

LAUNCH
of
University of Canberra's
Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative (UC CIRI)
22 July 2014

Thank you Professor Shannon (Frances) for the welcome and brief introduction to UC's Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative (UC CIRI).

A sincere thank you, Aunty Agnes Shea, for your Welcome to Country – I am so glad you are on the road to recovery and that you continue to give of yourself at functions and events across the ACT Region on behalf of the Ngunnawal People.

I pay my respects to the traditional owners of this land, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge all Elders present and our youth who will be our future Elders, custodians of our stories, language and culture.

I am a firm believer that we must support, develop, love, nurture and cherish our young, irrespective of their ethnicity, to develop their confidence and resilience as the challenges they will face as they enter midlife will be much more challenging than what we face today. We must also be the learners as our youth think, act and learn differently to us – we must be partners in our changing world.

I am more than happy to be here, as the UC Chancellor and an Indigenous Australian, to launch the Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative and present its inaugural seminar.

I am very happy with the name of this initiative - it 'hits the jackpot' - collaboration is the solid rock on which UC CIRI is founded and which it will foster and promote.

Collaboration, or working together, as I have said many times in many different venues, is the key to good policy, resolution of problems and conflicts, closing the gap and progressing reconciliation. The need to work together, and to speak with one voice wherever possible, is as applicable to white and black relations as it is within and between each community, and all other communities in Australia.

UC CIRI is a 'no brainer'. Multi-disciplinary approaches are logical and indispensable. The world is incredibly complex and narrow, single sector, blinkered policy prescriptions and 'solutions' are failing. To tackle the world's and Australia's increasing challenges, holistic perspectives and visions are required, which require multi-disciplinary, integrated inputs.

That is why I am a strong advocate for a social and cultural determinants approach to Indigenous affairs and I will put in a small plug to let you know that I will again be presenting at the National Press Club on 20th August on social determinants of health with a couple of members of the Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDOHA).

The failure by successive Australia Governments over decades and decades to achieve significant inroads into reducing Indigenous disadvantage has been due to, amongst other things:

- Failure to address underlying, root causes (such as trauma and psychological distress associated with dispossession, removal, colonisation etc);
- Failure to adopt a nuanced, flexible and localised approach rather than a 'one size fits all' prescription;
- Failure to develop true partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to work to address local problems, and as part of this, engage in a two-way exchange of ideas and learn from those at the front line in communities. The latter are commonly called 'bottom up' approaches that empowers communities and individuals to consider, and be part of, solutions;
- Failure to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to deal with complex inter-related problems, and
- Failure to have a long term focussed approach to Government policy, program and funding that is based on evidence and not imposed on communities.

UC CIRI is a 'bottom up' initiative – a new research network, started by researchers at UC involved in Indigenous research, who want to work together to collaborate to grow research capacity, impact and resources.

Importantly, UC CIRI aims to develop and provide structures for training, support and mentorship of Indigenous higher degree by research (HDR) students and early career researchers, and will assist with implementing Indigenous perspectives in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

UC CIRI will also work with other higher degree by research (HDR) students and early career researchers, to ensure they are culturally competent when undertaking their indigenous research and when interacting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The UC has researchers active in Indigenous research in many disciplines including law, environment, health, public policy, economics and social sciences. There is great opportunity for integrated, multi-disciplinary research here – and integrated research is what is needed to respond to the issues and opportunities facing Indigenous Australians and thus to Australian society. Over time UC CIRI might also be able to play an influential role in ethics considerations for Indigenous research.

The establishment of UC CIRI accords strongly with the UC Reconciliation Action Plan (2013-2017):

- The UC Reconciliation Action Plan identifies the need to grow the number of Indigenous students and research-active staff at the University, and to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into all facets of University life.

- It acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners of the land on which the University of Canberra stands and is committed to long-term engagement with the local community.
- The University recognises the diversity of Indigenous studies research being undertaken across the disciplines at UC, and seeks to provide a formal network to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers working in our Faculties and Research Centres.

UC CIRI participants have aspirations – they want UC CIRI to grow over time to be an Indigenous-led research centre with national impact for Indigenous people and internationally regarded for excellence.

I share such aspirations and look forward to how and where CIRI beds down at UC. To be viable and to grow we need a home and secretariat support for UC CIRI so let's all turn our minds to what's the best fit for the UC CIRI family.

With that said I officially launch UC CIRI with great hope and in anticipation of seeing ground - breaking, impactful work, and a cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and researchers emerge in coming years.

Thank you for taking the initiative!