



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Supporting Indigenous success



# Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses) and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Indigenous colleagues and partners.

In making this Acknowledgment of Country we commit to respectful and responsible conduct towards all others according to the Traditional lores of this land, particularly at times of formal ceremony.

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## Your support is changing lives

Education plays a pivotal role in improving economic and social outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and it remains one of the most vital strategies for addressing Indigenous disadvantage across the nation. At the University of Melbourne, this commitment to advancing Indigenous representation is both a responsibility and a priority.

Over the past decade the University has worked hard to see a significant increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and staff numbers. There are now over 500 Indigenous students in undergraduate and graduate courses – a 22 per cent increase from five years ago – while the number of Indigenous staff has reached over 150, considerably above the national average of 44.

The University's Indigenous Strategy 2023–2027, known as Murmuk Djerring – meaning 'working together' in Woi Wurrung – embodies the spirit of collaboration between the University and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This strategy sets out to deepen relationships, strengthen Indigenous leadership and prioritise the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, culture and perspectives across all facets of our institution.

Most importantly, it aims to build pathways to opportunity for Indigenous Australians with impact stretching far beyond the University. We are not simply aiming to offer education and employment, but to develop the capacity of current and future leaders. Indigenous leadership has the potential to transform and enrich workplaces and communities across the country, bringing a wealth of cultural knowledge and professional skills. When Indigenous people are enabled to fulfill their potential, it drives economic prosperity, promotes social cohesion, and creates a more enriched Australia for all.

This report highlights the progress made through some of the standout Indigenous initiatives at the University, showcasing the impact of philanthropic support on students, programs and communities. It reflects the University's commitment to Indigenous self-determination and acknowledges the contributions of its donors and partners who have helped to make these achievements possible. Philanthropy continues to be an incredible enabler of Indigenous success on campus and across Australia.

Through shared efforts and meaningful partnerships, the University of Melbourne continues to contribute to closing the gap and advancing a future where Indigenous Australians thrive in education and beyond. Thank you to all those who strengthen our endeavour.

**Professor Barry Judd**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous)



## Your passion helps us to create change together

At the University of Melbourne, we firmly believe that advancing Indigenous representation is not only a moral obligation but a vital aspect of our identity as an institution. As we reflect on our commitment to Indigenous education and self-determination, it is essential to recognise the profound impact of collaboration and philanthropy in making our vision a reality.

We aim to be a place where the skills and experiences of Indigenous Australians are valued. Over the last decade, we have made significant strides in advancing opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. While working to embed Indigenous knowledge in the Academy, we are also deepening and expanding relationships with communities. This progress is not merely statistical; it represents real lives transformed, choices expanded and knowledge recognised.

Our Indigenous Strategy 2023–2027, Murmuk Djerring, encapsulates our vision for a collaborative future. By working hand-in-hand with Indigenous researchers, students and communities, we aim to create pathways that support self-determination. The stories on the following pages serve as a testament to the progress underway, showcasing the tangible outcomes of our collective efforts.

We are immensely grateful for the philanthropic partnerships that have been instrumental in driving these initiatives forward. The generous contributions of our donors have enabled us to expand our ambitions with the potential to effect lasting change far beyond campus. As we celebrate our achievements, we acknowledge with gratitude this commitment to closing the gap in social and educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

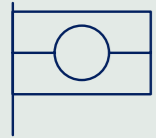
Together, we can continue to shape a future where Indigenous voices are not only heard but are integral to shaping the educational landscape. Thank you for your ongoing support in this vital endeavour.

**Nick Blinco**  
Vice-President  
(Advancement, Communications and Marketing)



# Student success

With your support, Indigenous students are empowered through scholarships, fellowships and bursaries to pursue their studies with a range of support to help them achieve their very best.



## 518

**Indigenous students enrolled at the University of Melbourne in 2024**  
123.7% increase over 10 years in the number of enrolments of students identifying as Indigenous.



## 191

**Subjects currently offered with an Indigenous focus**  
100% increase over 10 years.



## 315

**Indigenous students undertaking postgraduate study in 2024**  
65 students undertook courses in graduate research, 169 in graduate coursework and 86 in graduate certificates/diplomas (note some students enrolled in more than one course in a given year).



## 31

**Indigenous professorial staff**  
An increase from 4 to 31 over the past 10 years.



# Veteran's legacy is encouraging Indigenous voices

**A gift left in a Will to support Indigenous students has helped grow confidence, opened opportunities and created stronger professional communities for 25 years and counting.**

Born in 1914, Arno Herpe grew up in Essen, Germany before emigrating to Australia and graduating from the University of Melbourne in 1939. He served in World War II in Papua New Guinea where he gained immense respect for the Indigenous people from Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea who saved his life on multiple occasions. It became his wish to provide them with enduring support.

Through a gift in his Will, Mr Herpe's vision is being realised through a valuable bursary offered to students of Indigenous and/or South Pacific descent.

In 2024, the University celebrated 25 years of student support through the Arno Herpe Bursary. Here, current and former recipients Brittany and Cam share how the bursary is assisting them through their studies and beyond.

## Brittany Biles

**Third-year Bachelor of Fine Arts (Music Theatre) student**

One of the best phone calls of my life happened a few years ago when I was offered a place in the Music Theatre course at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). My answer was an immediate yes – I couldn't wait for the opportunity to study in what I think is the most culturally rich city in Australia.

It's a very physically demanding course, but it's so much fun. As a third-year student, we are in classes full-time, Monday to Friday, from dancing and acting to longer afternoon rehearsals for musicals.

When I found out that I was selected for the Arno Herpe Bursary, I was honoured that someone saw my application and chose to support me. It has made all the difference, because I can put all my energy into learning instead of chasing casual work. It gives me the chance to properly rest, put my best foot forward and avoid burnout.

It has also helped me move to Southbank, where I'm only a five-minute walk from campus. I used to travel an hour at the end of each day, which was exhausting, so moving closer has been a huge relief.

As a Ngemba Murrawarri woman from Central New South Wales, I have always celebrated my cultural identity growing up with my parents and my family around me. That has transpired into feeling proud whenever I see Indigenous people in shows, and so I've always wanted to become a point of representation in shows as well.

I believe it's so important that the right people are representing the right stories, and that's been a challenge for me because I don't appear Indigenous. I found solace in connecting with on-campus support for Indigenous student artists through the Wilin Centre, who talked with me and assured me I am just as worthy of claiming my Indigeneity as those with darker skin.

Through the support of the Wilin Centre and the vote of confidence I've received as an Arno Herpe Bursary recipient, I'm working on growing my confidence and finding my place as an Indigenous artist.

With the support of donors, a lot more is possible for students like me. We get to explore ourselves and see just how far we can go in our journeys while we're growing up at university. And for Indigenous students, the more welcome we feel, the more our stories can be told.



Brittany Biles performing during Arts Centre Melbourne's Morning Melodies program in 2024 with the VCA.



## Dr Cam Raw

**Bachelor of Veterinary Science alum (2013) | Lecturer and Assistant Dean (Indigenous), Melbourne Veterinary School, Faculty of Science**

Growing up in Lutruwita (Tasmania), I dreamt of being a veterinarian since I was very young, so I was excited to be accepted into the best veterinary school in Australia. But if it weren't for the financial support of the Arno Herpe Bursary, I may not have been able to seize the opportunities that led me to where I am now.

