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian, my goal is to ensure Western's Library is a culturally safe space for our community. I'm here to help Indigenous students and staff with academic literacy skills and accessing library services," said Lauren Castino.

Western Unlocks Careers in Science, Technology and Engineering for prospective students

On Friday 8th November, the Future Student Indigenous Engagement team, led by Project Officer Amelia Corr, hosted the inaugural Unlocking Careers in Science, Technology and Engineering event for Indigenous High School students in Years 9-12.

This event was an opportunity to expose students to the variety of degrees and careers linked to Science, Technology and Engineering sectors to address the importance of increasing Indigenous participation in STEM.

This was the final phase of the Unlocking Careers 3-part event series, which saw almost 450 Indigenous students engage in Western's Unlocking Careers in Sport & Health and Unlocking Careers in Humanities and Creative Industries, which were delivered earlier last year.

Additionally, 102 students participated in a range of practical workshops before engaging in a live Yarn Up Q&A panel. Students each chose two workshops from Animal Science, Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, Forensic Science, Industrial Design, Environmental Science, Construction Management, Health in ICT 'Medicine without blood and guts', and Medical Science.

The Yarn Up panel featured Indigenous professionals with tertiary qualifications and successful careers in the sector, including:

- Corey Tutt, Adjunct Associate Professor and founder of Deadly Science
- Renee Cawthorne, Indigenous Fellow in the School of Natural Sciences at Macquarie University
- Sarah Lynn Rees, Designer at JCB Architects
- Matthew Taylor, Badanami Student Success Officer.

Amelia Corr, Project Officer in the Future Student Indigenous Engagement team, said the feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive.

"It was so wonderful to see such excitement and engagement from Indigenous students in STEM, an area we need more Indigenous people qualified in. Students and teachers were even asking for more workshops to be added to the program so they have the opportunity for more opportunities to learn. The prospective students thoroughly enjoyed participating in the practical, hands-on workshops, particularly the forensic

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

science workshop which saw students don PPE and walk through a mock crime scene to obtain evidence and problem solve. The Yarn Up Q&A panel was also extremely insightful, with each panellist sharing their journeys, challenges and successes, as well as advising on the importance of staying grounded in identity and community. Students asked challenging questions about topics such as racism, low comminute expectations in relation to Indigneous Australians and how to navigate these barriers as a young Indigenous person. I would like to thank all the wonderful academics within their respective schools for supporting this event, delivering such impactful workshops for the next generation of learners," said Amelia Corr.



Western Sydney University staff facilitating the Unlocking Careers in Science, Technology and Engineering Event.



The Unlocking Careers in Science, Technology and Engineering Event.



ASPIRE Program Workshop.



Prospective student engaged in an ASPIRE Program Workshop activity.

The Aspire Program continues to nurture talented Indigenous engineering students

The Western Sydney University Aspire Program, launched in 2020, is a pioneering initiative dedicated to supporting the career development of Indigenous students pursuing engineering degrees. This unique program fosters a vital connection between aspiring engineers and industry partners, providing invaluable opportunities for professional growth and networking.

By partnering with 26 leading organisations, the Aspire Program offers Indigenous students paid internships throughout their degree, fostering real-world experience and mentorship from industry professionals. This invaluable support extends beyond the classroom, providing guidance on career pathways and even facilitating global mobility experiences.

The program's impact is undeniable. Since its inception, the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment has doubled, surpassing the national average for Indigenous student enrolment. This remarkable growth is a testament to the School's leadership and the program's effectiveness in attracting and supporting talented Indigenous students.

Beyond internships and mentorship, the Aspire Program provides crucial financial support through scholarships, ensuring that promising students have the resources they need to succeed.

This commitment to nurturing talent has resulted in a strong track record of success, with Aspire Program graduates securing prominent positions in leading organisations across various sectors.

The Aspire Program stands as a model for Indigenous student success and engagement. By fostering strong industry partnerships and providing comprehensive resources, this innovative program is empowering the next generation of Indigenous engineers and contributing to a more diverse and inclusive future for the engineering and construction sectors.

Professor Olivia Mirza, Aspire Program Founder and Associate Dean Engagement in the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment at the time of the program foundation, said the Aspire Program represents an investment in both the educational success of Indigenous communities and the future of engineering.

