

First Peoples Learning and Teaching 2023 Event Report

January, 2024

Report prepared by Dr Jessica Russ-Smith, Academic Developer First Peoples Curriculum, Centre for Education and Innovation, ACU

“If universities are to mirror and reflect the diversity of the Australian population then its staff, teaching curriculum, research and administration needs to be inclusive of diverse knowledges and viewpoints. These need to be monitored through government compliance mechanisms. Indigenous knowledges need to be ‘built in not bolted on’ to university curriculum. Usually Indigenous knowledges are found isolated to the humanities, and social sciences. The upshot of this isolation creates a contemporary paradox where Indigenous students and postgraduate scholars who gained access to university via inclusive equity strategies still face inequity through sitting in lecture theatres where the invisibility or distortion of Indigenous realities, identities and world views continue.” (Rigney, 2011, p. 11)

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1. Acknowledgements

In recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' spiritual and cultural connection to Country, and in continuing ACU's commitment to reconciliation, we would like to acknowledge the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country where ACU campuses are located:

- Ngunnawal – Signadou Canberra Campus
- Wadawurrung Peoples from the Kulin Nation – Aquinas Ballarat Campus
- Wurundjeri Peoples from the Kulin Nation – St Patricks Melbourne Campus
- Turrabul and Jaggera Peoples – McAuley Brisbane Campus
- Cammeraygal Clan – MacKillop North Sydney Campus
- Wangal Clan – Mount Saint Mary Strathfield Campus
- Darug/Dharug Nation – Blacktown Campus

We respectfully acknowledge our Elders, past and present, and thank them for their guidance as we walk in their footsteps.

We would like to acknowledge the tireless work and leadership of key staff in the development of this event including the Academic Developer for First Peoples Curriculum Dr Jessica Russ-Smith, and Director of First Peoples Jane Ceolin. We would also like to acknowledge staff from the First Peoples Directorate, the Centre for Education and Innovation, Indigenous Higher Education Units, and Canberra Facilities Management.

Our sincere thanks to ACU's First Peoples Directorate who awarded the ISSP funded First Peoples Curriculum Grant to fund this event.

Special acknowledgement is due to Professor Peter Anderson, Director of the Indigenous Research Unit at Griffith University, who was engaged to facilitate and assist in planning the event. Professor Anderson's expertise and leadership played a pivotal role in orchestrating a highly successful and engaging event.

We are grateful to distinguished guest speakers Dr Aunty Doseena Fergie and Professor Sue Green whose insightful contributions enriched discussion and learning of attendees, as well as Ngunnawal Elder Aunty Violet Sheridan for her Welcome to Country.

Thank you to Signadou Campus Dean Associate Professor Darius von Guttner for welcoming attendees and supporting the event to be hosted at the Canberra campus.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to all ACU staff who attended. Your presence and active participation contributed immensely to making the inaugural event a truly transformative and insightful experience.

This report was prepared Dr Jessica Russ-Smith Wiradyuri Wambuul woman and Academic Developer for First Peoples Curriculum, Centre for Education and Innovation.

2. Executive Summary

This report synthesises key findings and outcomes from the inaugural First Peoples Learning and Teaching 2023 event (referred to throughout this report as ‘the event’). These outcomes align with the university’s commitment to fostering an inclusive, culturally responsive learning and teaching environment. This initiative supports the university’s mission and strategic vision of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion of First Peoples’ Knowings, perspectives and pedagogies. It also supports key initiatives which aim to increase employment, enrolment and retention of First Peoples staff and students.

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Summarise the key discussions and themes that arose from the inaugural First Peoples Learning and Teaching Event 2023.
2. Examine First Peoples Curriculum at ACU to understand where it is supported and where it can be strengthened.
3. Identify key recommendations to support university structures, policies, processes, and staff to better support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The recommendations are divided into six key focus areas to improve First Peoples learning, teaching and curriculum at ACU. These recommended actions are to –

- 1) Develop a culturally informed First Nations pedagogical and curriculum framework to enhance ACU’s teaching and learning policies and educational experiences.
- 2) Create a comprehensive First Nations nomenclature to establish a language guide for the entire ACU community, fostering respect and inclusivity by promoting the use of culturally sensitive language.
- 3) Conduct a comprehensive review of First Nations staff representation on key governance committees to ensure decision-making is inclusive of First Nations perspectives.
- 4) Examine and strengthen professional development and promotional support for First Nations staff to contribute meaningfully to First Nations Learning and Teaching initiatives for all students.
- 5) Strengthen internal funding streams and resources for First Peoples Learning and Teaching to ensure long-term sustainability of First Nations curriculum initiatives.
- 6) Develop clear objectives and delegations of responsibility regarding First Peoples Learning and Teaching to support First Nations leadership and prevent disproportionate workload for First Nations staff.

