



Charles Sturt
University

Strategic coordination of
First Nations initiatives in
the Faculty of Science
and Health: maximising
impact on student
success and academic
staff cultural capability.

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Executive summary

This report is the outcome of a Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) project in late 2022. The aim of the project was to identify good practice at Charles Sturt, in relation to initiatives which benefit First Nations students and build staff capability for culturally safe practice.

Currently across the University there are a range of initiatives with a common focus on enabling success for First Nations students. These initiatives are core business for the First Nations Student Success team but in other spaces, initiatives have emerged *ad hoc* to address the needs of specific student cohorts, or as a consequence of staff identifying an opportunity for innovative practice. There is an identified need for a shared commitment to student experience, across the institution. Currently, however, there is a disconnect between student support services and Faculty staff who deliver subjects and have a day-to-day responsibility for the experience of First Nations students.

'I think we silo areas instead of embracing them across the Uni more generally ... academic work and professional work. It often overlaps but the strategic work sometimes remains in silos' (Ben Hunter, previously employed in the First Nations Student Success Team).

The value of this report is the identification of good practice at Charles Sturt, in relation to initiatives which benefit First Nations students and build staff capability for culturally safe practice.

Summary points are included at the end of each section, to highlight issues for further attention. Initiatives included in this report align with the 'Student Success Commitments' in the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 – 2025:

- Universities have recruitment strategies for Indigenous students.
- Universities acknowledge the significant role Indigenous student support services play in success and resource these services appropriately.
- Whilst Indigenous Centres play a central role, there is a need to share responsibility across the institution and universities should have in place resourced mechanisms for student support across their institution.
- Universities target the improvement of completion rates of Indigenous students through the development of an institutional working group to determine the nature of the issues at the institutional level and to implement strategies to improve Indigenous student completion rates at their university. These strategies should include undergraduate, postgraduate, mature age, and remote area students.
- Universities support through specific initiatives pathways for Indigenous students into university, and similar support programs for students to transition into higher degrees by research (HDRs), academic employment, and other employment opportunities (p.24).

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Background

The University Strategy [2030](#) asserts that First Nations education, research and engagement is everybody's business. There is a commitment to drive shared ownership for outcomes ... 'it's everybody's purpose and it's everybody's opportunity'.

Currently across the University there are a range of initiatives with a common focus on enabling success for First Nations students. These initiatives are core business for the First Nations Student Success team and First Nations Student Services but in other spaces, initiatives have emerged to address the needs of specific student cohorts or as a consequence of staff identifying an opportunity for innovative practice.

The impetus for this HEPPP project was the lack of an effective mechanism to consolidate knowledge of a broad range of activity at Charles Sturt and to connect professional and academic initiatives. A missed opportunity was identified, to maximise benefits for students, staff and the University.

This project also answers calls in the academic literature for universities to invest in programs that support Indigenous pathways, transitions, participation and achievement in higher education (Smith and Robertson, 2020). In addition, research shows that non-Indigenous academics continue to experience discomfort engaging with First Nations content and First Nations students (Bullen et al. 2021).

The specific focus is four schools in the Faculty of Science & Health (FoSH) - School of Agriculture, Environmental & Veterinary Sciences; School of Allied Health, Exercise & Sports Sciences; School of Dentistry & Medical Sciences; School of Nursing, Paramedicine & Healthcare Sciences. Based on 2021 data, undergraduate First Nations students enrolled in these four schools had progress rates 9.5% below non-Indigenous students (79.0% vs 88.5%) and first year attrition was 14.6% above non-Indigenous students (40.8% vs 26.2%).

This project report highlights areas of good practice in the Faculty of Science & Health, First Nations Student Success Team, the Retention Team, the Division of Learning and Teaching, and Three Rivers Department of Rural Health. It provides the opportunity to illustrate how this work could be facilitated more strategically, through intentional collaboration between professional and academic staff teams. In relation to implementation of the First Nations strategy, it is important to consider how best practice can be extended across the institution, to benefit First Nations students and contribute to building capacity for cultural safety.

The following sections provide a range of exemplars in the Faculty of Science & Health, highlighting opportunities which would improve the experience of students and staff. It is important

to acknowledge the people who lead the work in these spaces and to disseminate this knowledge. All academic and professional staff should reflect on their responsibility and accountability to ‘transform attitudes and create a workplace culture that values and respects First Nations knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing, being and doing’. (Charles Sturt Reconciliation Action Plan).

These examples are not an exhaustive list but provide insight to the diversity of activity across the Faculty of Science & Health and may serve as inspiration for future initiatives.

