

# INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS & RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



## FOCUS

The focus of this community engagement newsletter is the benefits of research and partnerships in Indigenous issues, for all involved.

**FEBRUARY-MARCH 2010**

This newsletter was published jointly by the CIER and the IACE



## INTRODUCTION

Professor Jude Butcher cfc

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Director, Weemala Indigenous Higher Education Unit

The Centre for Indigenous Education and Research (CIER) and the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement (IACE) bring you this 2010 community engagement newsletter. This newsletter acknowledges and celebrates CIER and ACU's community engagement teaching and research with Indigenous communities. These communities have offered ACU purposeful ways of forming relationships with Indigenous people which have significant benefits for the communities.

The range of Indigenous education initiatives reflects what has been developed since the 1980s and the wide range of communities which have engaged

with ACU. The value of research is highlighted with notes of caution about how such research is to be approached. The benefits of bringing together the community engagement, learning, and research are seen in the "Tales from a Dilly Bag" and other specific projects, such as those with a focus on numeracy, the "boarding experience", Indigenous soldiers, "Justice to be done", health initiatives and "Spirit of Religion".

The launch of CIER late 2009 celebrates ACU's record of Indigenous education and research and ACU's valued engagement with Indigenous communities across the country. CIER provides a new structure and capacity to consolidate and extend this work with Indigenous communities.

This newsletter is also available to download online @ [www.iace.acu.edu.au](http://www.iace.acu.edu.au)

## TODAY'S TOP STORIES

*Launch of CIER / Weemala - Celebrating twenty years /  
Some ACU Indigenous Education initiatives /  
Maths measures / Health initiatives / Justice Pathways Project + More!*

# LAUNCH OF CIER



L-R: Professor John Devereux, 2010 Associate Vice-Chancellor (Brisbane), Professor Gabrielle McMullen, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Elder Aunty Valda Coolwell, Professor Mark Rose of University of Melbourne, A/Professor Nereda White Director of the new CIER, Dr Lindsay Farrell, acting Associate Vice-Chancellor (Brisbane), Dean Duncan Associate Director of CIER with Vice-Chancellor Professor Greg Craven and Seth, Ruby and Eli, Doongalla Dancers

The new Centre for Indigenous Education and Research (CIER) was launched at the Brisbane campus on Wednesday 28 October 2009, by Vice-Chancellor Professor Greg Craven, with Professor Mark Rose, Director of Melbourne University's Centre for Indigenous Education, as guest speaker. The welcome to country was given by Aunty Valda Coolwell and the blessing of the launch by Bishop Ouderman of Banyo.

The Centre, with its directorate at the Brisbane campus, bringing together all the campus Indigenous Units, aims for high achievement in four cornerstone areas (mirrored in the four integrated loops of the new logo):

- Education
- Research
- Leadership
- Community Engagement

This is to be reached by:

- collaborative research partnerships;
- continuing Indigenous perspectives in academic courses;
- evaluation and refinement of Indigenous support services;
- strengthening the University's links with the Catholic Church;
- community engagement with Indigenous communities;

- contributing to leadership through representation at key forums and educational initiatives.

## CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS

Weemala, the ACU National Indigenous Higher Education Unit in Queensland, celebrated its 20th birthday on October 28, the date of the CIER launch. In 1989 the following courses at ACU were offered with a specifically Indigenous perspective – an Associate Diploma in Education and Bachelor degrees in Education and in Early Childhood Education, as well as an Associate degree in Business.

The handsome publications of Weemala, *The Spirit Within*, give graphic pictures of the achievements of Indigenous students who have been supported by the Unit.



A/Professor Nereda White, Director of the new CIER and of Weemala, and Dean Duncan, Associate Director CIER and Academic Co-ordinator of Weemala

## INDIGENOUS EDUCATION UNITS

On-campus Indigenous Education units, staffed by Indigenous people, provide cultural, personal, spiritual and educational support for ACU's Indigenous students. This is done in an environment which promotes positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

There are four such units:

**Dhara Daramoolen** Canberra campus - (02) 6209 1231

**Jim-baa-yer** (To Learn) Melbourne and Ballarat campuses - (03) 9953 3004

**Weemala** (Distant View) Brisbane campus - (07) 3623 7195

**Yalbalinga** (Place of Learning) Strathfield & North Sydney campuses - (02) 9701 4258

## BEGINNINGS OF ACU INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

**A/Professor Peter Howard** points to the first request from a community group at Kempsey in 1984 for specific Indigenous education courses at Catholic teachers' colleges, through Brother Ambrose Payne, who in fact ran such courses for four years before the North Sydney ACU courses began, with 17 students from Moree and 2 from Mt Druitt. Staff used to travel to Moree at the weekend to teach. In contrast, in 2009 there are 343 ACU Indigenous students.