In my final year of vet school, I went on a placement in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, an opportunity I couldn't have afforded otherwise. Being a Palawa man, of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent, I wanted to find a way that I could connect my studies to supporting Indigenous communities, and this trip to Arnhem Land allowed me to do that. Now, in my role as Lecturer and Assistant Dean (Indigenous) within the Faculty of Science, this program has become a feature of my work over the past 10 years.

Professor Liz Tudor AM first started the West Arnhem Land Dog Health Program (WALDHeP) in 2004 to provide essential veterinary services to the communities of West Arnhem. When I went as a student in 2013, it was a small program with just three vets and three students. Ten years later, we are delivering vet services to about 15 different communities in East and West Arnhem Land that otherwise have very little to no access to vet services for their animals.

After working in Arnhem Land for long periods, I developed an interest in how we can maximise the impact of this work with often constrained resources, which led to my PhD research focused on the One Health approach. It's a relatively new concept in western science, but the understanding that human health, animal health and the environment are all inextricably linked is something that has been in Aboriginal Cultures for tens of thousands of years.

It's an approach that can have a big impact in Arnhem Land. For example, there are certain parasite infections that may be spread between wildlife, dogs and people through the environment. To understand how best to help combat these infections, we need to consider the dogs' relationship to their environment and people, including important social and cultural factors.

It's led me to further appreciate the importance of diversity in the vet profession, which is another reason why student support is so valuable. Diversity is only going to make for a stronger profession better suited to serve a diverse society.

I am hugely grateful to people who have supported me. It's a powerful thing to influence the life of one person, but in turn, influence the lives of many more through the actions you empower them to take.

# Enabling greater Indigenous representation in law

Scholarship support helped Maggie immerse herself in her law studies, leading to an opportunity in the School's Indigenous Law and Justice Hub.

Growing up in nivaluna (Hobart), Palawa woman Maggie Blanden was all too aware of the injustices Indigenous people face in Australia's legal system. Everywhere she looked, she saw a disproportionate number of Indigenous people cycling through prisons and knew there must be a way she could work within the justice system to better protect them.

*"I have grown up in a world where the legal system is structured against my people," she said. "This is illustrated by the mere fact that Indigenous Australians are the most incarcerated peoples in the world."*

Maggie's passion led her to her a degree at Melbourne Law School (MLS) as a Juris Doctor (JD) student and remains the driving force behind her decision to become one of the growing number of Indigenous voices in the legal system.

*"Our people deserve the best representation they can get," she said. "We need diversity in the legal system to ensure that all voices are heard and empowered. This is what has motivated me to undertake my law studies. Without this, there is a danger that white lawyers are unable to fully comprehend the needs and experiences of their clients, in ways that Indigenous lawyers can."*



Maggie Blanden received an Indigenous Student Scholarship that helped her get the most out of her JD studies at Melbourne Law School.

## Support for Indigenous students critical

Now having completed her studies and awaiting admission into the legal practice, Maggie says she is within reach of her goal thanks to the support she has received through the Melbourne Law School Indigenous Student Scholarship and the Robin Chan Memorial Grant.

There are currently several scholarships on offer for Indigenous students to pursue their studies at MLS, with growing support increasing that number by 50 per cent in the past year.

*"With the scholarships, I was able to give my full attention to my JD studies. This allowed me to finish earlier than expected and provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in the work sphere."*

Additionally, Maggie has been afforded the time to take up mentoring opportunities with Indigenous staff members at MLS, which ultimately helped her stay focused on her goal of becoming a voice for First Nations people in the legal system.

*"Indigenous students, unlike their peers, face many intersecting barriers in their study. It is crucial for Indigenous students to be supported and mentored throughout their degree," she said.*

*"There is, sadly, an extremely high rate of students who withdraw from their studies, due to various factors that obstruct them from immersing themselves entirely in their studies."*

## Practical experience the key to learning

In 2023, Maggie landed a coveted position at the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub (ILJH) as a Research Assistant. Formed through MLS to work on issues impacting First Nations peoples, with particular focus on criminal law and Treaty. For Maggie, the experience was life changing and has helped cement the direction she wants her future to take.

*"I hope to work in the area of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, as well as criminal justice for our people. I am aiming to work on important areas, including Treaty and criminal justice reform, which has been fostered by my work with the ILJH," she said.*

Learn more: [law.unimelb.edu.au/iljh](http://law.unimelb.edu.au/iljh)

# Collective giving connects passion with purpose

I-LEAP Scholarships provide pathways and opportunities for Indigenous students in the Faculty of Arts who show the potential to excel and provide leadership within their own community, as well as in society more broadly. It supports initiatives that span high school, university, graduation and beyond.

Growing up as a queer, neurodiverse Aboriginal person in a small rural town in NSW, Nick Harvey-Doyle never expected to one day be studying a Master of Arts on a Fulbright Scholarship at New York University.

*"I was the first person in my family to finish high school and obtain a tertiary education," he said. "Through support from my network and my own tenacity and resilience, I have been able to study in New York City and get to do things that teenage me would have never thought possible."*

After completing his law degree and working as a consultant in Indigenous affairs for three years, Nick's love of storytelling and desire to bring diversity to the Australian media landscape trumped his plans for a legal career and set him on a more creative path.

*"Skilled storytellers are a key foundation in sustaining an engaging, contemporary and representative media industry, and I am passionate about diverse storytelling and the incorporation of disparate lived experiences into Australian media, which is shaping the next phase of my career and professional goals."*

## Taking the leap

Thanks to the Indigenous Leadership, Excellence and Achievement Program (I-LEAP), Nick was able to refocus his legal career plans and complete the Graduate Certificate in Journalism (Advanced) at the University of Melbourne.

*"The financial support allowed me to take a step back from my career, focus on my studies, and help carve out the trajectory of my future career, studies and ambitions."*

*"I have never been someone who has had the privilege of studying without working to support myself and the difference in being able to apply myself fully to my study without the demands of work was incredibly freeing."*

Since its establishment in 2015, I-LEAP has supported 66 Indigenous students to take crucial next steps into employment and life beyond university. Beneficiaries have included Rhodes Scholars, and several students have received numerous other scholarships.

## Exploring Indigenous stories

Having the time and space to explore his interests through his journalism course gave Nick opportunities he says he would have missed out on if he had stayed in a legal career.

*"I wrote an article on the impacts of freeing the Aboriginal flag from its copyright restrictions. I interviewed mental health professionals on the increase of ADHD diagnoses during the pandemic and the importance of accurate and robust treatment of the disorder. I created an audio story about incorporating Indigenous knowledge of Country and custom into modern place-making."*

He was able to do this because of the support he received through I-LEAP, most importantly through his mentors.

*"Rural, Indigenous and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are severely under-represented at Australian universities. There are many complex factors that contribute to this, but the absence of mentors is often a key feature, so having programs that can offer mentorship and financial support are integral in achieving positive outcomes," he said.*

## Opening doors to the future

For Nick, switching to an arts focus was a decision that set him up to undertake a Master of Arts in Media, Culture and Communication at New York University, supported by a Fulbright Scholarship and a scholarship from the American Australian Association, from which he graduated in May 2024.

*"Every ounce of support I've received along the way has led me to where I am, so I just want to say, thank you for playing a part in my journey," he said.*

Learn more: [arts.unimelb.edu.au/engage](http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/engage)



Thanks to generous donors, Nick Harvey-Doyle received support to complete his Graduate Certificate in Journalism (Advanced) through the I-LEAP program.