Examples of good practice in the Faculty of Science & Health

BACHELOR OF HEALTH SCIENCE (MENTAL HEALTH)

The Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) [course](#) ‘prepares graduates who have the ability to apply knowledge and skills to work with a wide range of people with a unique perspective and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures’. An entry requirement for this course is that applicants are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background.

The course lead is a First Nations academic who ensures the course team works collectively to build cross-cultural relationships. A non-Indigenous academic works in partnership as the Clinical Lead. Nothing is done without First Nations people at the table and staff meetings are open for anyone to gain insight to management of cultural and community issues. Regular communication is fundamental to the success of this team and during an intensive for example, the course lead and Adviser, First Nations students liaise each day.

The dedicated support provided by the Adviser, First Nations students is crucial to ensuring culturally relevant support and student engagement. A person with a strong cultural connection can build a trusting relationship with students. This is important to establish early and a relationship with a prospective student may begin well before they enrol in the course, for example through a school visit or NAIDOC activities.

Deep connections and culturally supportive relationships are nurtured with students, particularly during the first year of study. The Adviser, First Nations students is the first point of contact for students and also an important referrer e.g. academic support; disability services; counselling. A high level of pastoral support is provided with daily contact during an intensive school and individual student meetings are scheduled at least once per session. Conversations are always face-to-face or via online video, with the student’s experience and ‘best option’ at the centre of the conversation. This cultural framework ensures a collective approach to consultation and decision making; this is how cultural business should be done in the Charles Sturt community.

Student support through Student Success is focused on developing students' educational skill base, to enable independent learners who think critically. Ensuring academic rigour is important, not just for success in the course but for the students' self-confidence to hold their place in community and the workplace. First Nations students are always managing their cultural responsibility whilst maintaining their academic and workplace responsibility.

The first two Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) Honours students will graduate in April 2023. Students have moved well beyond the deficit model, now believing they can do this and make a difference.

BACHELOR OF NURSING - FIRST NATIONS STUDENT COHORT

First Nations students enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing represent the largest cohort in FoSH; 50 commencing students (5.0%) in 2022 and 156 First Nations students in total (6.3%). These students have the opportunity to join a First Nations student online cohort. This is an opt-in process for first year students. The purpose of this cohort is to create a culturally safe space for First Nations students to learn together. This student cohort share online lectures and tutorials with other nursing students but has a dedicated intensive school which is rotated between different campuses, depending on available space to accommodate students. The intention is that this cohort of First Nations students will progress through the course together, strengthening relationships with peers and tutors over time.

Wrap-around support for this student cohort is enabled by the First Nations Student Success Team who provide a dedicated Adviser to work with the students. Additionally, there is an embedded tutor specifically for the First Nations cohort that is separate from the HEPPP embedded tutor program and funded annually through First Nations Student Success.

Enabling best practice with First Nations student cohorts

- Provide First Nations academic leadership to ensure culturally relevant practice and effective cross-cultural relationships;
- Allocate a dedicated Adviser, First Nations students to provide direct support to the cohort and facilitate support from other services;
- Implement processes to nurture a deep connection and culturally supportive relationships with students;
- Provide regular two-way communication between students and the course team, to ensure timely and effective support;
- Apply a cultural framework to ensure a collective approach to consultation and decision making;
- Provide tutor support guidelines to ensure culturally appropriate support; particularly relevant if tutors are non-Indigenous staff;

- Facilitate enrolment in pathway courses as a stepwise approach to empower students for success e.g. Diploma – Associate Degree – Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health).

ORANGE CAMPUS – YARNING CIRCLE AND SKY STORIES

The Girinyalanha Aboriginal Nature and Bioscience Park on the Orange campus was officially opened on 15 March 2016 (Appendix 1). This initiative was driven by a senior academic in partnership with the Orange Local Aboriginal Land [Council](#), Orange Aboriginal Medical [Service](#), and a local Elders group.

This special place on the Orange campus is a significant cultural space which has multiple purposes – for social connection and maintaining cultural heritage; providing a space for learning; and highlighting environmental sustainability through cultural burning and growing Indigenous food and medicine plants e.g. Murnong (Daisy Yam). Girinyalanha is also used for Orientation and a Welcome to Country at the beginning of each year. This cultural orientation is important to induct new students to Charles Sturt and emphasise the value of First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing.