The first Indigenous Unit, Yalbalinga, in North Sydney, was set up just before Brisbane's Weemala, and was fortunate to have as its first Director Dr Nerida Blair, who set a firm foundation, and continues as A/Professor in Indigenous Students' Education at the Strathfield campus.

## SOME ACU INDIGENOUS EDUCATION INITIATIVES

### Tutors

Students apply to the Indigenous Units for tutors, who are funded by the Units.

### Individualised support scheme

This is designed to help Indigenous students enrolled in ACU undergraduate courses, not directly related to Indigenous studies, such as Nursing, Social Science, Arts and Business. The scheme involves a specially designed program of study and specialised support, where needed.

### Away from Base

This is a distance education correspondence program, well suited to Indigenous students from remote areas and those who are working or looking after families. Students are from many regional areas, from Townsville to Alice Springs, from Mt Isa to Shepparton.

### Residential stays

Away-from-base students come to ACU campuses for four residential weeks each year, with all travel and accommodation paid by the Federal Government DEEWR.

*"Residential weeks give away-from-base students an opportunity to meet their peers and to enjoy a personal approach."*

- Dr Anne Drabble, Education Lecturer

Following the social contacts of the residentials, away-from-base students are organised for student placements, as in Education or Nursing, with those from on-campus.

### Blackboard

This is a new website, designed for Indigenous students.

### Computer partnerships

There are partnerships with the Smith Family and other capital city enterprises to provide laptop computers to Indigenous students, which "makes a huge difference, not just to the students but to their families as well", according to A/Professor Nasir Butrous.

### Researching computer use

Dr Drabble reports that early studies have shown that initial use of computers was general, rather than scholarly. She thinks that the research had value in drawing attention to the need for students to use the technology to more purpose.

### Direct entry

A new scheme, on some ACU campuses, means that if students have named the University in their top two preferences they are considered for direct entry, after interviews both with the Indigenous Unit and with a staff member of the relevant faculty.

Other students follow Pathway entry schemes, through TAFE certificates. This is a method of entry for many students at the Canberra ACU campus, according to Ms Kath Wallace, Academic Co-ordinator of Dhara Daramoolen.



Some 1st Yr Education students lunch together at one of their campus residential weeks

# RESEARCH VALUE CONSIDERED

## Research - Value and Caution

### A variety of views

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#### a) Value seen in co-operative approach to research

**Dean Duncan**, Academic Co-ordinator of Weemala with four ACU degrees himself, is pleased that the Indigenous Units are being consulted for approval for research.

*"I am delighted that researchers are now coming to Weemala for support. We are now providing professional support as well as student support."*

- Dean Duncan

#### b) Broad benefits will come from research

There is a generally-held view that many Indigenous Australians value research into issues that will bring benefit to their lives and futures. Dr Drabble, who teaches away-from-base Education students, feels that research is seen as leading to more skilful graduates, giving Indigenous people confidence in the professional training they enjoy at universities.

#### c) "Research can either be supportive or it can be dangerous."

This is the view of **A/Professor Peter Howard**, who elaborates:

- Research can give support to Indigenous people "to achieve what is their human right".
- Research can be dangerous when self-indulgent, career-orientated or done without an Indigenous community perspective, or without reporting to the very people who have been "researched".

#### How to avoid these dangers?

Professor Howard says two things are very important: -

- (i) studies should be longitudinal
- (ii) communities must be engaged in research projects.

*"I must be certain in my mind that I can sustain that engagement. I must be as committed to the community as I am to the research."*

- A/Professor Peter Howard, first Academic Co-ordinator of ACU Indigenous education  
1989-1992

#### d) "Indigenous people need research to prove their case"

This is the view of Ken Ralph, Director of Strathfield's Yalbalinga Unit, Ken sees four steps to correcting a social wrong – and research is one, but just one, of them: -

- (i) recognising the issue
- (ii) validation by research
- (iii) government forming policy to correct problem
- (iv) programs of action

Ken echoes another concern expressed by a number of Indigenous educationists, that it is very important that the results of research are reported to the communities who have co-operated with it.

## FIGTREE FRIENDS

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At Yalbalinga Strathfield, Fiona Frail (unit administration), A/Professor Peter Howard, graduate student Kylie Speirs, Director Ken Ralph and Danielle Dent (administration)

Some of the many current ACU Indigenous projects in research and education:

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

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**A/Prof Nereda White** (Brisbane campus) and **A/Prof Tracey Bunda**, of Flinders University, and the first co-ordinator of Weemala, published this year the report of their joint research on Indigenous Women and Educational Leadership, supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Indigenous higher education units were used to recruit the Tiddas, a sisterhood of Indigenous women working in universities throughout Australia.