These recommendations were presented to Academic Board Wednesday 14th February 2024, and the University Learning and Teaching Committee 12th March 2024, senior leadership and appropriate governance processes for feedback, endorsement, and action.

3. Introduction

In December 2023, Australian Catholic University (ACU) hosted its inaugural First Peoples Learning and Teaching event led by Dr Jessica Russ-Smith from the Centre for Education and Innovation. With a purpose to explore and advance First Peoples education at ACU, the event represented a significant step forward in the collective commitment to reconciliation, inclusivity, and ACU's overarching vision. The event was co-facilitated by Professor Peter Anderson from Griffith University and Dr Russ-Smith, who alongside fellow distinguished guest speakers, Professor Sue Green and Dr. Aunty Doseena Fergie shared their expertise with an engaged audience of over 30 ACU academic and professional staff. The event was supported by Indigenous Student Success Funding (ISSP) through the First Peoples Directorate.

Presentations by leading First Nations academics and scholars, coupled with critical collaborative discussions, delved into crucial aspects of First Peoples curriculum development, mapping, and strategic support. These discussions explored fundamental questions including:

- What does it mean to embed First Peoples perspectives, pedagogies and Knowings into curriculum?
- How can we further develop First Peoples curriculum at ACU that is respectful, relevant, and rigorous?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for embedding First Peoples perspectives, pedagogies and Knowings and building staff cultural capability at ACU?
- What is the role of universities in supporting First Nations staff and students?
- Why and what strategic and operational planning is needed to support the implementation of First Peoples' perspectives, pedagogies and Knowings into curriculum?

4. Background

Historically education policy and practice has been used as a tool of oppression¹. Despite various inquiries, policy changes and education programs, education policy and practice continue to reproduce deficit discourse and be racially violent for First Nations peoples². Various legislative and regulatory instruments, frameworks, and practices emphasise the importance of First Nations staff, students, leadership and Knowledges within universities and learning and teaching contexts.

These deficits were recognised within the 2012 *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (commonly known as the Behrendt Report). When released, this pioneered a different way forward for First Nations success within universities. The Behrendt Report highlighted central focus areas of embedding First Nations Knowledge into curriculum, teaching practice and graduate attributes, supporting First Nations student and staff success, and First Nations leadership and governance. Historically, universities have failed to address these focus areas³ appropriately, systemically, and sustainably.

In 2017, Universities Australia (UA) built upon the Behrendt Report by introducing the first Indigenous Strategy and launching the first whole-of-sector commitment to advancing First Nations peoples within universities. UA's 2022-2025 Indigenous Strategy outlines five key focus areas to systemically support the advancement of First Nations peoples within Australian universities. These include:

- Student success
- Staff success
- University responsibility for Indigenous advancement
- Racism and cultural safety
- Recognising the value Indigenous people and Knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and Knowledges in teaching and research

Further to these strategies, the Higher Education Standards Framework⁴ (2021) of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 explicitly outlines that Higher education providers should support participation, recruitment, and admission of First Nations staff and students and that educational policies and practices are sensitive to First Nations cultures and Knowledges.

¹ Stephen Zubrick et al. *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People volume three*, Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2006.

² Melitta Hogarth, "One step forward, two steps back: The historical and social context of Indigenous education policy," *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, Issue 19, (2016): p. 147-160.

³ Lester-Irabinna Rigney, *Indigenous higher education reform and Indigenous knowledges*, 2011 report to the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

⁴ See [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#)

Most recently, in February 2024 the Universities Accord Final Report was released which outlined priority areas for the university sector, including various recommendations specific to First Nations staff and student success, leadership, and governance.

4.1. SUMMARY OF EXISTING FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM APPROACHES AT ACU

ACU has a range of strategies, policies and procedures that relate to First Peoples learning, teaching and curriculum (See [Appendix A](#)).

Whilst these policies and procedures exist, they often lack clear leadership, shared accountability, responsibility, and reporting structure. This lack of clarity impacts the success and achievement of relevant objectives. This ad hoc approach also greatly impacts consistent and informed pedagogical and curriculum development. Furthermore, the responsibility and significant load of this work is frequently carried by First Nations staff, which perpetuates an unfair burden not shared by their non-Indigenous colleagues⁵. This results in lower staff retention rates and restricts the promotional advancement opportunities for First Nations staff.