"By providing financial assistance, mentorship, and an all-encompassing community, we aim to empower Indigenous students to become leaders and innovators in the Engineering and Built Environment fields. Together, we can contribute to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community that benefits not only the students but also the broader society," said Professor Mirza.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership, said she is thrilled to witness the remarkable success of the Aspire Program within the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment.

"This program exemplifies Western Sydney University's unwavering commitment to strengthening and empowering all Indigenous students to excel and achieve their educational goals. By providing crucial support and guidance, the Aspire Program ensures that Indigenous students are well supported throughout their entire engineering degrees. It is fantastic to see the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the school double since the Aspire Program was initiated. This meaningful empowerment paves the way for the next generation of Indigenous engineers, with Aspire Program graduates successfully transitioning into prominent roles with leading organisations," said Professor Trudgett.

To learn more about the Aspire Program please follow: westernsydney.edu.au/aspire

Students

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ACHIEVE GREAT THINGS

Seven deadly questions: Introducing Arzycki de Vera

Who are you?

Hello, my name is Arzycki (Ace) de Vera. I am currently in the final year of my Doctor of Medicine degree.

Who is your mob?

My mob comes from Horn Island in the Torres Strait Islands and I am currently living on Tharawal land.

What community or cultural events have you been involved in lately or will you engage in this year?

In 2024, I was able to participate in the Indigenous Nationals hosted by Wollongong University. It was one of the highlights of my year, as I was able to establish amazing friendships, connect with people with similar degrees and compete with and against incredible athletes. Despite being admittedly nervous about attending, I left Nationals with a second family who I still connect with to this day. I also had the honour of captaining the student team against the staff in the annual Indigenous Students versus Staff Basketball game. It was wonderful to connect with mob and compete on the court, but I would be lying if I did not say that my favourite moment was keeping the staff winless for a second time in a row! To finish the year, I was able to attend the leadership retreat in Wollongong with a couple of friends where we were taught leadership skills and values and how to apply them in our everyday lives and careers. We also had a cultural day where we went out on Country and learned some dances, threw boomerangs and did some basket weaving. It was really fun and inspiring. I highly recommend it to any students who are keen!



Arzycki de Vera.

Why did you choose to study at Western Sydney University?

I have lived my whole life in Western Sydney and saw that the medicine course offered here had a strong focus on improving health outcomes for both Western Sydney and Indigenous populations. Furthermore, I saw that the School of Medicine offered a streamlined pathway for Indigenous students to apply for the course, with the interview panel consisting of community members and professors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This, paired with the fact that I lived five minutes away from both the campus and the clinical school, made it an incredibly easy decision to study at Western.

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

Growing up, people have always found it difficult to believe that I am Indigenous. My background is predominantly Filipino and I never really had any connection to my mob, especially with Country being based in far north Queensland. As a result, I was constantly questioned about my identity which made me believe that I was undeserving of any opportunities I was given as a Torres Strait Islander. I do not know if I will ever get over this feeling, but what has helped me is meeting other mob at Indigenous events like the ones hosted by Western. I would ask questions, get involved in cultural activities and just be a curious person. I have learnt so much through this approach and it has made me immensely proud of our beautiful culture, our amazing people and our rich history.

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

I hope to one day become a specialist/consultant in a field of medicine that I am extremely passionate about. As of right now I am unsure of what that field is, but I know it will not be surgery, and it will likely be general practice or emergency medicine. After specialising I would love to get out into Indigenous communities and play a role in improving Indigenous health outcomes to close the gap even further.

You are clearly a busy person with lots of commitments, what are your top 5 tips towards success for other Indigenous Western Sydney University students?

1. It seems to be a very common theme amongst all the other students and it is for very good reasons but utilise the Badanami centres across all the campuses! I was too nervous to go when I first started which essentially makes me a hypocrite, but I have since learnt from my mistakes. There are so many things I missed out on early in my degree (like tutoring, scholarships, yarn sessions, free mentos) that would have made adjusting to University life in those first few years way easier. It is nice to know you are not alone while studying and that there is a place to go when life inevitably gets tough.
2. Get involved in University events! I was terrified of signing up for the first Indigenous Student Staff versus basketball game because I did not know a single person but I made so many new friendships that day and got introduced to so many amazing staff members that I engage with regularly now throughout my degree. It was through those same relationships where I was able to go to Nationals and get a job as a student ambassador which aligns perfectly with my busy schedule.
3. Have variety in the places where you study! I am a hundred times more efficient at studying when I am not in my bedroom. The library is my favourite since you are forced to at least look like you are studying in fear of being judged by other studious individuals which sort of helps with discipline.