# Supporting First Nations creatives

## The Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellowships

Generously supported by the Mordant Family, the BLAK C.O.R.E. initiative is located in the Museums and Collections Department under the auspices of the Global Culture and Engagement portfolio. This positions BLAK C.O.R.E. firmly within a portfolio that builds strong and strategic international relationships and showcases the University's collections and cultural assets to the community and the world.

Driven by First Nations methodologies, research and cultural practices, BLAK C.O.R.E. (Care of Radical Energy) focuses on walumarra (protection), yindyamarra gunhanha (ongoing respect) and murungidyala (healing).

*"The BLAK C.O.R.E. vision is to realise systemic change by reimagining how First Nations Knowledge cultural materials and communities are held within institutional spaces of museums galleries and universities." Extract from the BLAK C.O.R.E. manifesto.*

Central to the program are the Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellowships which support local and international First Nations artists, makers and thought leaders, to reflect on their practices and methodologies on healing, museums and connecting with their communities through research and collaboration.

## Uniting through art

The Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellowship 2023 was awarded to Grace Dlabik, a multidisciplinary artist based in Narrm, working across sculpture, curation, creative direction, community building and engagement. She is Austrian/Hungarian and a proud Papua New Guinean woman from the Lavaipia clan of Lese Oalai and Motuan clan Botai of Hanuabada. Dlabik's practice sits at the nexus of contemporary art and traditional cultural practice; informed by the richness of cross-cultural discourse and her roles as Mama, carer, aunty, which are all foundational to her core.

Her work is deeply informed by her Melanesian heritage and the inherent knowledge of systems passed down to her, exploring avenues for continuing this ancestral knowledge and practice within the contemporary landscape. Across all modes of practice, she maintains the intention and conviction of building ecosystems where community care and culture are intrinsically woven and connected. Through the Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellowship, Grace created karu kin.

karu kin was an ambitious project conceived and created by Grace and BE.Collective for the Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellowship. This project used the power of community creation and connects Indigenous women and non-binary folk through clay making that uses memory embodiment, nurture, nourishment and connection. The participants in the collective came from various creative fields and were united through the exploration of deep relational connection with one another. It was intuitively led and sought to use clay and methodologies of harmonised and intuitive creation using body and DNA memory to make art into a multi-functional use to nourish our spirits metaphorically, spiritually and physically.

*"It was so special to share these creations we have made together in collaboration, that has given us so much joy and much needed healing and to offer in reciprocity nourishment, our cultures and the sharing of food with our guests, rooted in solidarity and love," said Grace.*

Learn more: [culturalcommons.edu.au/blak-c-o-r-e](https://culturalcommons.edu.au/blak-c-o-r-e)



Image: karu kin second making at Art Haus 19-20/8/24. Photo by Dan Elborne.



Image: Grace Dlabik, 2023 Mordant Family BLAK C.O.R.E. Fellow. Photo supplied by BLAK C.O.R.E.

# Advancing research in Indigenous health at the Doherty Institute

Made possible by the generous support of the Lionel Gell Foundation, the Yiaga Ngarnga Scholarship for Infection and Immunity aims to support Indigenous Australian PhD candidates with an interest in immunology or infectious diseases.

Kamilaroi woman Kristy Gardner is the recipient of the first ever Indigenous health PhD scholarship at the Peter Doherty Institute of Infection and Immunity (Doherty Institute), the Yiaga Ngarnga Scholarship for Infection and Immunity.

*"I grew up in north-eastern NSW and am the first person in my family to go to uni," the PhD graduate researcher explained.*

*"When I started Uni, doing a PhD was so far beyond what I thought I could achieve; I even had people telling me a PhD was out of my reach. So, I kind of dropped the idea and it's not until I finished my Masters that I knew I wanted to continue into research. Now, I have the chance to learn from and work with some very impressive people that can help shape my research career. Being stubborn really helps at times!"*

Professor Sharon Lewin, Director of the Doherty Institute, said this was an important milestone for the Institute and marks a commitment to research in Indigenous health.

*"The Institute is enthusiastic to train the next generation of exceptional Indigenous researchers and actively strives to provide a culturally safe and supportive working environment," she said.*

After completing her Masters by Research with UNSW Associate Professor Joanne Bryant on 'How Aboriginal young people in an urban setting access sexual health information, and the role technology can play', Kristy Gardner knew that she wanted to continue studying.

Kristy wants to ensure that Aboriginal people have their voices and experiences heard through research.

*"My research looks at how the sexual health workforce perceives Aboriginal young people as clients, and how Aboriginal young people perceive sexual health services, and the impact on service delivery in an urban area," she explained.*

*"My hope is that my work will start conversations and show what the priorities are in order to support the sexual wellbeing of Aboriginal young people," Kristy added.*

This prestigious scholarship was made possible by a generous philanthropic donation from the Lionel Gell Foundation to the Doherty Institute, and with support from the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

The Doherty Institute is proud to have worked with the Wurundjeri Council to name this prestigious scholarship, the Yiaga Ngarnga Scholarship. The translation is 'to seek meaning and understanding'.



Image: Copyright Michael Kai Photography

# Research

Through the Indigenous Knowledge Institute, we are cultivating a dynamic network of graduate researchers whose critical work elevates Indigenous knowledges and fosters meaningful community engagement, influencing policy and changing lives. University researchers are generating transformative insights that honour these rich traditions, taking their life-changing research ambitions further with the support of our generous donors and partners.



Image: Professor Michael Shawn Fletcher, Associate Dean (Indigenous), Science with Anthony Romano, Research Assistant (Palynology) and Ash Hallinan, Honours Student. Photo by Michael Kai.

# The Indigenous Knowledge Institute



Australia is home to the world's oldest continuous Indigenous knowledge traditions. Handed down over 65,000 years of living on this continent, Indigenous knowledge has enabled people to survive and thrive in Australia for more than 2000 generations and is a foundation for researching how we build better futures for all in our rapidly changing world.

The Indigenous Knowledge Institute is a global hub for research innovation and thought leadership. Established in 2020, its role is to support and expand linkages and collaborations through Indigenous Knowledge research across Australia and throughout the world.

The University is strongly committed to the Institute as stated in *Advancing Melbourne* and the *Murruk Djerring Indigenous Strategy*. The University recognises that Indigenous knowledges, practices and innovations are grounded in comprehensive Indigenous knowledge systems that are integral to our research.

The Institute catalyses Indigenous Knowledge research and partnerships through its comprehensive grant schemes and shares its work through key events and influential publications. The profound significance of engaging with Indigenous voices is exemplified in the Institute's latest book, *Indigenous Knowledge: Australian Perspectives*.

*'The one universal constant that Indigenous knowledge teaches us is that change is inevitably bound to natural cycles of growth and decay. The substance of true knowing to be gleaned from Indigenous knowledge is that attentiveness and adaptation in response to constant change are necessities for human survival. This lesson has served Indigenous people well in Australia over their tenure of 65,000 years and can now guide us in building better futures for all.'*

*Adapted from 'Deep Knowledge' by Professor Wanta Pawu, Professor Aaron Corn, Dr Samuel Curkpatrick and Professor Djangirrawuy Gumbula-Garawirtja in Indigenous Knowledge: Australian Perspectives (MUP, 2024)*

People and partnerships grounded in trust, reciprocity and mutual respect lie at the heart of the Institute. Respect for the ownership of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property by Indigenous knowledge-holders is fundamental to the Institute's research. Through the Institute's work, this is now recognised across the entire University.