Greater strategic and unified approaches are needed to support First Nations curriculum development, success and achievement. The inaugural First Peoples Learning and Teaching Event 2023 aimed to address this need through a collaborative event that connected key stakeholders to drive the vision of First Peoples Learning and Teaching at ACU.

4.2. EVENT APPROACH

The event was divided over two days co-facilitated by Dr Jessica Russ-Smith and Professor Peter Anderson. Sessions followed collaboration and co-learning models to facilitate critical discussions and transformative learning experiences that are central to ACU's mission and learning and teaching philosophy.

These collaborative learning approaches fostered a diverse and inclusive learning environment, encouraging participants to engage in meaningful dialogue and exchange perspectives. Professor Anderson's facilitation of critical discussions was undertaken to enable participants to analyse and challenge ideas, promote intellectual and cultural capability growth, and develop a deeper understanding of First Peoples Learning and Teaching.

In the context of First Peoples education, collaboration and critical reflection is essential for respecting and integrating First Nations knowledges, protocol and perspectives. Critical discussions in small and large groups were adopted to allow for a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures, and

⁵ Lester-Irabinna Rigney, *Indigenous higher education reform and Indigenous knowledges*, 2011 report to the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

contemporary issues through relationship-building with peers. The co-learning model emphasised a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, acknowledging the importance of First Nations voices, the inclusion of all staff and their knowledges, and the promotion of a more equitable educational experience.

Further details of the co-learning and collaborative approaches are detailed in the session snapshots.

5. Session Snapshots

The following section outlines detailed summaries of the co-learning collaborative sessions held over the two-day event. The purpose of these summaries is to provide greater context into the critical discussions and action planning that shaped the recommendations proposed in this report, and to highlight how the proposed recommendations align with ACU's vision and mission.

5.1. DAY 1

SESSION 1: FIRST NATIONS STAFF SESSION

The first session was a closed session for First Nations staff only. Due to privacy and cultural safety reasons, the details of this discussion will not be disclosed within this report.

First Nations only staff sessions provide essential cultural safe spaces for discussion. First Nations staff face unique challenges related to colonialism, cultural identity, racism, historical and institutional contexts. First Nations staff in this session were able to share their experiences without fear of misunderstanding or cultural insensitivity, and in an environment where their cultural Knowledges and perspectives were valued through culturally relational ways of being.

SESSION 2: EXPLORING FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM

From Session 2 all attendees participated in the event. During the initial session, participants engaged in profound discussion on the colonial foundations of education and the ongoing intellectual colonisation within universities and curriculum. Professor Anderson presented a summarised history of First Nations education policy and its failures within Australian higher education and schooling systems. Attendees provided insights from their experiences of how colonialism and systemic racism continue to persist in learning and teaching. These included inadequacy of policy measuring and reporting, lack of processes and framework for engaging in First Peoples learning and teaching, racial patterns in negative student evaluations, power imbalances in leadership and promotional opportunities between First Nations and non-First Nations staff, valuing of Western epistemologies over First Nations epistemologies, lack of remuneration for work, deficit discourse in curriculum, and additive approaches to curriculum where First Nations perspectives are “tacked on” to existing curriculum.

Professor Anderson introduced a rights-based pedagogical framework in this session as a way of addressing these issues. Group discussions highlighted how a rights-based pedagogical framework is congruent with the university's commitment to human rights and dignity, as well as ACU's commitment to critical thinking, intellectual inquiry, and challenging perspectives ([ACU Learning and Teaching Principles](#)). The session concluded with a discussion of the need for a fundamental shift in how First Peoples'

Knowings, perspectives, pedagogies, students, staff, and communities are valued and understood within the university.

SESSION 3: MAPPING FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM AT ACU

Dr Russ-Smith led this session by presenting key ACU strategies, policies, and practices (see [Appendix A](#)). Discussions quickly highlighted how there is an inconsistent awareness and understanding of key policies, especially those relating to First Peoples Learning and Teaching. Attendees undertook smaller group work where each group was allocated a policy, procedure, or strategy to discuss and consider how each of their roles interact with and can support the policy, procedure, or strategy. Each group shared a summarised reflection of their discussions. The following overarching themes were identified:

- A stronger sense of shared responsibility is needed for these policies and their objectives.
- Greater awareness and information on the processes of these policies and procedures are needed across the whole university.
- There is a need to continue building cultural capability of non-Indigenous staff.
- Clearer definitions are needed to understand these policies in practice contexts. For example, Knowledge/s, cultural Knowledge, Knowings and perspectives.
- The policies lack a cohesive approach to addressing key issues of racism and cultural unsafety.