(continued overleaf)

(continued from previous page)

4. Exercise! I do not think I would have survived University without at least some form of physical activity. It helps get your mind off things, keeps you in shape and you get this amazing sense of achievement after finishing.

I would highly recommend a team sport so you can yell at other people and call it 'teamwork'.

5. Sleep! There are way too many proven benefits to the point where I would consider it offensive to not prioritise sleep over everything else.

Get into a routine and sleep at the same time each night. Stop watching TikToks before bed. Do not pull all-nighters (especially before big exams) and try to wake up to some beautiful sun glaring in your face. Rest your brain.

Western Students Embark on Transformative Cultural Exchange in Taiwan

Eight Indigenous students from Western Sydney University recently returned from a life-changing learning exchange in Taiwan, participating in the Indigenous Taiwan New Colombo Plan Cultural Program. This immersive experience provided a unique opportunity to explore the rich tapestry of Taiwanese culture, fostering a deep connection with the people and traditions of this vibrant island nation. The program blended academic learning with firsthand cultural encounters, creating an unforgettable educational experience.

Under the leadership of Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, a Dharawal man and Director of Indigenous Research, and Kylie Beerens, a Kamilaroi woman and Executive Assistant in the Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global Development), the group engaged with diverse aspects of Taiwanese life. The program was offered in partnership with the College of Indigenous Studies at the National Dong Hwa University (NDHU) and Fu Jen Catholic University, creating a strong foundation for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

A key focus of the trip was understanding the profound and ongoing impact of colonisation. The students attended insightful scholarly presentations on Indigenous Studies in Taiwan, gaining valuable academic context for their cultural immersion. This academic component provided a framework for understanding the complex historical and social dynamics at play.

One of the most impactful experiences was an unscheduled visit to Makota'ay Country of the Amis Nation. There, the students had the privilege of yarning with Aunty Lafay and her mother, Grandma Arik. These remarkable women shared their struggles with colonial government



Western Sydney University's cohort for the Indigenous Taiwan New Colombo Plan Cultural Program.

systems, their ongoing fight for Indigenous Sovereign Rights over their lands, and their unwavering strength and kindness in the face of adversity. This encounter offered a powerful lesson in resilience and the enduring spirit of Indigenous communities.

The students also had the opportunity to engage with local Indigenous Taiwanese representatives from various communities, learning about their inspiring efforts to revitalise Indigenous languages and cultures in the face of four distinct waves of colonisation. Visits to community initiatives, including a stunning Tafalong (Pangcah) community house and another in Fata'an Country, highlighted the ongoing work to reclaim and rebuild cultural practices and beliefs. The group also visited a local museum led by the local Indigenous community, and shared stories, songs, and dances with local people, creating meaningful connections.

Throughout the trip, the students were deeply moved by the strength, kindness, and resilience of the Indigenous Taiwanese communities they encountered. Simultaneously, they were struck by the enduring and pervasive impact of colonisation. This powerful combination of inspiration and awareness created a transformative experience that will undoubtedly shape their perspectives and future endeavours.

Billy Bent-Ngawaka, an Anewan, Ngunnawal and Māori man, and a Western Sydney University Occupational Therapy student, said the Taiwan cultural exchange program was an amazing experience for which he is extremely grateful.

"It was an absolute privilege to attend. I hold immense respect for the staff that organised the program and the staff members that nominated me for this opportunity. I formed so many friendships, not only with the Indigenous Taiwanese students from the various universities we visited but also within the Western Sydney University group. I feel the bonds we have created over the course of the program will be strong enough to continue past our time at university. I also gained cultural retrospect. The cultural exchange was really strong, wherein the Western group and I shared our knowledge about our Indigenous Australian cultures and the Indigenous Taiwanese taught us about their cultures, customs and ways of life. Since experiencing this program and seeing firsthand how two completely different First Nations cultures share similar experiences of systematic inequalities, I have been motivated to learn more and experience other Indigenous cultures. Again, I am so grateful to have been included in this opportunity," said Billy Bent-Ngawaka.