The Sky Stories [project](#) emerged from the initial NAIDOC week events on campus. This collaboration between Charles Sturt, the Australian Indigenous Astronomy group, and the Central West Astronomical Society is an important example of the value of external partnerships to connect Charles Sturt with the local community. Sky Stories is an annual event which provides an opportunity for staff, students, and the community to come together to learn about the differences and parallels between First Nations and Western science

PORT MACQUARIE – PHYSIOTHERAPY AT WERIN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION MEDICAL CENTRE

This collaboration between the Physiotherapy team at Port Macquarie and Werin Aboriginal Corporation Medical [Centre](#) is another exemplar of the value of community partnerships.

Physiotherapy students enrolled in their second year of the program, meet the First Nations Elders who work at Werin in a two-hour yarning session. This introductory experience is embedded in the curriculum and informs a reflective assessment task, ensuring that students understand the relevance of this learning to their practice as allied health professionals.

Werin is also an important workplace partner, providing clinical placements for second year Physiotherapy students as part of PHS249 Integrating Physiotherapy Practice. This community partnership has been strengthened with some of Werin staff appointed as members of the Physiotherapy external advisory committee.

ALBURY – PODIATRY AT WESTSIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE

This project commenced in July 2020 as a collaborative partnership between the former School of Community Health, Westside Community Centre, and Three Rivers Department of Rural Health (DRH). The podiatry clinic was launched as a pilot project in July 2021 and is currently supported through a contract from Murray Primary Health Network. To date, the clinic has recruited over 100 clients and provided 280 community workplace learning hours for podiatry students in their final two years of study.

The local community for Westside includes a strong First Nations population which is almost twice the NSW average and 25% of community members are over 65 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics). The barriers facing the community include limited finance, lack of transportation, high unemployment rates, and low education levels. This collaborative venture is demonstrating the importance of: enabling access to primary healthcare by reducing barriers such as cost and transportation (Rural Health Information Hub); the impact of podiatry on improving the health and wellbeing of community; and the value of an authentic, situated learning experience to build podiatry students' knowledge, skills and attitudes for culturally responsive practice. The opportunity for podiatry students to work with First Nations clients is important to deepen their understanding of building relationships to foster culturally safe practice.

This community collaboration addresses the Universities Australia expectation that 'Universities have Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced' (Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 – 2025). Additionally, the student-led podiatry clinic contributes to building capacity in allied health to create a culturally safe health workforce, which is a key tenet of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (2020)).

This initiative was recognised with a Charles Sturt Executive Dean's [Award](#) for Teaching in 2022.

ALBURY – CULTURAL ORIENTATION FOR COMMENCING ALLIED HEALTH STUDENTS

This collaboration between Albury-Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) and the School of Allied Health, Exercise and Sports Sciences is a community partnership initiative.

The cultural orientation designed for commencing allied health students, is facilitated by Uncle Sam Wickman – Cultural Advisor, AWAHS. A two-hour lecture supports a one-day on-site cultural tour to Walla Walla, NSW. The value of a cultural orientation experience is to create a connection for new students, to the local community and Country. Learning about Indigenous cultures, histories and contemporary issues is important for all First Nations and non-Indigenous students,

and provides an important foundation for their studies in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and podiatry.

Educating our future allied health practitioners to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable culturally safe and respectful practice is critical to ensuring optimal health and wellbeing for First Nations peoples and communities.

Enabling best practice for community collaboration

- Ensure advocacy and action from the Senior Executive to support and facilitate innovative practice;
- Provide resources for individual staff and teams to develop collaborative partnerships within Charles Sturt and with external organisations;
- Enable dissemination and celebration of best practice to inspire others.

FIRST NATIONS CURRICULUM

Faculty staff have worked in collaboration with staff in the School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) for many years, scaffolding Indigenous Australian content in subjects and courses to meet the Indigenous Australian Content in Courses and Subjects (IACCS) [policy](#). This work has been very important to engage academic staff in inter-cultural conversations about subject and course design. The Indigenous Board of Studies provides in-depth feedback on subjects and courses to ensure learning outcomes, learning experiences and assessment tasks are culturally relevant.

Collaboration between SIAS and Faculty staff has led to the development of several hybrid Indigenous Australian studies [subjects](#) for example, HLT417 Indigenous Perspectives on Health and Wellbeing; SPH534 Cultural Competency and Community Development as Speech Pathology Practice; and ENM111 Indigenous Environmental Studies. These partnerships are particularly effective in building the capacity of academics to support students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes required for critical reflection and culturally safe practice.

72.4% of undergraduate courses and 28.5% of postgraduate courses (58.1% overall) in the Faculty have been endorsed as meeting the IACCS policy.