The discussions on language, perspectives, safety, and building staff capability aligned with the university's commitment to creating a respectful and inclusive campus environment (ACU Vision 2023; [ACU Vision 2033](#); [ACU Staff Learning and Development](#))

SESSION 4: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The final session of day one concluded with Professor Anderson summarising opportunities and challenges in First Nations education based on research, experience, and the reflections shared by attendees. The wider group discussion built upon the challenges identified in Session 3 and focused on how each person's role can help to address these challenges and support opportunities. The conversations reflected a strong connection to fostering social justice. This session encouraged a collective reflection on how each person, irrespective of their role or portfolio within the university, can contribute significantly to overcoming the identified challenges and enhancing the opportunities within First Nations education. Such action to address these challenges aligns with ACU's commitment to contributing to the common good. The closing session emphasised the interconnectedness of roles and portfolios, reinforcing the idea that collaboration and a shared commitment can bring about significant positive change.

5.2. DAY 2:

SESSION 1: SUPPORTING FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM

The second day emphasised moving beyond goodwill and investing in a more sustainable approach in supporting First Peoples Learning and Teaching. In small groups, attendees reviewed the findings of Stephensen and Cunningham's (2023)⁶ 'Uncovering Indigenous perspectives in the Australian engineering curriculum: a systematic literature review of practical examples' article and the six key themes the authors identified as central to embedding First Peoples perspectives in curriculum. Attendees highlighted how the framework of the six key themes was a useful approach to understanding and identifying First Peoples curriculum and supporting its development within their respective Schools, Faculties and Centres. Professor Anderson suggested adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as an additional and initial guiding framework for embedding First Peoples Knowings, perspectives and pedagogies into curriculum. The importance of sharing the load and structurally supporting this work as imperative was discussed in relation to supporting First Nations staff, reducing burnout, and assisting in better coordination between portfolios, individuals and teams and their developments over time. Furthermore, the over-reliance on external funding, especially Indigenous Student Success Program funds, was raised as a concern and greater allocation of resources and funds from within the general ACU budget was identified as essential. The importance of a culturally designed framework was also discussed and the benefits of a guiding framework to help give a bare minimum benchmark and best practice for embedding First Peoples Knowings, perspectives and pedagogies.

SESSION 2: GUEST SPEAKER PROF. GREEN FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM FROM OTHER AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Professor Green's presentation on Charles Sturt University's (CSU's) ethos *Yindymarra Winhanganha* gifted by Wiradyuri Elders, highlighted the need to connect with Country, local First Nations communities and cultural values and uphold these within institutions. The Wiradyuri concept of Winhanganha advocated for intelligent listening, where time and care are invested in understanding others. Professor Green highlighted the need to avoid extracting First Peoples Knowledges out of context for commodification and stressed the importance of considering the broader picture and context, especially in curriculum development. The importance of Indigenous cultural intellectual property (ICIP) and Indigenous data sovereignty was discussed and the need for further guidelines and principles in these areas was noted. Within this session it was asserted that what benefits First Nations students ultimately benefits all students. Small group discussions explored how Country and local First Nations communities are considered or not in learning and teaching at ACU. Discussions strongly emphasised that relationships with local

⁶ Stephensen, R., & Cunningham, S. (2023). Uncovering Indigenous perspectives in the Australian engineering curriculum: a systematic literature review of practical examples. *Australasian Journal of Engineering Education*, 1-17.

communities and upholding cultural values should be primarily led by First Nations staff and that clearer understandings of Acknowledgement of Country and community engagement are needed at ACU.

SESSION 3: GUEST SPEAKER DR AUNTY DOSEENA FERGIE SUPPORTING FIRST PEOPLES STAFF AND STUDENTS

Dr Aunty Doseena Fergie's presentation provided a holistic and action-oriented approach to supporting First Nations students and staff within the academic environment. Aunty Doseena drew attention to Pope John Paul's recognition in 1986 of the issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and acknowledgement of the diversity of First Nations cultures. Valuing First Nations ways of knowing was highlighted as a key aspect, symbolised by the metaphor of two rivers clashing in Aunty Doseena's 'flowtry analogy'. Discussions delved into the positives and barriers within academia, noting the need for appropriate training to ensure cultural safety and a sense of belonging. Aunty Doseena emphasised strategies such as "growing our own" in supporting First Nations staff to grow in their skills and leadership within the university and involving the community in curriculum to support First Nations students. Aunty Doseena also called for allies to actively engage and support, rather than just identify. Critical discussions by the group advocated for the involvement of First Nations students and staff on major committees, reference groups, and grants to ensure their integral perspectives are woven into decision-making processes.