The Institute has led the way globally in appointing Indigenous Knowledge Fellows as full Professors. This has led to the Institute's appointment of the world's first Indigenous Australian Professors from Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Yolŋu, Warlpiri, Warrimay, Kungarakan and Ngaympaa backgrounds. This visionary scheme has set a precedent by appointing expert Indigenous knowledge-holders to senior academic roles for their decades of personal commitment to sustaining Indigenous wisdom that exists nowhere else in the world.

Learn more: [indigenousknowledge.unimelb.edu.au](https://indigenousknowledge.unimelb.edu.au)



## Professor Yalmay Marika-Yunupingu Indigenous Knowledge Fellow (2024–2026)

Professor Marika-Yunupingu is a beloved and respected Yolŋu leader from Northeast Arnhem Land, and 2024 Senior Australian of the Year.

She was a teacher linguist at Yirrkala Bilingual School for over four decades and is known as a 'bilingual warrior'. She was twice awarded a 'Teacher of Excellence' by the Northern Territory Department of Education.

Her Indigenous Knowledge Fellowship project, Djambatj Dhukarr 'Road to Excellence', expands her successful research into the professional development of Yolŋu teachers. It explores ways to develop leadership opportunities through culture and language programs within Yolŋu communities, which requires a much better understanding of social and cultural barriers that face the emerging generation of Yolŋu leaders.

*"My passion and belief in the importance of an appropriate education journey for everyone influences how I approach this work. Djambatj Dhukarr encapsulates my broader aim to enable Yolŋu people to become professional leaders in health, education, sports, relationships management, ranger programs, and the environment."*

The Institute's capstone degree, the Doctor of Philosophy - Indigenous Knowledge, is also a world first. Launched in 2023, this course caters to the academic development of experienced Indigenous knowledge-holders. It offers flexible new academic pathways for Indigenous knowledge-holders from Australia and around the world to pursue their interests in Indigenous Knowledge research in a supportive and culturally safe learning environment.



## Joe Williams PhD - Indigenous Knowledge Student

Joe Williams is a Wiradjuri/Wolgalu man and the first student to enrol in at the Institute's PhD - Indigenous Knowledge. A former professional sportsman in the National Rugby League and a professional boxer, Joe has devoted the past 12 years of his life raising awareness and education about mental health and trauma. Recognising the significant gaps in mental health care for First Nations people, Joe's PhD research topic is 'Healing through Indigenous cultural practice in Australia: An applied case study of learning from tradition'.

*"My passion for my PhD lies in its ability to impact change on a personal and systemic level to help people realise that the way to achieve ultimate wellbeing is something that has been born from this land for tens of thousands of years. Cultural safety has always been a priority for me and studying through the Indigenous Knowledge Institute provides me with a culturally safe environment."*

# Ngarrngga: A nation-building education program

Ngarrngga is a Taungurung word (pronounced “*Naan-gah*”) meaning to know, to hear, to understand. Launched in 2022 with support from the Annamila First Nations Foundation and BHP, Ngarrngga strives to support educators to be confident in showcasing Indigenous Knowledge within their teaching. It aims to support all Australian students to learn about the contributions and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Australian society through a practical and sustained approach.

The Australian Curriculum’s deeper engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is a matter of national importance. Ngarrngga supports the University’s vision for Indigenous advancement through improving the ways in which all students – from kindergarten through to higher education – can learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge systems. It is a collaboration between the Faculty of Education, the Indigenous Studies Unit and the Indigenous Knowledge Institute.

## Imagine an Australia, where...

- every student has the opportunity to learn about the histories, cultures and knowledge systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
- all teachers are confident and interculturally competent in showcasing Indigenous Knowledge throughout the curriculum; and
- our education system creates safe spaces through shared knowledge, understanding and respect.

This is the vision of Ngarrngga.

*“Ngarrngga is an invitation to come along with us and explore. Let’s become a truly united country... One that celebrates the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the fact that we are home to the oldest continuous cultures in the world,”* said Professor Melitta Hogarth, Ngarrngga Director and Associate Dean (Indigenous), Faculty of Education.

Led by Professor Hogarth and an expert advisory panel comprising Indigenous Knowledge Experts from across the country, Ngarrngga is creating innovative, high-quality curriculum resources for educators and professional development tools to support the teaching of First Nations content, spanning all subjects from early childhood to Year 12.

- 300+ curricula resources for educators available for free on the Ngarrngga website.
- 250+ educators have participated in Ngarrngga professional development.
- 25+ educators are participating in curricula trials across three states (Victoria, Queensland, South Australia).

The University of Melbourne and its project partners share the vision for an education system that reframes our national story as one which recognises and activates Indigenous histories, cultures and knowledges. The current generation of young learners will become the next generation of leaders. Their values and intellect will be enriched by gaining a deep understanding of and respect for the world’s oldest continuous living culture. Educators are key to blazing the trail of this vital work.



Image: Aboriginal Educator Teaching. Source: Getty Images. Used under licence.

# “My class said to me: Go wherever they teach the teachers.”

## Ngarrngga Director Professor Melitta Hogarth on picking up a gauntlet thrown by her Year 10 students.

I’m one of those teachers that went through the schooling system and didn’t learn very much, if anything, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, histories or cultures.

I grew up in the 1970s and didn’t have that engagement with community and family. That’s a shared story across a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, that disconnect from country, family and community. It’s added an extra layer because by identifying as Indigenous as a classroom teacher, you’re suddenly considered to be the expert on all things Indigenous – totally dismissing that horrid history of Australia such as the Stolen Generations.

I was a classroom teacher for 20 years and I was working in an Indigenous community in Central Queensland as the only Indigenous classroom teacher.

**The biggest frustration for students on community was that they couldn’t see themselves being reflected in the work.**

The curriculum was Western-focused, and it was very much celebrating coloniality as opposed to them being able to see themselves.

*The Year 10 class turned to me at one point and said, “Go wherever they teach the teachers... and [you] teach the teachers.” They were tired of seeing teachers coming into the community and wanting to save the Aboriginal child.*

One of my favourite things having completed my Masters and my PhD is that I get to report back to my Year 10 class who are now parents with their own kids in schools, letting them know about the progress that I’m making to fulfill that remit that they set for me.



**Ngarrngga aims to achieve the full breadth of its education revolution by preparing for national scale by 2026. Its ambitions:**

- Expand curricula resources to include every learning area/subject and educational level (from early childhood to senior secondary).
- Expand into teacher training with higher education partners.
- Grow place-based content, including Torres Strait Islander knowledges and with communities.

## Learn more

Scan to watch, or visit:

▶ [ngarrngga.wistia.com/medias/pbj8hwymjd](https://ngarrngga.wistia.com/medias/pbj8hwymjd)

▶ [ngarrngga.org/the-vision](https://ngarrngga.org/the-vision)

▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/5w38](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/5w38)



# Legacy celebrates the richness of Indigenous Australian languages

**A generous gift left in a Will to the University of Melbourne is helping to prevent the irreplaceable loss of culture, identity and scientific knowledge that comes with the disappearance of language.**

Professor Rachel Nordlinger and her team at the University's Research Unit for Indigenous Language (RUIL) in the Faculty of Arts, work to support, maintain and learn from the more than 300 Indigenous languages spoken in communities across Australia.

For example, with the help of Elders who were its last fluent speakers, Professor Nordlinger created the only dictionary of the Wambaya language that for thousands of years has been spoken in the Barkly Tablelands region of the Northern Territory.