AN ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY

One example of innovative practice in learning & teaching is illustrated by the work of Dr Natalia Bilton – Senior Lecturer in the School of Dentistry and Medical Sciences. Dr Bilton collaborated with Dr Tyson Yunkaporta creator of [8ways](#) Aboriginal Pedagogy to develop a new and alternative pedagogy (and associated learning activities), for the teaching of anatomy and physiology to first year students (Appendix 2).

Dr Bilton's approach to teaching has been successful in increasing student engagement in large multi-mode cross-campus subjects. She has led the Indigenous Science Education Program at the Port Macquarie campus for three years and her work has been acknowledged with multiple teaching awards. Dr Bilton was a keynote speaker at the Australian and New Zealand Association of Clinical Anatomists (ANZACA) [conference](#) in December 2022.

ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULE AND WORKSHOP 'SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO BUILD CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE'

A bespoke online professional development (PD) module and workshop was developed and piloted in November 2022 as part of this HEP PP project. This innovative pilot was enabled through collaboration between Prof Jay Phillips – Head of SIAS; Kerstin Locke – A/Head SIAS; and A/Prof Caroline Robinson – A/Head L&T, School of Allied Health, Exercise and Sports Sciences.

Faculty staff were invited to an online module and participate in a 1.5 hours online workshop. The online module was constructed in an i2 Organisation [site](#), comprising a series of learning resources and reflective activities. These resources are used in the foundational Indigenous Australian Studies subjects – [IKC100](#), [IKC101](#) and [ENM111](#), in which they introduce students to the principles of Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy (ISP) and engage participants in critical reflexivity. A series of reflective activities provided staff with a valuable insight to their students' experiences in these foundational subjects:

- Reflective activity 1 – who are you?
- Reflective activity 2 – Australia's shared history
- Reflective activity 3 – Application to your own context

This combination of guided online study and workshop participation provided a transformational learning experience for 43 continuing and sessional academics in FoSH. Preliminary feedback from participants was very positive:

"This has been incredibly beneficial to be a part of. Thank you to everyone involved".

"Thanks everyone. Lots of take-homes and thinking points regarding how to incorporate what I have learnt into my teaching".

"Thank you for organising the workshop. This was needed - Thank you!"

"A terrific workshop - thank you all!"

"Thanks so much for this awesome opportunity".

Enabling best practice in curriculum, learning and teaching

- In addition to prioritising the recruitment of First Nations academic staff, allocate specific funding to Schools to employ First Nations people as sessional teachers;
- Invest in the development of an engaging resource for all staff to provide a culturally appropriate replacement for the ICCP;
- Allocate adequate funding to enable all continuing and sessional academic staff to complete professional development which builds staff capacity for developing and delivering subjects which scaffold cultural capabilities;
- Increase the recruitment of First Nations Education and Learning Designers to build capacity in the Division of Learning & Teaching;
- Facilitate collaboration between Faculty staff, the First Nations Student Success Team and the Division of Learning and Teaching, to enhance student engagement and enable success;
- Prioritise the First Nations curriculum in the new Teaching Academy;
- Showcase best practice to inspire others.

Three Rivers Department of Rural Health (DRH)

Three Rivers DRH has established many partnerships with Faculty staff to enable workplace learning opportunities for students and support staff development for example, through conference attendance.

Many of the DRH initiatives are focused on supporting First Nations students and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations peoples and communities. Cultural orientation, on-country cultural immersion experiences, and opportunities for cultural safety training are facilitated through DRH to build the capability of students and clinical educators for culturally responsive practice.

The DRH also collaborates with [First Nations Student Connect](#) to coordinate approaches to First Nations prospective and current student engagement, and improve pathways into health disciplines for First Nations people. Further detail about the broad scope of DRH initiatives is provided in Appendix 3.

Research

Whilst there has been clear focus in FoSH on developing the cultural capabilities of undergraduate and postgraduate students through learning and teaching, guided by the IACCS policy, research students and supervisors may not have the same opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills for culturally responsive practice. This is particularly important in relation to 'ethics and protocols

for research related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and collections' (AIATSIS), and Indigenous data sovereignty.

Current considerations to address this need include:

- the requirement for HDR students to complete [IKC501](#) Indigenous Research Methods, to ensure that students understood 'the value of decolonising and anti-colonial approaches to research with Indigenous peoples and / or research on issues of significance for Indigenous Australians';
- collaboration with community to decolonise the research space and increase First Nations leadership in research;
- enabling professional development for First Nations community researchers to ensure research safety and build research capacity;
- implementing cultural safety training for non-Indigenous research supervisors working with First Nations HDR and Honours students;
- design of a 3 + 1 model as a pathway into research for graduates from a professional background.

