

# *Origins of Indigenous Research at UTS*

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There is a uniqueness about UTS in relation to this space and the ability for that rests with the way Jumbunna was set up. Ken Canning and Frances Peters-Little, two of our first Indigenous students, advocated for this space. Then came the recruitment of Uncle Bob Morgan as the first Director. It was significant because it showed at its very heart that UTS was capable of responding to what Indigenous people within the institution had wanted. UTS was one of the first universities to set up this kind of centre.

What was critical about Uncle Bob's leadership was that he profoundly believed in the academy as a place that needed to make room for Indigenous people. It wasn't just about bringing Indigenous people in and educating them in a white way, but really challenging the university to find space for

Indigenous focused study. The other aspect of Uncle Bob's worldview that was critical was his incredibly strong international ties with Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada and the United States. He saw what we were doing here as part of an intellectual global partnership.

This philosophy and environment paved the way so that when I came to Jumbunna as the new director in 2001, this mindset and expectation had already been built. We didn't have to fight those fights again.

The next step was to look more towards the research side of Jumbunna. We were in the first wave of organisations within the university sector looking to develop a research profile through those centers. We built up a small number of researchers over the next couple of years. We pulled together people who prioritised responsibility to community over everything else that they did. That was really important and over the years the staff who have the best experiences within Jumbunna are the ones who have those strong responsibilities and connections with community. A really important learning experience was seeing how the academy could prioritise and embrace the knowledges and perspectives of our community, because we had all trained separately through a particular discipline or profession. We started to see the scholarship that was coming through, the global connection was helpful in terms of us thinking big about what we could do.

At the same time, we saw the need to build capacity within disciplines. While Jumbunna was a hub, it was important to have Indigenous scholars to also be changing the academy from within the faculties with their research and practice.

We didn't start with a research framework for Jumbunna straight away but built it slowly over many years of practice. Rather than starting with a

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framework, we brought principles, a cultural lens and a cultural background. We also knew we were still young and learning. We had been brought up culturally that way and we had enormous support from the older cohort who were really excited with what we were doing. We felt like we had time to think about and get it right. We worked, reflected and then articulated a framework.

Another thing we all brought with us was the idea of self-determination; this has been central to political philosophy in our community. We care more about how the community sees our work than how other academics see it. That is our test and is how we frame the work we do. It speaks to how we disseminate our results. We would not have done a research project if we didn't think it was going to have an impact on the community.

This started to speak to our methodology of who we were privileging and how we would go about what we were doing. It also put us in a process of partnership, because we were responding to community need. Those partnerships came generically. Community should come to us and we should respond to them as we had the skills and capacity to do it. That is what we were here for. It meant that those partnerships started differently and there was a different power relationship between us in our response and how we would work and meant we became Indigenous led in our practice.

Along the way, we have developed a research program, research methodologies and have had a focus on ethics. Ethics within the university is a place that speaks to the influence and presence of Indigenous academics. Being able to formalise that through an ethics process, so there is a mechanism for holding people accountable for their work, is an

important part of us being able to normalise across other disciplines some of the ideas and principles that we work with in Jumbunna.

The next focus is to continue to engage with our Indigenous knowledges, our Indigenous frameworks and our Indigenous worldviews, rather than continually thinking how the Western disciplines can continue to benefit by hiving off those things from us. That is why the continual independence of where Jumbunna sits is important. We don't have to carve our work or our Indigenous knowledges to fit in with the disciplines as they've been defined by Western education. We can honor our knowledge systems holistically, engage with them and not have to try and squeeze them into other things. At the same time, the Indigenous academic leadership within the faculties are leading work that is transforming their disciplines. It is a two-pronged approach but one that seeks to continue the vision on which Jumbunna was founded—a powerful and respected place for Indigenous knowledges as part of our institution.

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*Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt is a Eualeyai/Kamillaroi woman from Northwest New South Wales, who lives and works on Gadigal land. Larissa is an academic and a lawyer, a filmmaker and a writer. Larissa shares the origins of Indigenous research at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) as she describes her role as the Director of Research and Academic programs at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research.*