Aside from their cultural and historical significance, these languages contain centuries of scientific knowledge that is critical to researchers in a range of fields. For example, words for native trees in Wambaya that had not been identified by non-Indigenous botanists. Professor Nordlinger hopes to use the generous gift to also increase the number of Indigenous people working with the University's linguistics program, and to increase the public's awareness of the importance of Indigenous languages.

## The 50 Words Project

In 2019, an online resource called the 50 Words Project launched, making words from local Indigenous languages available for every Australian to hear and learn. All of the language information is provided by a community language speaker for this purpose, meaning it comes from Indigenous language speakers who give the information knowing that it will be included on a website for the general public. For each language you can hear the words spoken via an online map that shows the general location of the language. The resource now showcases words from 97 languages across Australia, with further languages being added regularly as more communities around Australia become involved.

*"The initial idea for the project came out of discussions with Indigenous members of the RUIL Steering Group including Professor Marcial Langton, and the late Jeanie Bell. We are strongly committed to supporting the ongoing use of Australian Indigenous languages and enable as many people as possible to appreciate the diversity and nature of these languages," said Professor Nordlinger.*

*"Community involvement is vital in the creation of these resources. We have partnered with several language centres around Australia to arrange in-community recordings and to support community-led language documentation."*

This invaluable linguistic and scientific work was enabled by the Leary Trust for Australian Indigenous Languages, established through the Will of the late Duncan Elphinstone McBryde Leary (1918–2009). Duncan Leary – a gifted linguist and Faculty of Arts alum – continued to study Indigenous history and culture throughout his life, supported by his partner, Ernest Lanz.

## Learn more

Scan to watch, or visit:

▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/n3zj](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/n3zj)

▶ [arts.unimelb.edu.au/research-unit-for-indigenous-language](https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/research-unit-for-indigenous-language)



Image: Gangulu man, Thomas Watson, Industry Fellow in Australian Indigenous languages, recording 50 words in Gangulu, supported by the Indigenous Language Support Scheme.

# Onemda: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing

The important work of Onemda is supported through the generosity of numerous partnership organisations. This support is driving evidence-based change for Indigenous communities in health and wellbeing.

The ethos that guides research and engagement in Indigenous public health at the University of Melbourne finds expression in the word 'onemda'. Meaning 'love' or 'community spirit' in the Woiwurrung language, it expresses a holistic way of thinking about wellbeing. Since its establishment in 1998, the Onemda public health group at the University of Melbourne has emerged as a beacon of hope in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing. Recently relaunched with new strategic ambitions, it has gained a reputation for promoting culturally safe and effective health practices through meaningful community engagement.

In alignment with its holistic approach, the new Onemda unites research across multiple disciplines. Headed by Professor Marcia Langton AO, the Indigenous Studies Unit explores health data, knowledge translation, alcohol management and family violence. An investigation of intergenerational trauma focusing on parents and their children is led by Professor Catherine Chamberlain in the Indigenous Health Equity Unit, while the Indigenous Eye Health Unit aims to eliminate avoidable blindness and vision loss among Indigenous Australians under the guidance of Professor Mitchell Anjou.

*"Onemda was reestablished following a strategic direction to make it a fruitful centre of excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. It's all about modelling success and translating research to benefit communities. We work closely with community-controlled organisations to make this a reality," said Onemda Director, Professor Sean Taylor.*



Image: Professor Sean Taylor, Professor Catherine Chamberlain, Professor Marcia Langton AO and Professor Mitchell Anjou.

## A holistic approach to health

For many Indigenous Australians, wellbeing is deeply intertwined with culture, community and the environment. Onemda's approach extends beyond traditional clinical practices to consider not only physical wellness but also social, emotional and spiritual dimensions. This comprehensive outlook is critical in addressing the unique health challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Onemda aims to make change not only through direct community engagement, but also by advancing policy, understanding and practice among government partners, students and other stakeholders.

A key driver of the persistent health inequities experienced by Indigenous Australians is intergenerational trauma. 'Replanting the Birthing Trees' is an Onemda-led collaboration between Victorian and West Australian partners to boost familial wellbeing in the first 2,000 days of an infant's life. Vital bonding during this period has the potential to transform the 'vicious cycle' of trauma into a 'virtuous cycle' of love. This community co-designed project helps reconnect Indigenous women with their heritage while establishing positive contact with the healthcare system. This not only promotes better health outcomes but also empowers parents to take control of a new chapter in their lives to build strong futures for their families.

## Community engagement and education

Onemda prioritises community engagement, ensuring that Indigenous voices are at the forefront of health research and policy development. Co-design that actively engages community members in research methods is integral to many projects. The centre fosters a collaborative environment where knowledge and traditions are shared and respected, building trust and ensuring the relevance and accessibility of health services. The success of this approach is evident in the work of the Indigenous Eye Health Unit, a longstanding leader in the national campaign to eliminate trachoma in remote communities.



Image: ARDC Workshop 2024

## Research and innovation

Onemda's commitment to research is another key factor in its success. By focusing on topics such as mental health, chronic disease prevention and alcohol-related family violence, the centre aims to fill critical gaps in knowledge and inform policy.

Collaboration with Indigenous communities in research design and implementation ensures that the findings are applicable and make use of local knowledge. The Indigenous Data Network (IDN) – an initiative of the Indigenous Studies Unit – is leading a national project that will allow Indigenous community organisations to better analyse their data and make evidence-based decisions to improve outcomes for their communities. Spanning health, education, employment, justice, environmental management and cultural heritage services, this data will open up new possibilities for highly effective local governance.

*"Our work is having a significant impact. Our Indigenous Studies Unit contributions to teaching and research are substantial. Our major projects on understanding Alcohol Related Family Violence, Improving Indigenous Research Capability and Community Data Projects, continue to benefit our community and government partners, our students and other stakeholders through advances in policy, understanding and practice," said Professor Marcia Langton AO, Head of the Indigenous Studies Unit.*

## A brighter future for Indigenous wellbeing

As Onemda continues to grow and evolve, its commitment to culturally-informed initiatives will undoubtedly inspire similar initiatives across the country. Its success stands as a powerful example of how community engagement can drive positive change. Through its dedication to meaningful research and education, the centre is making significant strides in enhancing the wellbeing and self-determination of Indigenous Australians.

Educational programs at Onemda also play a vital role in training future health professionals. By incorporating Indigenous perspectives and cultural competency into the curriculum, the centre is shaping a new generation of healthcare providers who are equipped to deliver culturally safe care. This is crucial in addressing the historical mistrust many Indigenous communities have towards the healthcare system.

Learn more: [mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/onemda-pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/replanting-the-birthing-trees](https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/onemda-pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/replanting-the-birthing-trees)

# Community

By working together with communities, we can foster social change and create a meaningful impact. Your generosity is opening doors for future leaders in social transformation through collaborative teaching, learning, and research initiatives.



Image: Lighting the Wilin, Southbank campus, 2022. L-R: Tiriki Onus, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous); N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM; Professor Duncan Maskell; Professor Nicola Phillips, Provost; and Professor Marie Sierra, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.

# Partnering with communities to build on Country

The Bower Studio links Indigenous community groups with postgraduate Architecture students and staff from the Melbourne School of Design in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. Supported through the generosity of industry partners and sponsors, including the Dyson Bequest, students work alongside Indigenous groups to respond to each community's call for specific infrastructure projects, collaborating in the design and construction phases.