A range of dedicated First Nations research scholarships are available to students enrolled in the School of Agriculture, Environmental and Veterinary Studies (SAEVS) for example, the [AGRTP](#) Indigenous scholarship and the First Nations Agriculture [Scholarship](#).

Examples of First Nations research partnerships including **FoSH First Nations academic staff** and non-Indigenous academic staff include:

- Achieving true representation of Indigenous people in nursing and midwifery'.

An ARC Grant – Discovery Indigenous \$1,034,235 (IN230100003)

Partnership between CATSINaM¹ and Muliyan²

Research team: Adams, K. Saunders, V. West, R. **Deravin**, L. Stuart, L.

- A comparison of rural Australian First Nations and Non-First Nations survey responses to COVID-19 risks and impacts: implications for health [communications](#)

This study investigated differences between rural Australian First Nations and non-First Nations survey respondents' perceptions of COVID-19-related risks and analysed other variables that could predict an exacerbation of anxiety related to COVID-19 harms.

¹ The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) is the peak advocacy body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives in Australia.

² Muliyan is a National Indigenous nursing and midwifery research team.

Authors: Julaine Allan, Jodie Kleinschafer, Teesta Saksena, Azizur Rahman, **Jayne Lawrence** & Mark Lock.

- The Pepi Pod @ [program](#)

This research project trialled the Pedi Pod ® as a safe alternative to co-sleeping among First Nations families.

Research team: Grant, Julian. et al.

- '[DANMM that's good!](#)': Evaluating the feasibility and acceptability of the Deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nursing and Midwifery Mentoring (DANMM) Program across rural, regional, and metropolitan NSW'

A research project to extend a pilot program that aims to increase the retention and satisfaction of First Nations nurses and midwives through culturally safe practices.

Research team: Peter Fernando; Jessica Biles; Judith Anderson; Shanna Cargill; Troy Pietsch; Brett Biles; Bradley Christian; Faye McMillan; Grant Sara; Nathaniel Alexander; Tara Flemington.

Enabling best practice in research

- Implement AIATSIS guidelines to inform research practice at Charles Sturt;
- Prioritise the appointment of First Nations academic staff as principal or co-supervisors;
- Modify the bespoke professional development module and workshop designed for teaching staff, to meet the needs of research supervisors;
- Support the development of a cultural governance group to facilitate liaison with community and a focus on serving the communities in our footprint, to enable success outside of the institution.

The following sections relate to work which is led by staff in the First Nations Student Success Team, the Retention Team, and the Division of Learning and Teaching. Summary points are included to identify opportunities for closer collaboration between these central teams and academic staff, to enhance the student experience and improve recruitment and retention.

First Nations student recruitment

Strong Moves

The Strong Moves [program](#) is specifically designed for Year 9 and 10 First Nations students. Sessions are held in school and at a local Charles Sturt campus. This program includes goal setting, admission pathways, discussions with Charles Sturt First Nations mentors, staff and local Elders. The Strong Moves program provides students with the opportunity to build strong

relationships with the mentors and staff, to develop the confidence and understanding that university is an attainable goal.

Strong Moves camps enable First Nations students to spend three days participating in leadership and personal development workshops to build confidence, and cultural activities which may include an on-country site tour. The final academic session focuses the students on pathways into a range of disciplines. These camps are currently organised at Port Macquarie, Bathurst, Wagga Wagga and Albury campuses, with the potential to host 120 students across the year.

Students from the Strong Moves program have become student mentors for the [Connections](#) program. Connections is a five-day First Nations direct entry program that helps students prepare for study with Charles Sturt. Successful completion of this program provides students with guaranteed entry into a broad range of Bachelor degrees.

Enabling collaborative practice to enhance student recruitment

- Establish a process to identify First Nations students who experienced the Strong Moves program and subsequently enrolled in a course, to enable a continuing relationship with the Strong Moves team;
- Broaden the engagement of academic staff in the Strong Moves program to promote courses and career pathways, provide students with hands-on experience, and facilitate relationships between prospective students and industry partners;
- Strengthen the partnership between discipline teams in FoSH and the First Nations Student Success team, to create tangible pathways from VET to university and sustainable support for students' transition;
- Invest in a collaborative and shared commitment to the First Nations student experience across the Faculty, which assists in building relationships with students prior to commencing study.