SESSION 4: FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

The final session of the event was co-facilitated by Professor Anderson and Dr Russ-Smith. Each attendee was invited to share what they had learnt from the event, what processes and resources they see are needed, and how they see their role in supporting First Peoples Learning and Teaching at ACU.

The final reflections revealed a shared commitment to proactive and deliberate efforts across Faculties, Schools, Disciplines and Centres. Participants acknowledged the sustainability challenges in their work, recognising that desire and will alone are insufficient without a concerted emphasis on actionable steps. Funding concerns and the need to address the systemic issues behind the challenges were highlighted, encouraging a move beyond mere allyship and an acceptance of the inherent complexity in the process. The reflections emphasised the importance of overcoming resource challenges, balancing workload, and acknowledging the discomfort and transformative learning non-First Nations staff may feel in coordinating these roles.

The closing reflections delved into addressing resistance, institutional racism, and discrimination, advocating for strategic goals, and a coordinated and First Nations led approach. Participants stressed the need to move First Peoples Learning and Teaching from the periphery to core business, adopting a holistic and sustainable approach that integrates First Nations leadership and community-driven frameworks. The reflections called for top-down responsibility and accountability, valuing relationship building, and increasing resource support of First Nations projects for sustained impact. The focus on inclusivity extended to

sessional staff and students, ensuring their meaningful inclusion, and considering the scalability and sustainability of proposed initiatives. The reflections highlighted a collective commitment to transformative action and actively engaging in the work of creating positive change within the institution to advance First Peoples Learning and Teaching.

6. Staff Reflections

This section outlines personal reflections from attendees, highlighting the profound impact it had upon them personally and in relation to their learning and teaching practice.

Associate Professor Alison Owens, Academic Lead, Scholarship and Professional Learning, Centre for Education and Innovation

I was delighted to be invited to attend this important event as I have been working on a collaborative project focused on decolonising law curriculum. It was a rare opportunity to hear from Indigenous academics who generously shared their experiences and insights into how higher education can and should centre Indigenous Knowings and Perspectives in the process of decolonising our curriculum. It was both an inspiring and unsettling experience. The lead, Prof Anderson, encouraged us to 'do our jobs', ensuring we understood that decolonising is everyone's work and cannot be left to the small number of Indigenous academics working in Australian higher education. The burden carried by Indigenous intellectuals became very apparent to me. The opportunity to meet and talk with people from different disciplines, institutions and backgrounds in the context of this decolonising mission was invaluable. It has left a deep impression on me and how I think about my work and my country. I hope that I can work more effectively and respectfully as an ally in the project of decolonising Australian higher education as a result of attending this event. Thank you Dr Russ-Smtih for creating such a powerful learning experience.

Associate Professor Stephen Guinea, Associate Dean, Learning, Teaching and Professional Experience, Faculty of Health Sciences

The two-day First Peoples Learning and Teaching event provided a forum which was challenging, thought-provoking and inspiring. It is rare to participate an event that brings together professional and academic staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous to explore fundamental cultural, structural and procedural factors which impact on First Peoples in relation to learning and teaching across a university. As an academic leader in the Faculty of Health Sciences, I found the ability of the facilitators to challenge and unsettle yet maintain an environment in which everyone felt safe to participate and engage in the dialogue was outstanding.

The significance for me came from listening to and reflecting on the sessions and conversations facilitated by Professor Peter Anderson, and speakers Aunty Dr Doseena Fergie and Professor Sue Green. The honesty, sometimes brutal, to which these

Indigenous Australian academics spoke of the need for change in Higher Education, the resilience conveyed and encouragement to the leaders of learning and teaching at ACU present to advocate, enable and enact change was confronting, practical and motivating. These two days have provided me with a direction for advancing the embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculum for the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Rayna Smith, Indigenous Student Success Officer Dhara Daramoolen Indigenous Higher Education Unit, First Peoples Directorate and Academic, Thomas More Law School

It was a really impactful and enjoyable event with open and honest dialogue and opportunities to strengthen new and existing collaboration at the ACU and wider community. I was interested in Dr Aunty Doseena's session and would have been great to hear more about the history of exclusion of First Peoples from the education system, this is often forgotten/ignored in society but is important given the economic disadvantage of First Peoples in their own Country and a tool colonisers used to their benefit.