Led by Associate Professor David O'Brien, the Bower Studio has completed 27 projects since its inception in 2008.

*"We only work in communities when invited by the leaders and when the community contributes a local workforce. This builds stronger relationships, more meaningful outcomes and ensures that all participants experience the project as a partnership. This also ensures that the Architecture students return to Melbourne with stronger and more relevant capacities to suggest future community improvements," said Professor O'Brien.*

*"We make a special effort to revisit our earlier projects, reflect on the process and outcomes, to ensure that we learn from the experiences and see how to improve into the future. We have also been fortunate, through the generous support of donors and sponsors, to return to design and build in communities we have worked previously. Lots of consultation, undertaken over many visits, helps ensure we understand and share the same long-term vision as our partners."*

## The Karungkarni Art Centre upgrade

Located in Kalkaringi in the Northern Territory, 875 kilometres south of Darwin, the Karungkarni Arts Centre partnered with the Bower Studio team on a range of projects over the past ten years, including the establishment of a viable and sustainable arts centre.

The artist collective had been operating in an abandoned power station since 2012. Built on a floodplain with corrugated iron and blockwork, they were making do in a structure with little shade and poor ventilation in a harsh environment.

Over the years, the Bower Studio has worked with the community to double the size of the building and significantly improve the facilities, encouraging a wider range of community groups to now use the space in a more comfortable setting. Over dozens of site visits and three separate stages of construction, two pavilions have been added and the footprint extended, opening up the view to the Karungkarni hills that gave the centre its name.

The improvements have encouraged more artists to use the Centre to paint their traditional stories and help keep the culture strong so it could be passed on to new generations.

In August 2024, Professor O'Brien led a team of 12 students to 'put the icing on the cake' by completing the inside renovation and lifting the workability and appearance of the Centre to the standards of other Indigenous remote and regional arts centres. Installing fans and improving cross ventilation has enabled artists to spend more time working as the high heat loads were diminished.

*"Working incrementally at the Arts Centre project over many years provided the Bower Studio team a unique opportunity to engage with the artists and see how they used the spaces. It helped us understand the compromises the artists were making as they adapted into a building originally made to house diesel generators. The stages of this project have progressively informed each other and have been governed by the collaborative efforts of the broader team," said Professor O'Brien.*

The outcome has proven to be extremely satisfying for the artists, students and Bower Studio staff. The Karungkarni artists have reported that the space feels so much more 'professional' than it had been before and that this had lifted their spirits. The number of artists working at Karungkarni has tripled and the manager can now display, catalogue and store artwork which helps with sales and financial rewards back to the artists and community.

*"We are often asked how the Bower Studio got its name. Does it come from the bowerbird that makes an intricate nest for its family with a variety of bits and pieces? Is it because a 'bower shelter' or 'bough shelter' is the common name for a shelter used by many Indigenous people? Yeah, that's pretty much right on both counts!" said Professor O'Brien.*

The University of Melbourne is working to increase the number of subjects it offers that provide students with opportunities to work within, learn from and contribute to Indigenous communities. Now, over 6,500 students are provided with opportunities to engage with Indigenous communities and organisations each year.

Learn more: [bowerstudio.msd.unimelb.edu.au](http://bowerstudio.msd.unimelb.edu.au)

Scan to watch, or visit:

▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/5x38](http://go.unimelb.edu.au/5x38)



# The Dilin Duwa Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership: Pioneering a path for Indigenous entrepreneurs

**With economic success comes self-determination, and one First Nations initiative is paving the way in creating opportunity through commerce. The Dilin Duwa Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership unites the academic and commercial sectors to accelerate entrepreneurship. A joint initiative of Melbourne Business School and the Faculty of Business and Economics, the Centre plays a nationally unique role in addressing historical disparities and fostering economic growth for Indigenous Australians.**

Dilin Duwa translates to 'everlasting flow,' signifying the meeting point of knowledge and culture and embodying the convergence of the Centre's three activity streams: research, community engagement and capacity-building.

Celebrating the ingenuity of Australia's First Nations people who have been in business for over 60,000 years, it helps Indigenous entrepreneurs navigate today's challenges and opportunities while exploring how traditional knowledge and practices can enrich current business models. By focusing on culturally relevant education and mentorship, it aims to build a strong foundation for the next generation of leaders.

Enabling Indigenous people to reach their full potential strengthens Australia economically, builds social cohesion and thereby enriches us all.

## Turning the tables

Few people are aware of the vast reach of First Nations entrepreneurship in Australia. Dilin Duwa's 2024 *Indigenous Economic Power Project Snapshot* reports that Indigenous businesses contribute more than \$16 billion to the economy, employing 116,795 people and paying \$4.2 billion in wages. Many of these businesses – particularly sole traders and partnerships – are creating value in rural and remote communities.

Despite this thriving ecosystem, Indigenous Australians are significantly underrepresented in formal business qualifications. When Associate Professor Michelle Evans began her PhD in Management in 2007, she soon discovered that she was the only Indigenous student at the Melbourne Business School.

As the Founding Director of the University's Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, Associate Professor Evans understood the power of accessible and culturally safe education in creating pathways to success. Inspired by the potential to foster Indigenous business leadership through research-informed training, Associate Professor Evans set about the task of building a national hub in partnership with talent pipeline expert Professor Ian O. Williamson.

After extensive consultation, the MURRA Indigenous Business Masterclass was established in 2012 with support from the Senior Executive MBA Class of 2003 and in consultation with Kinaway, the Victorian Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. The success of MURRA indicated a strong appetite for First Nations-led business education, and an expanded program was established with the launch of Dilin Duwa in 2021. With the support of its major founding partners, the Centre has now developed a comprehensive research agenda that looks at building a national data infrastructure for the Indigenous business sector.

Dilin Duwa 2024 Visiting Scholar Dr Kiri Dell (Ngāti Porou) is Associate Dean (Māori) at the University of Auckland Business School. She is a strong believer in the future of Indigenous-led entrepreneurship.

*"One of the reasons that I chose to join the Dilin Duwa academic network is the work of the Centre," said Dr Dell. "It has the potential for transformative change for the Indigenous business sector, both here and globally."*

## A holistic approach to success

At the core of Dilin Duwa's mission are innovative leadership programs that integrate Indigenous perspectives to equip participants with theoretical knowledge and immediately applicable practical skills.

Named after the word for 'fish net' in Woi Wurrung, MURRA remains the Centre's flagship initiative that unites Indigenous entrepreneurs and professionals in the common purpose of developing business that benefits communities.

Complementing MURRA is the Master in Indigenous Business Leadership, Australia's only fully Indigenous course that responds to the complex and growing challenges faced by Indigenous business leaders working in a range of professions and industries. A robust program of research is also growing insights into the Indigenous economy, policy and Indigenous economic empowerment, as well as socio-economic and cultural legacies and impacts.



Image: Dilin Duwa team. Photo supplied by Dilin Duwa.

## Building a community of leaders

Dilin Duwa is committed to creating a supportive community for Indigenous business leaders, combating the isolation faced by many and facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources. Its impact can be seen in the success stories of its highly engaged alumni, whose achievements are inspiring others to pursue their aspirations.

Dharug woman and MURRA graduate Lee Townsend is the founder of the Yarning Circle, a publisher of innovative educational and communication programs that embed Indigenous knowledge into training. She believes that the MURRA network provides a forum for Indigenous knowledges and has a significant role to play in enabling Indigenous equality in education and mainstream structures.