Students

Badanami hosted an Inaugural Indigenous Student Leadership Retreat



The 2024 Indigenous Student Leadership Group.

In 2024, the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education hosted an Indigenous Student Leadership Retreat in Wollongong. It was a two-day event designed to empower Indigenous students through leadership development and cultural connection.

The first day focussed on leadership, exploring topics such as leadership styles, Indigenous leadership and mentoring to inspire and guide students in their personal and professional growth.

The second day centred on cultural connection, with students participating in a cultural workshop that deepened their understanding and appreciation of their heritage.

Elina Roberts-Turner, a proud Gamilaroi Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) student, said being surrounded by such passionate individuals was a really empowering experience.

“Every opportunity to connect with mob at Western is special, but this retreat was especially meaningful. Each of us had a different story and journey in connection to Culture, but we were able to come together and share that knowledge, learning from each other,” said Elina Roberts-Turner.

Billie D’Elboux, a proud Tharawal Bachelor of Education (Primary) student, said the Indigenous Student Leadership retreat was an incredible experience.

“The retreat was culturally informed and driven, with relevant teachings and useful outcomes. Recently, I was promoted into a leadership role at work and found that the gaps I had in my leadership skills were addressed in really helpful ways throughout the retreat. It was also a safe and beautiful experience where I felt welcomed and valued. My peers were the best part of the experience for me, being around other mob with shared interests and drive was something really special. I left the retreat feeling much more confident in my leading abilities and excited to use the strategies I learned,” said Billie D’Elboux.

The retreat provided a meaningful space for students to engage, reflect and strengthen their leadership skills while staying connected to culture.



The 2024 Indigenous Leadership Group engaging in cultural activities.



Luke Davis and Arzycki de Vera engaging in the cultural activities.

Staff

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S PASSIONATE INDIGENOUS STAFF

Seven deadly questions: Introducing Lauren Castino, Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian

Who are you?

I am Lauren Castino. I live on Dharawal Country with my husband and two little jarjums.

Who is your mob?

Both of my parents are First Nations people – my Mum is Wiradjuri and my Dad is Gamilaroi. I was raised on beautiful Darug Country in the Liverpool area, where my family have maintained community connections for generations.

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

It is important that my children grow up feeling connected to their culture and community. This year we went to Yabun, and we often go to our local NAIDOC and Kari events as well as the Mil-pra art awards. When I was a secondary school teacher, I established and led my school's First Nations Education Team and was a member of our local



Lauren Castino, Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian.

Aboriginal Education Consultancy Group. Now that I have joined Western, I am thankful for the opportunity to see Indigenous excellence in action at events like the Indigenous Research Symposium and the Indigenous Students vs Staff Basketball game.

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

I am an Outreach and Indigenous Engagement Librarian and I have been at Western for about 7 months. My role is a new one and it aims to strengthen connections between the Library and Western's Indigenous community by providing mob with culturally appropriate library support.

Have you always aspired to work in tertiary education?

I am an educator but had not imagined working in tertiary education. Prior to working at Western's Library, I spent 12 years as an English teacher in NSW public secondary schools. I am re-training as a Teacher Librarian because of my interest in student wellbeing and providing more holistic academic support. The Librarian role at Western sparked a career change because of its focus on Indigenous Librarianship, a rare but critical area of work. I see such potential in academic libraries as engaging, culturally welcoming spaces that can support Indigenous priorities and knowledges.

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

Western Sydney University's commitment to its values – sustainability, inclusion and community – resonates with me. Even though I have only been here a short time, I have had the chance to offer input on the University's sustainability measures, have participated in Ally training, and have felt so warmly welcomed by both Indigenous staff and my Library team.

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

Western is my alma mater so I knew there would be a lot of supportive mob working here. There is a nice sense of community at each campus and I feel that Indigenous staff are valued for the unique skills and knowledge we bring to our professional roles.