Leanne Long, Indigenous Student Success Program Project Officer, First Peoples Directorate

What a way to end off 2024! After a difficult year for First Peoples it was wonderful to attend an event to embed First Peoples' perspectives, pedagogies and Knowings into curriculum. Jess' organisation skills and Peter's facilitation skills were exceptional. Peter and Jess both led discussions that were collaborative, rigorous, respectful and pertinent to the conversation. By hosting the initial session with First Peoples staff to share culture, languages and stories, provided the foundation of valuable community and cultural knowledges for the workshop. The 2-day event provided so many collaborative discussions and I look forward to many more.

Joshua Pryor, Coordinator, Indigenous Higher Education Unit (Yalbalinga), First Peoples Directorate

I benefitted from being able to listen, and hear the experiences of the Faculties, other IHEUs [Indigenous Higher Education Units] and other Indigenous staff (professional and academic). Hear about the small wins along the way, and ideas for success. The challenges we were all experiencing, even when intentions were good. And some of the fears to not progress this works (unwillingness for certain non-Indigenous persons to want to make mistakes or not feeling they were appropriate to do it as they are non-Indigenous).

Having members of IHEUs was so important. We [IHEUs] really got to open our eyes and ears to many of the difficulties, and issues, in doing this work while also adding our own experiences, and what the (Indigenous) students tell us in person. We could also provide a more unique insight into the experiences of our AFB students, and how it impacted their Residentials, and their non-Residential, periods.

7. Recommendations

7.1. RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOP ACU'S FOREMOST FIRST NATIONS PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

This framework will:

- Be developed by First Nations peoples in ways that connect with local communities' strengths, ACU's alignment with the University Accord, UA Indigenous Strategy and its own Vision
- Provide a university-wide culturally informed approach to First Nations teaching methodologies, principles and curriculum development, providing clarity for a unified educational experience⁷
- Enable ACU to strengthen its commitment to inclusivity and diversity. A framework will support the academic success of First Nations students and also reinforce the institution's dedication to providing an education that reflects and respects the diversity of its student body⁸.
- Establish a structured mechanism for quality assurance and improvement of First Peoples Learning and Teaching, facilitating ongoing evaluation and enhancement of educational practices, ensuring that the university remains responsive to the evolving needs of First Nations students and communities and maintains its dedication to delivering informed, high-quality learning and teaching.
- Streamline First Peoples curriculum processes by providing a systematic foundation for teaching and curriculum development across the University
- Assist in further developing guidance and principles for engaging respectfully and appropriately with First Nations Knowledges including in line with University IP policies and ICIP
- Contribute to dismantling colonial biases in education system and policies, fostering a learning environment that reflects the diverse and valid Knowledges of First Nations communities and builds cultural capability of the University community

7.2. RECOMMENDATION 2: CREATE COMPREHENSIVE FIRST NATIONS NOMENCLATURE

A comprehensive First Nations nomenclature will:

- Enhance cultural sensitivity and inclusivity across all aspects of communication and curriculum
- Build cultural capability and respectful awareness among non-Indigenous staff, aligning with ACU's commitment to diversity and promoting an inclusive environment

⁷ Aligns with University Australia Guideline for '[Good Practice Principles for course accreditation and review of Indigenous curriculum](#)'

⁸ See [First Nations Pedagogical Framework](#) at CSU for further reading of similar model and impact

- Enhance the educational integrity of the University through promoting a more accurate understanding of First Nations cultures and histories among the University community and in its curricula
- Demonstrate a commitment to building respectful partnerships and recognising the contributions of First Peoples to the University's academic and social fabric
- Enhance the university's reputation as an institution that values diversity, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity. This positive image can attract a more diverse student body, and increase enrolment and retention through increasing culturally appropriate communication.
- Align the university with national and international standards for Indigenous rights and representation

7.3. RECOMMENDATION 3: COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF FIRST NATIONS STAFF REPRESENTATION ON KEY GOVERNANCE COMMITTEES

This review will:

- Assess decision-making processes and bodies and their inclusion of First Nations perspectives to foster a more representative governance structure
- Demonstrate a commitment to the University Accord's Interim Report priority areas for First Nations' engagement and advancement in higher education
- Enhance the quality of decision-making by incorporating diverse representation on governance committees, a broader range of experiences perspectives, and insights, directly impacting student policy, enrolment and retention rates.
- Provide an opportunity to enhance cultural capability within governance structures and amongst the ACU community
- Contribute to the long-term sustainability of First Nations initiatives within the university, fostering a supportive and empowering environment for continued growth and student success