Over two years four workshops were held, each one involving 20 Indigenous university women, aiming to build the women's confidence to undertake leadership effectively.

#### Workshop themes:

- Learning and Teaching
- Scholarship
- University Administration
- Community Engagement

## Research measured

Key project outcomes included:

- knowledge about strategic planning of careers;
- understanding the need to be selective about committee participation;
- gaining information about university structures;
- the establishment of a network of Indigenous academic women to support, advise and mentor, as well as to supervise postgraduate studies.

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

### Educational Leadership - Linking Worlds

**Emeritus Professor Tony d'Arbon** FMS (Educational Leadership Strathfield) was Chief Investigator on an ARC Linkage grant (2005-2009) for the project *Linking Worlds: strengthening the leadership capacity of Indigenous educational leaders in remote education settings*.



L-R: Dr Jack Frawley, post-doctoral fellow Martha Camera, her husband Aloysius and Professor d'Arbon

## Partners in research

Professor d'Arbon was partnered in this research with Dr Jack Frawley (also ACU) and Professor Lyn Fasol of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIIT). They looked into the work of Indigenous educational leaders in remote community schools with the aim of identifying the relevant capabilities and to meet the special leadership development needs for Indigenous educational leaders, in both familiar contexts and in new and changing circumstances.

Data came from many sources in the Northern Territory, through metaphor workshops, focus groups, interviews and Indigenous leaders' stories. August 2009 saw the publication of the research report.

## An Indigenous leader's perspective

Brandon Garnarradj, from Gunbalanya, wrote, for this research, about the importance of educational leaders supporting their children.

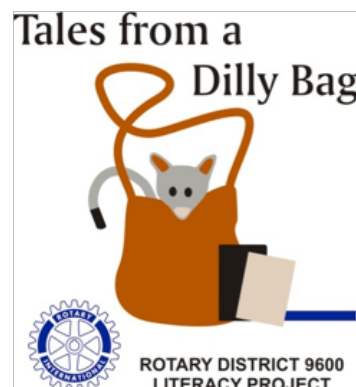
*"The grandson will use all the skills given by his granddad. No matter what happens he just has to focus on his studying and never look back... We must always support our children for their future education because it is very important. They are the ones who are our future,"*

- Brandon Garnarradj

## EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

### Read Away

The Tales from a Dilly Bag project, developed by ACU Education lecturer Dr Janelle Young is funded by Rotary Clubs, which provide \$750 for each school, with a large percentage of Indigenous students, which takes part. Dr Young has recently received the 2009 Vice-Chancellor's Staff Award for Outstanding Community Engagement for this program.



The Dilly Bag kit, designed by Dr Young, includes quality storybooks and stationery for follow-on literacy activities, as well as teachers' materials. The project has so far reached 27 classes, with at least 675 young children and a similar number of older students, as reading mentors.

## Project's two aims:

- To help young Indigenous children as they begin to learn to be literate.

*By sharing stories with young children, talking about the stories and completing activities relating to the texts, children enjoy the experience, gain a love of story sharing, learn more about how language is used in books and build a sound foundation for literacy.*

- To engage older primary-age Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as reading mentors for the young children, and to research the effect of this program.

## Hands on researcher

Dr Young co-ordinates the whole project, from promoting it with local Rotary clubs to actually assembling each kit.

## Researching the effect

With one grant from Australian Literacy Educators Association with a class teacher, Dr Young is able to evaluate the effect of using the kit in one school.

*"I am now also meeting people to see if I can secure larger funding to conduct case studies to ascertain how schools/early childhood centres are using the kit and the effect these are having on the younger children and the older student reading mentors."*

- Dr Janelle Young

## RESEARCHING THE BOARDING EXPERIENCE

Dr Judith Mulholland is in charge of research which will be valuable in the light of the newly popular cause of providing boarding scholarships for Indigenous children.



Dr Mulholland's 4th year B Ed students stay for four weeks at St Bernard's School in Herberton in the Atherton Tablelands, a school with a number of Indigenous girl boarders. The ACU students reflect on the experience of the Indigenous girls and give reports to Dr Mulholland for analysis.

## MATHS MEASURES

\* **Professor Elizabeth Warren** (Brisbane campus), Associate Dean of Education, says: "Minimal progress on numeracy measures results in failure to engage in higher levels of mathematics."

She is involved in a research project, with an Australia Research Council Linkage Grant, on young Indigenous students' numeracy learning with ACU's **Eva B De Vries**, **Ms Thelma Gertz** (Townsville Catholic Education) and **Mr Stephen Thomson** of Shalom

College Townsville, a school with a large Indigenous student population.

The hope is that this research will build a foundation in mathematics "that will level the assessment playing field and support participation in higher levels of mathematics."