First Nations student support and retention

The First Nations Student Success team offers a broad range of support for students via First Nations Student [Connect](#). This is primarily an opt-in process for individual students but a referral from one of the First Nations student advisors or the Retention Team, is also a mechanism to enable access to academic support. The best outcome for student engagement is a direct referral from a First Nations student advisor because it is relational - a personalised connection. The education journey experience for a First Nations student might be quite different to that for a non-Indigenous student. A holistic approach to student support is essential with a requirement for cultural understanding and awareness; careful attention must be paid to the 'unsaid'.

Relationships between First Nations student advisors, First Nations students and the Academic Skills Advisor (First Nations), are reliant on trust and relationships established by the First Nations student advisors. This trust and relationships take a long time to establish. A First Nations student might be less proactive in asking for help, so it's important that all professional and academic staff have the knowledge and skills to navigate these relationships successfully.

The Academic Skills Advisors (First Nations) provide support which is targeted to a specific student's needs for example, academic literacy or assignment writing. Support also focuses on where a student is at in their learning journey e.g. 1st year; final year. Close collaboration with student support services such as the library and disability services, is also an essential aspect of this role. Considering the holistic circumstances for a student is essential because a First Nations student is likely to have many competing commitments – work, family, community responsibilities – and study might be the lowest on the list.

Attrition from university study is preventable if students connect with support early and effectively. The most common barrier to success for First Nations students, is accessing help too late. Of the approximate 1400 First Nations students enrolled at Charles Sturt, about 21% are linked in with First Nations Student Success.

EMBEDDED TUTORS PROGRAM

The Embedded Tutors [Program](#) is managed by the Retention Team in the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and facilitated by the Division of Student Success. This initiative enables tutors to provide timely, subject-specific feedback to students in selected first year undergraduate subjects with large cohorts. Embedded tutors are faculty-specific sessional staff who provide targeted learning to increase students' confidence in their capability for study.

In relation to First Nations students enrolled in their first year of study, the Embedded Tutor Program provides an additional opportunity to benefit from academic support. If a student fails an assessment task, they are identified for follow up by a member of the Outreach Team and connected with an Academic Skills Advisor (First Nations).

The Embedded Tutor program has demonstrated positive outcomes in improving student performance, with First Nations student success higher than that for non-Indigenous students.

GULAAY, DIVISION OF LEARNING & TEACHING

[Gulaay](#) is part of the Division of Learning and Teaching (DLT). The lead for Gulaay is employed as the Academic Lead (First Nations Curriculum) to provide academic support to staff for curriculum design, integrating Indigenous Australian content in subjects, and implementation of the IACCS policy. Lloyd Dolan works in collaboration with Course Directors and subject conveners to facilitate

the integration of Indigenous Australian content in subjects and courses, and assist with the development of subject outlines and learning resources.

Lloyd Dolan also manages the Indigenous Cultural Competency Program ([ICCP](#)) which all academic continuing staff must complete. Upskilling staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to teach subjects with Indigenous Australian content is a particular challenge. The ICCP provides foundational knowledge but is not a requirement for sessional academic staff and this poses a risk to cultural safety for First Nations students. Additionally, concerns have been raised that the ICCP is a potentially traumatising experience for First Nations staff and a more culturally appropriate learning resource is needed.

In an unofficial capacity, however, Lloyd Dolan is also a mentor and provider of pastoral care for numerous First Nations students across the university, providing support to the First Nations Student Success team. For example, the lived experience for a First Nations student can make it very challenging for them to complete an assessment task which requires writing about personal or community trauma, in an academic format.

This focus on building authentic relationships with First Nations students and providing timely support is essential to ensure that each student feels valued and not just a number in the institution. This presents the largest risk to student attrition. The more barriers placed in the way for students, the more disengaged they will become.

Enabling First Nations student support and retention

- Strengthen collaboration between the Academic Skills Advisors (First Nations) and Faculty staff – particularly subject coordinators, Heads of Discipline and Course Directors;
- Adequately resource the Gulaay team and prioritise 'in person' interactions with First Nations students to build strong and trusting relationships;
- Ensure that the template for the new Learning Management System prioritises ease of access for students, to improve the online experience e.g. standardised format with links to academic support and other resources.

Summary

The value of this project report is the identification of good practice at Charles Sturt, in relation to initiatives which benefit First Nations students and build staff capability for culturally safe practice. Specifically, this report highlights some exemplars from the Faculty of Science & Health.

This report is also useful to illustrate how this work could be facilitated more strategically, through intentional collaboration between professional and academic staff teams. Opportunities for

improved partnerships between Faculty and the First Nations Student Success Team are highlighted, to improve the experience for First Nations students and enhance retention.

