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A fresh approach to indigenous business education
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A fresh approach to indigenous business education

Christopher Bajada and Rowan Trayler

UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney,
Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – The social and economic disadvantages confronted by many Indigenous Australians are well known. A close look at Indigenous employment highlights that Indigenous Australians are substantially under-represented in the technical and professional areas of business and management. Closing the gap and improving the social and economic outcomes requires a greater focus in these areas. The purpose of this paper is to outline the design of an innovative undergraduate business degree for Indigenous students that: meets the targets set by government, produces the “T-shaped” graduate expected by business (disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and soft skills), addresses the employment needs of the Indigenous community and provides the building blocks for Indigenous students to enrol in post-graduate business courses. A close look at Indigenous employment highlights that Indigenous Australians are substantially under-represented in the technical and professional areas of business and management. Closing the gap and improving the social and economic outcomes requires a greater focus in these areas. This paper outlines the design of an innovative undergraduate business degree for Indigenous students that: (i) meets the targets set by government; (ii) produces the “T-shaped” graduate expected by business (disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and soft skills); (iii) addresses the employment needs of the Indigenous community; and (iv) provides the building blocks for Indigenous students to enrol in post-graduate business courses.

Design/methodology/approach – The development of the Bachelor of Business Administration (Indigenous) provided an opportunity to address the needs of Indigenous Australians in a curriculum that is not only interdisciplinary but also taught by indigenous and non-Indigenous academics. The paper outlines how the review was shaped, the innovative mode of delivery and the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum.

Findings – This course provides an integrated approach to business education focusing on the professional, technical and managerial roles in business that is in such short supply in Indigenous communities. The course contextualises the study of business within an Indigenous perspective to demonstrate how Indigenous studies not only contributes to empowering the individual but also how business education plays a critical role in repositioning Indigenous people in their local communities and society more broadly empowering the individual but also how business education plays a critical role in repositioning Indigenous people in their local communities and society more broadly.

Originality/value – This paper demonstrates an integrated approach to business education focusing on the professional, technical and managerial roles in business that are in short supply in Indigenous communities.

Keywords Interdisciplinary education, Business school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Business curriculum, Capstone, Indigenous education

Paper type Research paper

The authors would like to acknowledge the work of the Bachelor of Business Administration Review Committee, the academic staff who contributed to the review and to Lily Liu and John Elliott who assisted with the artwork.
1. Introduction
The social and economic disadvantage confronted by many Indigenous Australians is well known and understood. Much of this is reflected through statistics on employment, education, health and other social metrics such as housing, crime, deaths in custody and infant mortality rates. Using the most recent Australian census data from 2011, we observe that 56 per cent of the Indigenous working age population participate in the labour force while for the non-Indigenous working age population the participation rate is 76.4 per cent. Over the same period, the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians was three times the rate of unemployment for non-Indigenous Australians (17.2 per cent compared to 5.5 per cent) (ABS, 2013). A similar situation is the case for participation in education. Only 44 per cent of the Indigenous working age population had completed secondary education at the highest level (Year 12) while 73 per cent of the non-indigenous population had attained the same qualification (ABS, 2011). These and other economic fundamentals to social well-being impact significantly on the social fabric of Indigenous communities. The levels of arrest, incarceration, substance abuse, domestic violence, hospital admissions and infant mortality are much higher and are over-represented in the Indigenous community. These concerns have echoed over many generations despite government attempts to deal with these issues. More recently some concerns have been expressed that suggest the situation has instead deteriorated (see Sutton, 2001; HRC, 2002).

Successive Commonwealth governments have introduced a range of policies and specific initiatives to help address and alleviate the disadvantage experienced by the Indigenous communities. Unfortunately for many of these policies and initiatives, the outcomes have been far from fruitful. These policies have been underpinned by a philosophy of self-determination which in the past has been depicted as “the fundamental right of Aboriginals to retain their racial identity and traditional lifestyle or, where desired, to adopt wholly or partially a European lifestyle” (see, Hon RI Viner MHR, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia 112 Parr Deb, 3442, 24 November 1978). Alternatively self-determination can be described as the “right of Indigenous peoples to control their own affairs, maintain their culture and heritage and determine their own future” (IEEP, 2011).