\* **A/Professor Peter Howard** is part of an Australian Association of Mathematical Teachers' collaborative numeracy project called "Make it Count" – which has received \$3 million funding for the next 4 years. The project fulfils one of Professor Howard's measures for good research – that it is a collaboration to bring together all the necessary appropriate people.

\* In Melbourne, the Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Unit, with Academic Co-ordinator, **Ms Naomi Wolfe**, supports much research, such as a DEEWR-funded project - Bridging the Numeracy Gap for Students with low SES and Indigenous Communities: extending mathematical understanding (EMU),

## HISTORY RESEARCHED

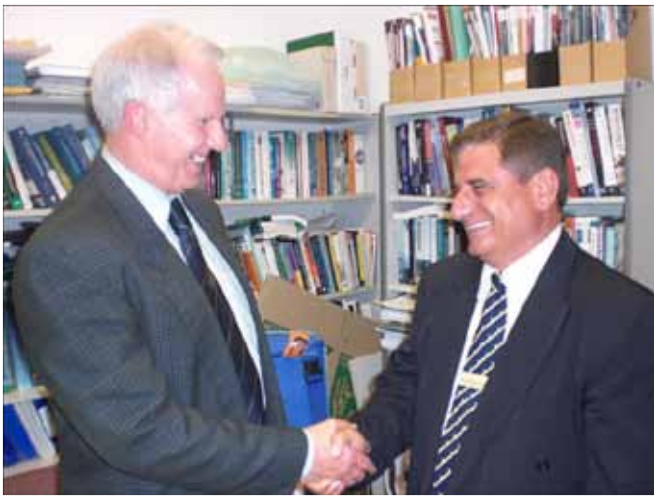
Dr Noah Riseman on the Melbourne campus is conducting important research into the significant contribution of Indigenous soldiers in the Second World War, which is often under-represented in relevant histories.

The project is called *Defending Australia, Defending Indigenous Rights: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers and Veterans since World War II*, and has been supported by the Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Unit.

## JUSTICE TO BE DONE

The Justice Pathways Project 2008-2010, an initiative of the Queensland Police Force, Education Queensland and the Brisbane North TAFE, aims to provide Indigenous secondary school students with pathways to justice-related careers - the police force, corrective services and family services.

ACU's **A/Professor Nasir Butrous** is a member of the advisory board for the project and has a \$10,000 research grant to conduct an evaluation of the project.



IACE Director Professor Jude Butcher congratulates A/Professor Nasir Butrous, of the Business School (Brisbane), on his community engagement initiatives

## HEALTH INITIATIVES

### Regional Nursing

**A/Prof Violeta Lopez** (North Sydney) Head of School and **Ms Jane Allnutt**, (Strathfield) Lecturer, School of Nursing, received an ACU teaching development award of \$5,000 for the second year nursing elective unit, in Indigenous Australian Health Field Study, which they monitor.

Students have placements, with mentors, in regional centres in far Western NSW, such as Bourke and Broken Hill, in Indigenous Australian primary health care settings.

#### Value – preparation and partnership

Before the nurses go to rural centres, they take part in interactive sessions on cultural awareness and respect, coping in isolation and bush survival.

As a joint venture with the University of Sydney, the project also shows the benefits of such a partnership to the students, staff and communities involved.

#### Nursing Needs

The new 2010 ACU Bachelor of Nursing curriculum has much strengthened content in Indigenous health, with a number of new modules specifically relating to Indigenous people's health needs. There are also plans for an Associate Degree in Nursing to meet the education needs of other Indigenous health workers.

## THE SPIRIT OF THINGS



Rev A/Professor Gerard Hall and Aunty Joan Hendriks, collaborators of the Spirit of Religion research and reflection project

Rev A/Professor Gerard Hall and Aunty Joan Hendriks, in their Spirit of Religion project, funded by Foundatione Abor Suisse, have in the last three years, -

- held reflective communal forums, with representatives of all major religions who shared in daily and prayer life;
- planned for a 2010 conference on the Indigenous Spiritual Traditions and the Vision of Raimon Panekkar;
- published a paper on Inter-religious reflections, where very specific links are explored between Indigenous spirituality, the oldest continuing in the world, with Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Tao religious traditions.

This sensitive report on the research into spiritual links ends with references to a Prayer of Aboriginal People – “make a home for everyone in our land.”

## RESEARCH PROTOCOL

The ACU Indigenous Research Advisory Group (IRAG) was established in 2003, from the University's Indigenous Education Strategy 2003-2005.

It developed a procedure to ensure ethical research in Indigenous studies, which conforms to the guidelines published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies (AIATSIS). These guidelines are found at: - <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/corp/doc/EthicalGuideA4.pdf>