*Associate Professor Evans said "To other businesses considering participating in MURRA, I would say it was probably the best investment I have made of my time and finances."*

A member of the Thabu/Samu Clan from Saibai Island in the Torres Strait, Nancy Bamaga is the founder of content, strategy and events consultancy Bamaga Productions. Her participation in MURRA marked a milestone in her transition from being a self-employed sole trader to the owner of a growing business that could function in her absence.

*"The memorable thing about the program is the relationships we've built, and the mutual respect around the diversity of businesses in the room. It's a wonderful environment that really challenges you to step up," she said.*

*"The Indigenous business sector is thriving but it remains a hidden secret. Dilin Duwa's role is to shine a light on the sector and to share the stories of their contributions to this nation."*

## Looking to the future

Through education, mentorship and community-building, Dilin Duwa is paving the way for a new generation of Indigenous entrepreneurs who are investing in the futures of their communities. By championing a spirit of resilience and innovation, it is empowering participants to lead the way to a more prosperous and equitable future. Revealing the diversity of Australia's Indigenous business sector, the past three years of Dilin Duwa have marked an exciting time to explore the possibilities that come with creating a new network of changemakers.

Learn more: [dilinduwa.com.au](http://dilinduwa.com.au)

# The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity: Local leaders for global change

The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE) program, based at the University of Melbourne, has become a beacon of strength and hope for those who are passionate about driving Indigenous-led and community-based social change. Launched in 2017 and now in its seventh year, the program brings together changemakers from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations to address the challenges of social disadvantage and build self-determined futures. AFSE Fellows form a dynamic community that advocates for and works to implement transformative solutions and amplify Indigenous voices in leadership, policy and social impact.

AFSE was established with a significant USD\$50 million grant from US-based foundation the Atlantic Philanthropies. At the time, this philanthropic grant was the largest ever seen in Australia. The AFSE program was the last of seven fellowship programs established by the Atlantic Philanthropies worldwide. Each program targets a specific social challenge, and all share the common goal of promoting fairer, healthier and more inclusive societies.

## A vision for long-term change

AFSE aims to build a generation of leaders equipped to drive social change to tackle long-standing social harm and disadvantage that continues to undermine Indigenous peoples and communities. AFSE attracts mid-career leaders with proven track records in social change initiatives, specifically those with an Indigenous focus. Each cohort of Fellows is carefully selected to represent a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives, enriching the diversity of the AFSE community.

In the first year of the program, Fellows pursue a Master of Social Change Leadership. This AFSE-exclusive degree expands their knowledge and skills through thematic modules covering key social change topics, including enacting influence, disruption and change, collaboration, and Indigenous leadership. Fellows also work on a social change project, applying what they have learnt to develop a creative solution to a problem or opportunity in their community.

Upon graduation, Fellows become Global Atlantic Fellows and join a lifelong, international network of more than 1,000 changemakers. This network provides ongoing opportunities for collaboration, offering Fellows a platform to raise awareness of their work and promote collective action.

## Driving change through education and support

AFSE's emphasis on education and mentorship sets it apart. During the foundation year, Fellows are immersed in the diverse knowledges and perspectives of Indigenous and Pacific leaders, scholars and thinkers from across the Pacific and beyond. Fellows also benefit from the guidance of Pou (Indigenous intellectual leaders and knowledge holders) who help them navigate the sensitivities of social change within Indigenous contexts.

Beyond mentorship, the program offers graduates of the Masters degree the opportunity to apply for \$30,000 in project funding. This seed funding enables Fellows to turn their ideas into actionable initiatives that bring positive change for communities.

Recently funded projects cover a broad range of issues, from Indigenous education to environmental sustainability and economic development. After project implementation, Fellows continue to make significant contributions to their communities by applying and leveraging the skills, insights and networks they developed through the program.

As the 2025 cohort prepares to commence, the 2024 cohort are starting to apply their knowledge to exciting, Indigenous-led solutions in a variety of settings, from grassroots community initiatives to larger-scale policy lobbying. AFSE Executive Director Damien Miller underscores the importance of Indigenous leadership in shaping the future of the Pacific region.

*"Our shared future depends on embracing Indigenous social innovation and leadership," said Mr Miller. "By elevating diverse Indigenous and Pacific perspectives, we activate solutions grounded in generations of understanding and deep connections to Country, community and culture."*

The AFSE program also plays a vital role in the University of Melbourne's broader commitment to promoting Indigenous knowledge and leadership. Professor Barry Judd, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) and ASFE Board Member, highlighted the program's alignment with the University's Advancing Melbourne Globally strategy and its focus on intercultural understanding.

*"The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity program profoundly reflects many aspects of the University's vision of a globally connected institution," Professor Judd said. "It fosters collaboration, foregrounds Indigenous knowledge, and promotes a deeper understanding of the Pacific region's cultural richness."*



Image: AFSE Senior Fellows with leadership and Pou at a gathering at the AFSE Hub, 2024.  
Photo: Tiffany Garvie.

## A lifelong network of change

One of the most valuable aspects of the AFSE program is its enduring global network. Fellows become part of a lifelong community that spans across continents and sectors, offering opportunities for collaboration, mentorship and mutual support. This international network is a unique resource for Fellows as they continue to tackle pressing social issues and advocate for lasting change, providing a robust platform for sharing ideas, celebrating achievements and ensuring the voices of Indigenous leaders are heard on the global stage.

The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity program is a powerful investment in the future of Australia, the Pacific Region and the world. AFSE gifts Fellows the community, mentorship, knowledge, skills, and financial support they need to not only effect change but make a lasting, positive impact on societies. As the program continues to build a new generation of leaders, we all move closer to living in healthier, more equitable and inclusive communities enriched by Indigenous peoples' knowledge and leadership.

Learn more: [socialequity.atlanticfellows.org](https://socialequity.atlanticfellows.org)

[go.unimelb.edu.au/uw38](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/uw38)

# On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri

**The Indigenous Studies Program in the Faculty of Arts offers a dynamic and interdisciplinary approach to engaging with Indigenous histories, knowledge systems and cultures.**

Launched in 2020, it is designed to address contemporary global challenges through the perspectives of Indigenous peoples, emphasising both local and international contexts. A key feature of the program is its commitment to fostering respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities, particularly the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations, on whose lands the University operates.

The Indigenous Studies Program integrates teaching, learning and research to critically examine historical and modern issues, including biogeography, ecology, cultural heritage, gender, activism and Indigenous philosophies. Through its curriculum and collaborative projects, it challenges traditional academic narratives, advocating for a sustainable future grounded in Indigenous knowledge and practices.

## On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri

A centrepiece of the program is the subject On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri, which provides students with an immersive experience of engaging directly with the values, knowledge and Country of the Wurundjeri people. This intensive course is grounded in experiential learning and reflective practice, designed to deepen students' understanding of Indigenous perspectives and foster meaningful connections with Traditional Owners. The course emphasises the importance of place-based relationships and encourages participants to apply the insights gained to their broader interactions with Indigenous communities across Australia and beyond.

### Key features of the course include:

- On-Country experiences that introduce students to Wurundjeri traditions, values and knowledge systems.
- Insights into the historical and ongoing significance of Indigenous leadership and boundary maintenance.
- Exploration of social and political contexts impacting local Indigenous communities.
- Development of an appreciation for Indigenous value systems and their continuing application in contemporary contexts.