7.4. RECOMMENDATION 4: EXAMINE AND STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR FIRST NATIONS STAFF

This examination will:

- Identify and create avenues for career growth and advancement for First Nations staff, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse leadership within the university through an in-depth examination of professional development strategies
- Enable the identification of areas where additional training and professional development opportunities are needed, resulting in enhanced skills and capacities among First Nations staff

- Contribute to higher job satisfaction and retention rates among First Nations staff and support ACU in its goals to be the employer of choice for First Nations peoples and staffing benchmarks⁹. This not only benefits individual career trajectories but also positively impacts the overall work environment, productivity and retention
- Better support First Nations to contribute meaningfully to First Nations Learning and Teaching initiatives, promoting cultural capability in their peers and enriching the educational experience for all students
- Directly support First Nations academics in advancing their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), enhancing the quality and quantity of ACU's SOTL and research outputs

7.5. RECOMMENDATION 5: STRENGTHENING INTERNAL FUNDING STREAMS AND RESOURCES FOR FIRST PEOPLES LEARNING AND TEACHING

Diversifying funding sources and establishing internal mechanisms will:

- Promote long-term sustainability of First Nations curriculum initiatives. This reduces dependence on external funding streams, providing greater sustainability and continuity.
- Encourage non-First Nations staff to engage in collaborative efforts, develop their own projects, and contribute to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive academic and scholarly environment
- Allow the University to prioritise and demonstrate its commitment to First Nations Learning and Teaching as a fundamental aspect of its broader academic mission and vision
- Contribute to capacity building within the University, empowering Faculties to take an active role in supporting First Nations curriculum initiatives and collaborating across various operational units
- Allow the University to be more responsive to the evolving needs of First Nations curriculum development. This adaptability is crucial for staying current with educational trends and addressing specific opportunities and challenges faced by First Nations students.

7.6. RECOMMENDATION 6: CLEAR OBJECTIVES AND DELEGATIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING FIRST PEOPLES LEARNING AND TEACHING

Clearer delegation and outlining of responsibilities regarding First Peoples Curriculum will:

- Support an equitable distribution of tasks and duties among staff members, preventing the burden of work from falling disproportionately on First Nations staff
- Facilitate better communication and collaboration among staff members, enabling Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to work together seamlessly, leveraging each other's strengths and expertise

⁹ See Section 6.2 from the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025](#)

- Allow for intentional integration of cultural capability goals into staff responsibilities. This ensures that all staff members contribute to creating a culturally safe and inclusive university environment.
- Support the professional advancement of First Nations staff by providing a transparent pathway for career growth. This contributes to the development of diverse leadership within the university.
- Contribute to structural change, fostering a more inclusive and equitable university environment that ensures the organisational structure reflects and supports the diverse needs of all staff members.

8. Next Steps

These recommendations were presented to Academic Board Wednesday 14th February 2024, and the University Learning and Teaching Committee 12th March 2024 for feedback, with support received. A formal action plan will be developed to guide recommendation implementation and evaluation. Some of the recommendations are already in action or actionable based upon existing learning and teaching projects and approaches.

9. Final Reflections

The event provided a platform for insightful discussions on embedding First Peoples Knowings, perspectives and pedagogies into curriculum at ACU. The alignment of these discussions with the university's key strategic goals and commitments emphasises the institution's dedication to fostering an inclusive, culturally responsive, and transformative learning environment.

The insights gathered will significantly influence ACU's ongoing efforts to enhance culturally safe learning and teaching and support First Nations academic and professional leaders who play a pivotal role in shaping a more socially just and enriched educational experience for all.

The recommendations gained from this event will contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance inclusivity and transformative education at ACU for staff and students.

Appendix A: Summary of ACU First Peoples Learning and Teaching Policies

Table 1: Summary of ACU First Peoples Learning and Teaching Policies, Procedures and Strategies

POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND STRATEGIES	KEY SECTIONS
<u>ACU Strategic Plan 2023</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Education - Our teaching and learning respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures • 3.4 Promote reconciliation and champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures and leadership.
<u>Graduate Attributes and Capabilities</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GA Empathy - Each graduate has had experience of Indigenous knowledges and can respect and work alongside Australia's First Peoples; they are able to connect with people and cultures, locally and globally; they can integrate knowledge across disciplines. • GC Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Cultural Capability - The ability to understand Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and experiences, and their impacts, and apply critical reflective practice to influence social change.
<u>Education Strategy (2023)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives: Widen participation, outcomes and deeply embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into our curriculum • We commit to: embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowings in curricula to prepare students to work interculturally with respect and competence • Indicators: Proportion of curricula with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowings and perspectives embedded
<u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build and develop capacity - Work with stakeholders to provide development opportunities that support internal promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early and midcareer curriculum and teaching focused academic staff
<u>Reconciliation Action Plan</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives will be integral to the curriculum of the University • Promote inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges and Ways of Knowing in curricula for all students • Create a tool for staff to develop capacity to design curricula which includes vital Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, perspectives and/or pedagogical practices as appropriate and required by their discipline