In relation to implementation of the First Nations strategy, it is important to consider how best practice can be extended across the institution, to benefit First Nations students and contribute to building capacity for cultural safety.

Investment in the initiatives and opportunities for best practice which are showcased in this report will assist Charles Sturt in meeting the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 – 2025, ‘to move beyond aspiration to implementation ...’ (Universities Australia, p.17).

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Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 – 2025
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Girinyalanha Aboriginal Nature and Bioscience Park, Orange campus

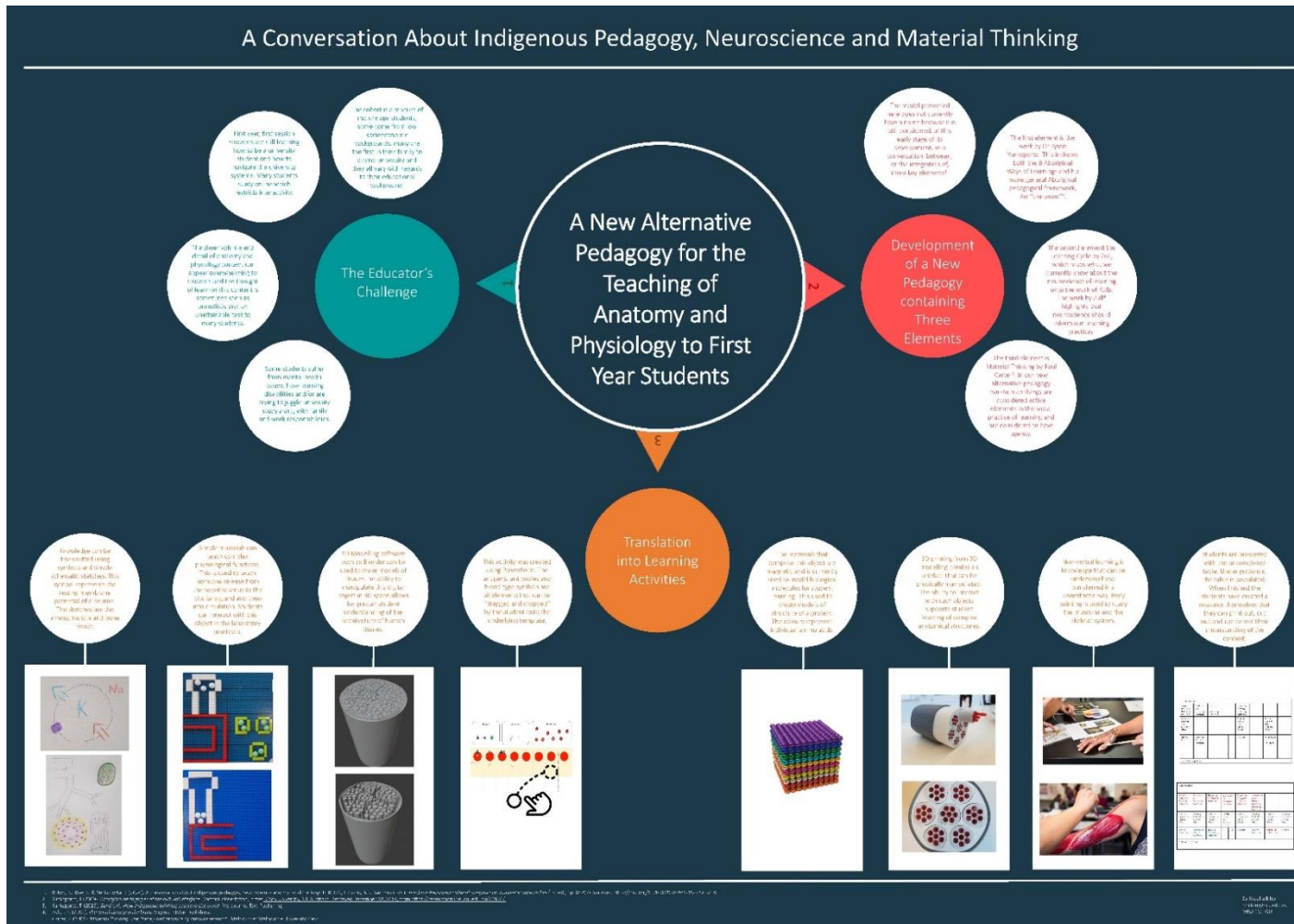


Draft

Faculty of Science & Health | Strategic coordination of First Nations initiatives in the Faculty of Science and Health: maximising impact on student success and academic staff cultural capability.