Staff Updates

Western Sydney University would like to congratulate the following Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members on their new appointments:

- Maeve Powell, Lecturer in School of Social Sciences
- Aaliyah Kearney, Ignite Trainee in the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching
- Ambah Donovan, Ignite Trainee in The College
- Annabel Fryer, Ignite Trainee in School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Social Science and Law

- Ashleigh Capper, Ignite Trainee in the School of Health Sciences
- Melanie Manning, Ignite Trainee in the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching
- Victor Simon, Ignite Trainee in the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education.

Western Sydney University would also like to thank all the Indigenous staff who continuously demonstrate excellence and support the University's values, ensuring Western is the place to be.

Staff



The Sage Indigenous staff research team who were awarded the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Enterprise and Global Research Award for Excellence in Indigenous Research. Photography: Yann Le Berre.



The Vice-Chancellor awarding Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine his Excellence Award for individual service. Photography: Yann Le Berre.

Celebrating Indigenous Staff and Student Excellence at the 2024 University Excellence Awards

On Thursday 12th December 2024, Western Sydney University staff celebrated the University Excellence Awards at Parramatta South Campus. The awards provide a platform for the University to showcase some of the outstanding work being carried out in teaching, postgraduate research and supervision, professional service, engagement, sustainability, and leadership.

The event celebrated outstanding achievements across three key categories: the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards, the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research Enterprise and Global Research Awards, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education Learning and Teaching Awards.

The Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Enterprise and Global Research Award for Excellence in Indigenous Research was awarded to the Sage Indigenous staff research team. We would like to congratulate Dr Sarah Kennedy from the School of Health Sciences, Dr Kierny McKay from the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Enterprise and Global, and Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine

from the Division of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership on this achievement.

This team's research project entitled 'Gathering Insights and Embedding Workplace Improvements for Indigenous Staff at Western Sydney University' is the first known research project to explore the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous staff at Western.

This research engaged Indigenous staff in a collaborative evaluation of Western's Indigenous Strategy and associated policy and practice changes introduced by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership portfolio. The research sought to assess whether and how the Strategy is having an impact for Indigenous staff and to identify further action and refinements to drive equity for Western's Indigenous staff, students and community.

The Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for individual service was awarded to Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine from the Division of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership.

Gabrielle leads Indigenous employment initiatives at Western Sydney University. Her outstanding professionalism and passion for Indigenous success inspires Gabrielle to forge crucial connections with all areas seeking to recruit Indigenous people within the University.

One highlight of Gabrielle's work has been leading and developing the Ignite Traineeship program, offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Combining excellence and compassion, Gabrielle creates high expectations and culturally safe environments which drives success for trainees and their work areas. She strives to ensure that trainees complete their programs and ultimately secure work at Western and beyond.

Finally, the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence in University Engagement Staff award was presented to Amelia Corr. Through her role as the Future Student Engagement Project Officer, Amelia has driven significant growth and change for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathway Program, strengthening ties with Indigenous community organisations.

(continued overleaf)

(continued from previous page)

She is committed to enhancing the program to align with best practices and ensure a culturally safe, student-centred model. Amelia actively supports Indigenous initiatives at Western, engaging with stakeholders and advocating for Indigenous perspectives in all aspects of her work, and has made a significant and important contribution to the educational participation and future success of Indigenous peoples in our region.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership, congratulates all who received and were nominated for the Excellence Awards.

“Western Sydney University has many passionate and dedicated staff contributing to the University’s success. The award ceremony was a fantastic opportunity to recognise the achievements of our staff. It is important to publicly acknowledge the outstanding endeavours and accomplishments of our staff and to recognise, reward and encourage their excellence, performance and achievements more broadly now and into the future,” said Professor Trudgett.

To find out more about the University’s Excellence Awards or to watch a replay of the awards ceremony, please follow: westernsydney.edu.au/excellence/awards/awards



The Vice-Chancellor awarding Amelia Corr her Excellence Award for Engagement. Photography: Yann Le Berre.

Indigenous staff come together at the End of Year Staff Networking event

On 12th December 2024, the Division of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership warmly invited Indigenous staff, from all Western Sydney University schools and institutes, to come together for an end of year networking event. The staff enjoyed a buffet lunch followed by barefoot bowls.

The luncheon provided Indigenous staff the opportunity to network and learn about the on-going developments in

all Indigenous portfolios whilst building connections with colleagues. This event celebrated all achievements in the Indigenous space for 2024 and acknowledged Western’s Indigenous staff continued dedication, collegiality and teamwork to our space.

