

# Indigenous PhD Familiarisation Program 2016 Report



*“Fantastic, knowledgeable facilitators,  
inclusive and inspiring”*

Credit: Possum skin cloak by Mandy Nicholson (Wurundjeri)







# Summary

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*"I went down with an idea and I came back with so much more!"*

Funded through the Melbourne Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and the University of Melbourne's Hallmark Indigenous Research Initiative, the second Indigenous PhD Familiarisation Program was held 8-10 August 2016.

This series of workshops helped prepare prospective Indigenous PhD students for graduate research study, challenged and inspired this next generation of Indigenous researchers to further develop their research ideas and provide practical solutions to the common apprehensions around PhD study.

In total, 13 future researchers participated in the program. Eight travelled to Melbourne from interstate and the remaining five were Melbourne based.

Key criteria for participation was to be at a stage where enrolling in a PhD is possible within the next five years.



## Outcomes

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*"I'm ready now. I lacked confidence,  
didn't want to expose myself."*

Prior to beginning the Program, participants told us that they were expecting to have some clarity around their research questions, understand the PhD process, identify prospective supervisors and come away with a clear research plan. Other expectations included discussions around available academic and financial supports, and making valuable connections across the University and amongst the group of participants.

*"Overall, I think the program was fantastic,  
extremely well facilitated and very well organised."*

From participant feedback, the Program as a whole provided a good mix of information and expectations that a graduate research degree at the University of Melbourne would require.

Participants told us their expectations were met, and although many acknowledged the intensity of the Program, they noted it was well facilitated and organised.

Program participants highlighted that the workshops had challenged them and provided a solid grounding on which to base their PhD aspirations.

One overarching theme from the feedback was that the information shared during the Familiarisation Program was comprehensive and much of it wasn't readily available. One participant even noted that they wouldn't have been able to acquire this important information if it weren't for the Program.



*"The sessions were well organised, flowed well and comprehensively covered a lot of information we would not otherwise have available to us."*



# Networking

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Noting the feedback from the 2015 Program, one of the main inclusions for 2016 was the focus on increasing the opportunities for participants to network across the University.

On each of the three nights of the 2016 Program, a social event was offered to enable yarning amongst the group and with various people from across the University. These events provided an opportunity to demonstrate the social capital and networks that are available at the University of Melbourne.



*PhD student Tess Ryan speaking at the Trinity College Dinner*

Trinity College Dinner with current Indigenous PhD students and early career researchers. Both Professor Marcia Langton and Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (University of Waikato) spoke to the cohort and provided stories of their experiences as PhD students and as researchers.

Opening of Indigenous art exhibition In the Saddle On the Wall at the Ian Potter Museum of Art. Launched by Professor Marcia Langton, this exhibition was an opportunity for participants to see Indigenous cultural connections between art and the University.



*Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith's keynote address at the Advancing Indigenous Scholarship Dinner*

Advancing Indigenous Scholarship Dinner, held to celebrate the conclusion of the Familiarisation Program and the beginning of the Poche Indigenous Health Network meeting. The Dinner brought together those that work in the development and success of Indigenous leadership across the University.

Hosted by the University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Glyn Davis and with special guest The Honourable Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria, the Dinner also included a keynote address by visiting Maori scholar Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

Professor Smith spoke on the development of Maori PhD and researcher networks in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1990s, the ambitions of Maori PhD graduate numbers and the establishment of a centre for Maori research excellence.

# The Facilitators

*"The facilitators were fantastic, knowledgeable, inclusive and inspiring."*

Conscious efforts are made to ensure that where possible, Indigenous facilitators are engaged to run the Program's workshops. Six of the ten workshops in the 2016 Program were facilitated by the University's Indigenous leadership.

The Program is Indigenous led from Program design to workshop facilitation, providing participants with a culturally safe space to discuss their research ideas, as well as raise challenges they envisage as Indigenous PhD students. Participants specifically noted that this was inspiring and encouraging to see.



Participant Eddie Buli with Professor Kerry Arabena.  
Photo: @ArabenaKerry - Twitter

*"The facilitators were great.  
They were so knowledgeable and  
passionate.  
I actually can't fault a single  
facilitator."*

*"It was great how you  
seemed to try and get  
a lot of Indigenous  
facilitators.  
It is reaffirming to  
see so many powerful  
Indigenous people.  
This has been so  
inspiring."*

# Workshops

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Designed to flow from one workshop to the next, the Program explored a broad range of essential information for prospective students. Workshops topics were designed in a generic form to ensure all participants, regardless of their chosen discipline, were kept engaged.

*"Meeting new mob, the discussions and sharing of information, listening to people's stories/future directions and being surrounded by this academic world was too deadly!"*

Building on the feedback that was received from the inaugural 2015 Program, minor changes were made to the 2016 Program, notably more time for networking with prospective supervisors, current PhD students, Indigenous staff and the other participants.





*PhD student Shawana Andrews, The Honourable Linda Dessau AM, Governor of Victoria and Poche Elder Uncle Kevin Coombs*



## Prospective Supervisors

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Participants' research ideas were matched with researchers with similar interests at the University and its partners, and meetings were arranged for each participant to discuss their ideas with these prospective supervisors.

Not only did these meetings provide opportunities for the participants to discuss their ideas and receive feedback on the viability of their proposed projects, they provided the opportunity to engage prospective supervisors in the Program.

The researchers who provided time to meet with the participants were supportive of the concept of the Familiarisation Program and were keen to take a role in supporting Indigenous PhD students.



*PhD student Alister Thorpe*



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