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Appendix 2 – Conference poster by Dr Natalia Bilton – Senior Lecturer in the School of Dentistry and Medical Sciences



Appendix 3 - Three Rivers Department of Rural Health – Current and proposed First Nations initiatives

Activity description What are we doing / proposing to do	Key stakeholders (internal and external)	Key measures (process and outcome, and potential for research)
Support and grow placements that enhance the health and wellbeing of First Nations people Established process to prioritise working with First Nations communities to grow placement opportunities where students work in a First Nations health setting or undertake cultural immersion during their placement	ACCHO's LHDs	Numbers of placement sites Types of placements (traditional /Three Rivers bespoke placements) Number of students Range of disciplines involved
Facilitate and deliver on-line cultural safety training to students in preparation for placement		Continued promotion of online module 'Developing cultural awareness for placement and future practice' No of students completing the module prior to placement (mandatory for all students undertaking placement in a First Nations community or health service)
Development of First Nations cultural immersion experiences as part of the Allied Health expansion project in Forbes and Parkes		Consultation with First Nations community members and stakeholders in the development of design principles First Nations representation on governance committee for GO4898 Established program for implementation
Engagement of Aboriginal Health Workers to support student cultural training for placement in Forbes and Parkes		To be determined following co-design of the program of work
Continued Student Health Club bursaries for the Executive	RHC	Student executive group actively engaged in RH+ Effective RH+ club governance RH+ Executive Group - First Nations Lead – Medicine
Maintain regional approach to student placement support through employment of local Clinical Educators across the footprint to provide support for rural placements	Students WPL Providers	CE's employment maintained No of students supported by each CE (with regional breakdown)

	Disciplines	Community engagement activities such as interagency meetings to build community relationships and build / grow specific First Nations placement opportunities
Engagement with community-based committees		Continued identification of key committees for UDRH engagement across our region Register of staff on external committees – captured on CRM Communication and knowledge exchange between the university and external stakeholders
Support education of staff to engage in research with First Nations peoples	JCU Office of First Nations Engagement CSU	Completion of the Indigenous Research Methodologies Workshops with JCU Support enrolment of staff in additional PD specifically focused on research with First Nations students (PhD) and with First Nations groups and people
Increase engagement with First Nations health services and community groups to co-design research projects	AWAHS	Disseminate findings from Walkin' About project with AWAHS
Increase opportunities for First Nations Research Leadership	Exec Dean Research Lead HR	Establish a Level D/E Professor position for First Nations Rural Health Research
Coordinated approaches to First Nations prospective and current student engagement	First Nations Student Connect	Active engagement in the Charles Sturt Schools Engagement Reference group to deliver a coordinated approach to the engagement of prospective First Nations health students. Establishment of a service agreement with First Nations Student Connect to ensure an integrated and coordinated approach to First Nations student enrolment and support activities.
Improve pathways for First Nations people Connections First Nations Direct Entry programs will be implemented, as well as customised pre-entry programs for health disciplines	Three Rivers Operations team	Establishment of a Service Agreement with FNSS. Customised Connections programs in health disciplines, developed and ready for implementation

		<p>Outreach campaigns developed and rolled out to maximise potential and future student uptake</p> <p>CSU Direct and Early Entry programs outside of FNSS have been engaged to enhance the journey of FNS accessing these alternate pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships established • Collaboration Agreements with Faculties • Aspiration building and support components agreed • Aspiration building material complete • Direct entry program conducted for each area • Customised support model established
Improve retention for First Nations Students through the identification of contributing factors to attrition, and development of early intervention and re-engagement strategies offered as part of First Nations Student Connect services	Three Rivers Operations team	<p>Retention information accessed and analysed via meetings, focus groups and/or surveys</p> <p>Retention strategies formalised and implemented</p>
First Nations Mentor Program (for First Nations students)	Three Rivers Rural Health Education team	<p>Systems in place to ensure 100% of First Nations health students are offered mentoring support</p> <p>First Nations mentors engaged for trial and ongoing program. *(Note – potential for some mentors to be sourced from First Nations clinicians undertaking IAHA training)</p>
		<p>Program trial preparation finalised, and trial facilitated</p>
		<p>Program trial reviewed/analysed</p>
		<p>Outcomes of trial and review incorporated into Program guidelines for new consistent First Nations Mentor Program offered through First Nations Student Connect, developed, and implemented with customisations refined, cultural safety measures embedded, and a recognised visual identity</p>