The Division of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership would like to provide a special congratulations to the winning barefoot bowling team:

- Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership
- Josh Mason, Director of Badanami Centre
- Kristy Bell, Badanami Student Success Officer
- Dr Sarah Kennedy, Senior Lecturer in Sport, Health and Physical Education
- Dean Norris, Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science.



Western Sydney University’s Indigenous staff at the End of Year Staff Networking event.



The winning barefoot bowls team, including Dr Dean Norris, Professor Michelle Trudgett, Kristy Bell, Josh Mason and Dr Sarah Kennedy (left to right).

Alumni

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S INDIGENOUS ALUMNI

Congratulations to Western's December graduates

Western Sydney University is committed to empowering and supporting Indigenous students' to study and graduate from degrees of their choice. Currently, Western Sydney University has over 1,704 Indigenous alumni who have graduated from a variety of degrees across the University's range of Schools.

Graduation is an incredibly important milestone as it celebrates all the hard work and time put into achieving a degree, marking the formal end of tertiary study and the beginning of a new journey.



Aunty Kerrie Doyle, Olivia Hay, Lucy Schulz and Kristy Bell at a December Graduation Ceremony. Photography: Sally Tsoutas.

In December 2024, four deadly students graduated from Bachelor Degrees. Congratulations to the following students, we are so proud of each of you and wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours.

Joshua Mastop graduated with Bachelor of Clinical Science (Medicine)/ Doctor of Medicine degree

Keesha Von Stieglitz graduated with Bachelor of Clinical Science (Medicine)/ Doctor of Medicine degree

Lucy Schulz graduated with Bachelor of Clinical Science (Medicine)/ Doctor of Medicine degree

Olivia Hay graduated with Bachelor of Clinical Science (Medicine)/ Doctor of Medicine degree

Celebrating the 2024 Ignite Trainee Cohort!

On the 30th of January, Western Sydney University celebrated the graduation of the 2024 cohort of the Ignite Indigenous Traineeship Program. We would like to congratulate Amos Turvey, Brayden Popovich, Katarina Ferkula-Cohen, Mitchell Regan and Skye Lampton on successfully completing the program.

Over the past 12 months, these talented individuals have shown resilience, dedication, and a commitment to their personal and professional development. Their hard work has paid off, and this accomplishment is a testament to the groups' strength and passion for learning.

Since launching the Ignite Trainee program in 2022, 16 trainees have successfully completed the program, with over 68% securing employment



The 2024 graduated cohort of the Ignite Indigenous Traineeship Program with Professor Michelle Trudgett, Professor Susan Page and Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine.

at Western Sydney University with others obtaining employment outside of the University, and others going on to further studies. These figures are a testament to the impact of this initiative. The traineeship provides a vocational pathway for Indigenous

participants to gain paid experience in university operations as business administration trainees. The program offers a one-year fixed term of employment in combination with enrolment into a Certificate III in Business Administration traineeship.

(continued overleaf)

(continued from previous page)

Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine, Senior Indigenous Employment Coordinator, said she is beyond proud of all graduates.

"I would like to share my warmest congratulations to the whole cohort. As each of you step into the next phase of your careers, may you continue to strive for excellence and make meaningful contributions to your respective fields. I would also like to mention this would not have been possible without support from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership Professor Michelle Trudgett, Western Sydney University's The College, Silvia Bazon, Gavin Webber and Catherine Cooper and finally our host unit managers, Sharon Short, Marian Schraishuhn, Lauren Marsh, Louella Almeida, Josh Mason and Jacqueline Forrell. The mentorship, encouragement, and expertise have been invaluable in shaping the success of our trainees," said Gabby Talbot-Mundine.



The graduation ceremony for the 2024 cohort of the Ignite Indigenous Traineeship Program.

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Indigenous Leadership, congratulates all graduates.

"The Division would like to thank Gabrielle Talbot-Mundine, Senior Indigenous Employment Coordinator, for her leadership and facilitation of this program. We would also like to collectively thank the participating schools, divisions and institutes for supporting the creation of entry-level positions for the Indigenous

community. I wish the graduating cohort the best of luck as they continue their professional and academic journeys. This is just the beginning for the 2024 graduates. We can't wait to see all the incredible things they will achieve. We could not be prouder of the cohort," said Professor Trudgett.