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Success Belonging Strategy

- An integral component in building successful higher education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at ACU is the valuing and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowings and perspectives in our curricula, learning and teaching practices, and graduate attributes. This strategy highlights four key overarching
- Increased confidence among non-Indigenous academics to design inclusive curricula, and to engage in and collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and content.

Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025

- 2.14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Languages Allowances: Staff who are required to use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples languages in the course of their employment will be paid an allowance in accordance with sub-clause 6.2.13.
- The University will implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Employment Plan in order to increase and maintain the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the University to 77 FTE or 3.2% of the workforce during the nominal life of the Agreement. This increase is benchmarked from the 42 FTE Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed by the University in June 2022.
- 6.2.3 The University aims to be an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The University will strive to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with an environment that supports and nurtures their careers.
- 6.2.4 The University will increase the number of identified positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from 30 to 40. Identified positions will be continuing and will be at classifications that reflect the broader staff profile of the University.
- 6.2.10 The University will also provide ongoing, specialised training opportunities which would support staff to apply and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples perspectives and knowledge in their roles

Assessment Procedure

Section 9, Phase 4 Accommodating flexibility to support diverse student needs
 b) The needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other cultural groups should be taken into consideration in modifying assessment requirements.

Learning & Teaching Procedures

2. Curriculum is designed to create opportunities for students to flourish.

- 2.1 Curriculum is designed and renewed to ensure real world relevance and reflect the learning needs of students preparing for dynamic communities and workplaces.
- 2.2 Partnerships with students, industry, regulatory/professional bodies and community are used to inform curriculum design and development.
- 2.3 Learning theory and transition pedagogy inform the design and development of all curriculum.
- 2.4 Curriculum is designed to reflect multiple world views including global perspectives and Indigenous Knowings, perspectives and pedagogies.

2.5 Discipline knowledge and competencies are developed through curriculum and teaching which integrate skills for interdisciplinary transferability and life-long learning

6.2 e: content must:

- contain a cultural sensitivity statement where appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Islander students

8a Accommodating flexibility and supporting equity

- The needs of equity groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and other identified cohorts should be taken into consideration in modifying learning activities.

Appendix B: Event Attendees

Attendee	Division
Professor Peter Anderson	Facilitator – Griffith University
Sarah Beltrame	Library Services for Research and Learning
Associate Professor Jennifer Carpenter	Faculty of Education and Arts
Damien Casey	Faculty of Theology and Philosophy
Associate Professor Georgia Clarkson	Centre for Education and Innovation (CEI)
Professor Mick Dodson	Faculty of Law and Business
Associate Professor Rachel Dryer	Faculty of Health Sciences
Dr Aunty Doseena Fergie	External
Professor Sue Green	Charles Sturt University
Associate Professor Stephen Guinea	Faculty of Health Sciences
Trevor Ianna	Access and Disability Service
Eliana Sarmiento	Faculty of Health Sciences
Machellee Kosiak	Faculty of Health Sciences
Tara Lewis	Faculty of Health Sciences
Leanne Long	First Peoples Directorate
Associate Professor Christian Lorenzen	CEI
Miriam Mani	Diploma Programs
Associate Professor Jane McCormack	Faculty of Health Sciences
Helen Bachmann	First Peoples Directorate
Dr Victoria Obeng	Faculty of Law and Business
Associate Professor Alison Owens	CEI
Joshua Pryor	First Peoples Directorate
Joanne Quick	Faculty of Education and Arts
Associate Professor Michael Reynolds	Faculty of Health Sciences
Dr Jessica Russ-Smith	CEI
Madelaine Sealey	First Peoples Directorate
Rayna Smith	First Peoples Directorate and Faculty of Law and Business
Dr Ryan Tam	Faculty of Health Sciences
Kerrie Thomsen	Faculty of Health Sciences
Dr Blake Wassell	Faculty of Theology and Philosophy
Professor Anthony Whitty	CEI
Helena Williams	CEI
Dr Elise Woodman	Faculty of Health Sciences