



UNIVERSITY *of*
TASMANIA

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Indigenous perspectives form new learning foundations

Visiting Country with an Aboriginal elder or knowledge holder will be a distinctive place-based experience for all students enrolling in an arts degree at the University of Tasmania from 2021 onwards.

The On Country experience is one part of the University's innovative work, in line with contemporary teaching practice, to embed Aboriginal content across all relevant courses at the University. This initiative will begin with the embedding of Aboriginal perspectives into the Bachelor of Arts curriculum, establishing a model that is unique in Australian universities.

Speaking during National Reconciliation Week, the Leader of Curriculum Indigenisation in the College of Arts, Law and Education, Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter, said the desired result was to have students learning from the world's oldest living cultures and developing greater cultural awareness and understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous scholarship.

"Inviting students onto Country, via virtual tours and physical presence, is innovative, distinctive and place-based teaching practice," Professor Walter said.

"It will stimulate cognitive and emotional engagement with Indigenous culture, knowledges and worldviews. Learning On Country contextualises Indigenous perspectives."

The On Country experiences will be included in a new unit titled Indigenous Lifeworlds, which has a focus on palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal worldviews. The unit will be available to every student enrolling in the Bachelor of Arts from the beginning of 2021 and also be available as an elective to students enrolled in other courses at the University.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership, Professor Greg Lehman, said curriculum indigenisation was integral to the University's Strategic Direction (2019-2024) to deliver a place-based and globally connected curriculum.

Every subject at every level in the Bachelor of Arts has been examined to consider how and to what extent current content and teaching reflects the presence of Indigenous peoples and the valid contribution of Indigenous knowledge.

“We see Indigenous perspectives as integral components, not siloed issues in the curriculum. Rather than Indigenous knowledges being something we learn about, they are something that we can learn through and from across a wide range of courses.”

Professor Lehman said embedding Indigenous content and scholarship was a core component of the decolonisation of universities to be more inclusive and representative of Indigenous Peoples, perspectives and place.

In Australia, there has been an increasing effort to indigenise curricula within law, humanities and the social sciences, prompting the formulation and execution of innovative teaching practices, including real and virtual On Country experiences.

“On Country experiences are the most direct way of mediating a personal learning engagement with Aboriginal people, knowledges and culture. Understanding the connection of Indigenous people to their ancestral lands is foundational to understanding Tasmania’s deep sense of place,” Professor Lehman said.

Four University of Tasmania academics, including Distinguished Professor Walter, had an article published earlier this year in the *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* titled “[Virtual tours of Country: creating and embedding resource-appropriate Aboriginal pedagogy at Australian universities](#)”.

The article examined the benefits of On Country experiences with virtual as well as physical tours allowing students to gain a broad and deep engagement with Aboriginal lived realities and worldviews.

Walking on Country

The Walking on Country event is a culmination which allows students to use their learnings from the Indigenous Lifeworlds unit of study. Held on culturally important sites in lutruwita/Tasmania, students will be guided by a Palawa elder or knowledge holder, who will appropriately share traditional stories of Country, the historical significance of Country, cultural knowledges relevant to the particular area and Palawa worldviews about Country. The purpose is to centre the lived reality of Palawa relationships to Country and Country’s relationship to Palawa people within a student’s understanding of the Indigenous Lifeworld.

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