Students completing this subject gain a nuanced understanding of Wurundjeri knowledge systems and their role in research and community engagement. The course fosters critical reflection on the ways Indigenous knowledge and leadership inform sustainable and ethical practices in various disciplines.

## Collaborative research and partnerships

The program's collaboration with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation exemplifies its commitment to co-designed, community-focused research. Through a secondment initiative, staff and PhD candidates work directly with the Corporation to develop research projects aligned with the needs and aspirations of the Wurundjeri people. This partnership ensures that academic pursuits are not only respectful but also serve the interests of Indigenous communities.

## Broader impacts and opportunities

By integrating local insights with global concerns, the Indigenous Studies Program encourages students to challenge simplistic narratives about history, "race" and culture. Areas of focus such as Indigenous design, languages, creative arts and activism equip students with the tools to critically engage with pressing societal challenges. The program's emphasis on collaboration and place-based learning ensures that students are not only informed but also active participants in the journey toward reconciliation, social justice and sustainable futures.

Through courses like On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri, the Indigenous Studies Program provides students with opportunities to learn from and connect with Wurundjeri culture and highlights the value of Indigenous knowledge in academia and beyond.

*"On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri has been co-developed with Uncle Bill Nicholson and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation's Education team, the team that Uncle Bill leads. Indigenous Studies has offered the subject since 2023, and now, at the request of the Corporation, offer it in both Summer and Winter semesters. It is a wonderful experience of intensive in-place learning, and Indigenous Studies considers it the highlight of our subject offerings."*

*Students are highly engaged in this subject and express the significant impact that the subject has had on them personally. I consider the experience of learning from, and teaching with, Uncle Bill – as such a wonderful educator and so generous in sharing his knowledge - the highlight of my teaching career."*

*Rachel Standfield, non-Indigenous teacher, Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Studies, and Subject Coordinator of On Country, On Campus: Wurundjeri.*



Image: Uncle Bill Nicholson, Wurundjeri Elder and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation's Education Team Lead. Image courtesy of Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.



Image: Rachel Standfield, Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Studies. Image courtesy of Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

## Building futures in STEM: The Residential Indigenous Science Experience (RISE)

As the world's first engineers, the Indigenous peoples of Australia have understood and cared for their environments for at least 65,000 years. Using sophisticated engineering and design principles, they have modified and managed their surroundings sustainably, living with the land rather than off it. Despite this proud history, very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are participating in today's booming engineering and information technology industries.

The problem starts early, with systemically low education levels leading to reduced workforce participation rates. Indigenous people are particularly underrepresented in decision-making roles, with the unwritten rule that specialist positions require at least a Bachelors degree creating an impassable barrier for those without standard attributes. Particularly acute for people from remote and rural communities, this challenge is exacerbated in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines requiring advanced mathematics and science education.

The University of Melbourne is committed to empowering Indigenous Peoples as key decision-makers and leaders who can create positive futures for their communities and broader society through STEM. Achieving this goal means that barriers to success for young Indigenous Australians must be tackled before the critical school-leaving stage.

It is an issue well recognised within industry, who are now partnering with the University of Melbourne to support two standout initiatives which are leading the way in identifying promising scientific talent and nurturing it through relevant and engaging pathways to higher education. The Victorian Indigenous Engineering Winter School (VIEWS) and Residential Indigenous Science Experience (RISE) aim to inspire and empower young Indigenous People, offering them invaluable insights into engineering and science and encouraging them to consider future careers in these fields.

### The Residential Indigenous Science Experience

RISE caters to Year 9 and Year 10 Indigenous students with a passion for science. Supported by Agilent Technologies, this annual immersive program takes place over a week in November, offering students from around Australia the chance to engage with scientific concepts in a dynamic and interactive setting.

Participants join like-minded peers to learn about the principles and applications of cutting-edge research being undertaken at the University, take part in hands-on workshops and hear presentations exploring current themes in STEM. Experienced Faculty members and researchers share their expertise and ignite curiosity about the natural world, while scientific fields such as biology, chemistry and environmental science are explored through hands-on experiments.

RISE not only aims to build the scientific knowledge of young Indigenous Australians, but also empowers them to envision a future in STEM. A key element of the program is the opportunity to interact with inspirational First Nations scientists and students making waves in STEM. By showcasing the success stories of Indigenous scientists, RISE aims to inspire participants to pursue their aspirations and challenges the stereotype that these fields are inaccessible.

#### Learn more

Scan to watch:

- ▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/hn38](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/hn38)
- ▶ [science.unimelb.edu.au/engage/science-for-schools/riase](https://science.unimelb.edu.au/engage/science-for-schools/riase)
- ▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/ow38](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/ow38)



## Creating pathways into Engineering and IT: The Victorian Indigenous Engineering Winter School (VIEWS)



Image: 2024 VIEWS program participants. Photo supplied by VIEWS.

**RISE is complemented by the Victorian Indigenous Engineering Winter School (VIEWS), an exciting program for scientifically-minded Year 10, 11 and 12 Indigenous students from across Australia. Held annually during the winter school holidays, it provides first-hand insights into the reality of study and work in Engineering and Information Technology.**

VIEWS enables young Indigenous Australians to explore projects run by engineers and IT specialists, meet Indigenous engineering professionals and discover pathways to careers that impact society and improve the lives of people across the globe. Hands-on activities, workshops and mentoring from industry professionals and academic staff expands perspectives and ambitions through real-world exposure, while a day exploring study options at four top Victorian universities illustrates how ambition can be turned into reality.

The program focuses on creating a supportive and inclusive environment where Indigenous students can thrive. Participants engage in practical projects, such as building bridges and designing sustainable energy solutions, which not only develop their technical skills but also encourage teamwork and problem-solving. This experiential learning approach helps demystify engineering concepts, making them accessible and relatable.

Importantly, VIEWS also incorporates cultural elements, ensuring that students see the relevance of their heritage in the modern engineering landscape. By connecting Indigenous knowledge with contemporary practices, the program highlights the potential for innovative solutions that respect and reflect Indigenous perspectives.



### Creating pathways to success

Both RISE and VIEWS play a crucial role in addressing the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the engineering and science disciplines. By providing targeted support and resources to talented young people at a critical age, these programs create pathways for Indigenous students to further their education and careers in ways they may never have imagined.

The impact of RISE and VIEWS extends beyond the classroom. Participants leave not only with new skills and knowledge, but also with a sense of confidence and purpose. A sense of camaraderie is fostered by the residential format of the programs, creating a strong sense of community and belonging that leaves participants with a new network of similarly ambitious friends from across the country.

Through hands-on learning, cultural connection and community support, initiatives such as RISE and VIEWS are not only inspiring students today but also paving the way for greater innovation in STEM.

*“Before I came to RISE my expectation was that I wasn’t very good at science and thought I was not going to have a good time, but now at the end of it I had so much fun and learnt so many new things and realised that there are so many more different elements to science than I thought.”*

*“VIEWS gave me insight into different opportunities and into living in Melbourne. I would definitely recommend the program to other Indigenous students, very beneficial!”*

### Learn more

▶ [eng.unimelb.edu.au/engage-with-us/indigenous/views](https://eng.unimelb.edu.au/engage-with-us/indigenous/views)

▶ [go.unimelb.edu.au/e8e8](https://go.unimelb.edu.au/e8e8)

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Director of Philanthropy (Indigenous)

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**Cover image:** Bachelor of Fine Arts student Brittany Biles.