To learn more about the program, please follow: westernsydney.edu.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/employment

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 earlier this year.

Corrinne T. Sullivan. (2025). Paving the Way from Latchkey Kid to Big Sky Dreaming. In *Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities* (pp. 97-102). Springer, Singapore.

Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Shannon Foster, Frances Bodkin, John Foster, Gavin Andrews, Karen Adams, Jodi Stephenson, Peter Fryer, Brooke Fryer, Maripa Teo, Eddie Burge and Bronwyn Carlson. (2024). The Echoes of Genocide. *Issues: A Multilingual Journal of Short Essays*, 6. Western Sydney University Published online. <https://issues-journal.org/the-echoes-of-genocide/>

Jacob Prehn, Cassandra Price, **Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews,** Maggie Walter and Ray Lovett. (2025). Social Research and Indigenous Data Sovereignty. In T. Venturini, A. Acker, J-C Plantin, & T Walford (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Data and Society* (pp. 153-170). London UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Matilda Harry, Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page and Rebekah Grace. (2025). "We are born mentors ... It's in our DNA": Exploring Indigenous Australian kinship mentoring practices. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2025.2459944>

Michelle Locke, Michelle Trudgett, and Susan Page. (2024). All hands on deck: Coordinated Approaches to Indigenous Early Career Development. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 15(2). DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2024.15.2.15182

Michelle Locke, Michelle Trudgett, and Susan Page. (2024). Indigenous early career researcher's perspectives of "safe spaces" in higher education. *The Australian Journal of Education*, 68(3), 161-175-161-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441241274522>

Michelle Locke, Michelle Trudgett, and Susan Page. (2025). 'Treat them well and keep them' - Advice from Managers about Indigenous Early Career Researchers. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2025.2458891

Michelle Locke. (2024). Am I there yet? Learning As I Go and Wondering What Success Looks Like. In *Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities*. (pp37-44) Springer Briefs in Education.

Michelle Locke. (2024). Future Directions. Where the end is actually the beginning. In *Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities*. (pp117-127) Springer Briefs in Education.

Michelle Trudgett, and Susan Page. (2025). Introduction: Retrofitting the Academy for Indigenous Excellence. In M. Trudgett, S. Page, R. Povey & M. Locke (Eds), *Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities - Our Stories*. Springer, Singapore.

Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page, Rhonda Povey, and **Michelle Locke.** (Eds) (2024). *Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities: Our Stories*. Springer Nature.

Research



Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities: Our Stories

Professor Michelle Trudgett, Professor Susan Page, Doctor Rhonda Povey and Doctor Michelle Locke recently published their new book entitled '*Indigenous Early Career Researchers in Australian Universities: Our Stories*'.

The book explores the key barriers and facilitators to advancing meaningful and fulfilling academic careers in the higher education sector for Australian Indigenous doctoral graduates. It focuses on the career trajectories of Indigenous early career researchers who have participated in the Developing Indigenous Australian Early Career Researchers study, funded by the Australian Research Council. It delves into a deeper understanding of the professional development requirements of Indigenous Early Career Research academics and presents a new set of knowledge which incorporates Indigenous standpoints, thus creating new avenues for Indigenous early career researchers to articulate their living experiences and perspectives for the benefit of their colleagues, in the present and the future.

This book also provides a model of best practice collaborative approach through its methodology, method, and structural design. The various chapters present first-hand experience with an Indigenous methodological approach, including access to respectful use of culturally appropriate terminology, modelled by the authors and carefully footnoted with explanatory notes. Its writing is also guided by ethical principles concerning Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights. This book serves as a compendium of critique for current and future Indigenous early career researchers, as well as an encouragement for mentors and advocates for equity and parity for Indigenous academics in higher education. Through the voices of Indigenous early career researchers, this book positions universities well to facilitate improved Indigenous outcomes and to continue to pursue educational equity within the higher education sector.

The book is open access, which means that you have free and unlimited access. The research team invite you to read this book by following this link:

[https://link.springer.com/
book/10.1007/978-981-97-2823-7](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-97-2823-7)

