Creating Institutional Connections and a Sense of Belonging through Cultural Awareness and Competence

Dr Dominique Parrish
BACKGROUND

**Institutional**: Strategic goal of doubling the intake of Indigenous students by 2018

**Federal Legislation**: Assist with overcoming barriers and implement strategies for improving access, participation, retention and success of Indigenous Australian students.

**National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education Policy**: Raising awareness of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture among non-Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and staff is an extremely important endeavour of institutions.
BACKGROUND

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to choose a higher education institution if:

- They **feel a sense of belonging** to the institution ¹
- The **organisational culture** of the university is ‘**pleasant**’ ¹
- Cultural programs and/or cultural competency training for university staff, students and researchers, is the most effective way of encouraging cultural awareness across universities ²

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² Pechenkina, E & Anderson, I 2011, Background paper on Indigenous Australian higher education: trends, initiatives and policy implications, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra
AIM OF THE INITIATIVE

PROMOTE AWARENESS OF …

• Indigenous Australian culture, history & knowledge

• The Dharawal people

• The connection of the Dharawal people to the ‘Country’ on which the University of Wollongong is situated

• The importance of tolerance and inclusivity.
PROJECT PHASES

2013
• Physical Trail

2014
• Translation of Physical Trail to a Mobile App

2015
• Facilitate Community Consultation
PHYSICAL TRAIL – PHASE 1; 2013
TRANSLATION OF PHYSICAL TRAIL TO MOBILE APP – PHASE 2; 2014

- Employed project officer
- Ascertained target audiences
- Established a focus/aim for each trail
- Scoped the stations in each trail
- Designed a ‘Taster Trail’ for consultation
- Confirmed technology specifications
# THE TRAILS – BLACK SNAKE TRAIL (ACADEMICS)

**Exploring learning, teaching and research**

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother Mountain</td>
<td>Elder story about the Mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Yarning Circle</td>
<td>Story about Aboriginal Learning Circles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovering ideas</td>
<td>Student story about journey to researcher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journeys to University</td>
<td>Graduate’s story about studying at UOW</td>
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### Exploring UOW and its Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grandmother Mountain</strong></td>
<td>Elder story relationship of Mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Deadly Staff</td>
<td>Story about becoming an educational leader &amp; 1st Indigenous Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Kinship</td>
<td>A personal story of introducing Aboriginal culture &amp; Kinship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking Together</td>
<td>A personal story about NAIDOC Day walk</td>
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**THE TRAILS – PIGEON TRAIL (GENERAL STAFF & STUDENTS)**
**THE TRAILS – WALLABY TRAIL (YR 5 & 6 STUDENTS)**

### Exploring Culture and stories

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<tr>
<td><em>Grandmother Mountain</em></td>
<td>Dreaming story, five Islands &amp; Mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadly Sports</td>
<td>First Indigenous Games held at UOW</td>
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<td>Connection to land</td>
<td>Bush tucker &amp; caring for the land</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building talent</td>
<td>Conversation between AIME mentor &amp; Yr 9 student mentee</td>
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## THE TRAILS – WHALE TRAIL (LOCAL COMMUNITY)

### Opportunities for study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandmother Mountain</th>
<th>Story about connection of UOW to Mountain</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Deadly students</td>
<td>Graduation at UOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working together</td>
<td>Journey Community to working at UOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting success</td>
<td>First Aboriginal Education Centre</td>
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FACILITATE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION – PHASE 3; 2015

• Employed Aboriginal project officer from the local community

• Confirm target audiences, foci and aims of each trail

• Seek endorsement of the stations and associated content in each trail

• Advise on the appropriate images/stories/community to feature in each trail and station
IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

- Significant engagement and support from community
- Has promoted the university pathway programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- Improved Community and University relations as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and University relations
- Raised cultural awareness
- Engaging across all target audiences
CHALLENGES

- Cultural appropriateness
- Authentic and equitable collaboration
- Mobility and technology capability of those walking the trail
- Connectivity issues
- Time demands
FUTURE PLANS

• Create apps for regional campuses

• Develop supporting resources and activities (e.g. worksheets, mobile games)

• Embed in pathway, orientation and induction programs for students & staff

• Transfer custodianship to University (DVC-E portfolio)

• Strengthen presence of Community artefacts and links in the app
CREATING INSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS AND A SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH CULTURAL AWARENESS AND COMPETENCE

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