Much of what drives self-management or self-determination is the skill and capacity that are derived through an effective level of education. A closer look at employment data highlights the consequences of the poor levels of education for the Indigenous community as well as limitations this creates for eliminating the social and economic disadvantage. The employment data highlights that Indigenous Australians are under-represented in the proportion of the population employed in the technical and professional areas of business and management. This means there is limited Indigenous expertise available within Indigenous communities to foster, grow and manage the business needs of these communities. Aspiring to raise the level of business education is one of the fundamental requirements for advancing the economic and social well-being of the Indigenous people.

The Council of Australian Governments agreed to several targets during 2008 to improve the circumstances faced by Indigenous Australians, one of which was the level of education. The targets for education are set out in the most recent National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), which lists the following three objectives (NIRA, 2012): “ensuring all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years”, “halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade” and “halving the gap for
Indigenous people aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020. Although fundamental for successful participation in higher education, these initiatives focus only on primary and secondary education. To address the issue of higher education, the Commonwealth government in 2011 initiated a Review of Higher Education (RHE) Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (IHER, 2012) that made several recommendations which are subject to a focus later in this paper. More importantly, the review found that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across the country are increasingly aspiring to get an education, go to university and take up professional and leadership positions (p. 9). This marks a great opportunity for tertiary institutions to make a significant contribution towards closing the gap.

This paper outlines the design of an innovative university undergraduate business degree (a Bachelor of Business Administration, hence forth referred to as “the degree”) for Indigenous students that: aims to address several of the recommendations set out in the government’s 2012 Review, instil a business/management mindset to contribute towards reducing the under-representation of Indigenous Australians in technical and leadership roles in business, produces the “T-shaped” graduate expected by business (strong business disciplinary skills and the soft skills in communication and teamwork), addresses the overall employment needs of the Indigenous community to help close the gap, which has been estimated to cost the Australian economy in excess of 1 per cent of GDP (Deloitte, 2014), provide a pathway for Indigenous students completing this degree to enrol in almost any mainstream post-graduate business course so as to provide opportunities to further their education, and provide an exemplar curriculum that takes into account public policy direction and the needs of the community.

The residential feature of the degree allows Indigenous students from around Australia to participate in the programme while the training it provides gives the graduate the capacity to undertake further studies in specialised masters courses. By proposing a solution that specifically caters for Indigenous Australians as a way to bridge the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, this proposal becomes an important step towards supporting the autonomy and self-determination that Indigenous Australians have been striving towards.

2. Indigenous participation in higher education and employment

Much has been written on the gaps in education and employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Daly, 1995; Hunter and Gray, 2001; Biddle et al., 2013; White et al., 2013) and the cost associated with this on society (Deloitte, 2014; IHER, 2012; Australian Government, 2011). Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment by industry, type of occupation and the levels of post-secondary education, reveals the magnitude of the gap which exists and the challenges facing those who attempt to close this gap. As we have already argued, the need to position education (including higher education) at the forefront of any strategy will contribute significantly towards achieving this goal.

Table I provides a measure of the proportion of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous working population (in Columns 2 and 3, respectively) that are employed across a range of industry classifications. For a number of occupations, the proportions of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in these industry sectors are relatively similar. There is, however, a number of other industries where Indigenous employment...
is either significantly under- or over-represented when compared to the distribution of non-indigenous employment.

In Table I we observe that Indigenous people are under-represented in trade, manufacturing, finance, insurance, scientific and technical services as well as in accommodation and food services. On the other hand, in industry sectors such as Public Administration, Safety and Health Care and Social Assistance, Indigenous people are over-represented as a percentage of the Indigenous workforce. Table II illustrates that this over-representation in Public Administration (25.9 per cent for the Indigenous working population compared to 14.5 per cent for the non-Indigenous working population) is at all levels of government including state and local. The specific results are most likely explained by the immediate needs of Indigenous people in regional and remote locations across Australia but the absence of other skills (primarily business) will undoubtedly limit the capacity for future growth and development.

Much of this is underscored by the lack of education opportunities available to Indigenous people. Table III illustrates the disparity between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous post-secondary school qualifications as represented by the percentage of the respective population who have post-secondary school qualifications. For the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas, water and waste services</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade, accommodation and food service</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, postal and warehousing</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information media and telecommunications</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and insurance services</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific and technical services</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration and safety</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative service and real estate</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care and social assistance</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and recreation services</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector of employment</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth government</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/territory government</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS (2012)
non-Indigenous population, approximately 39 per cent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, while for the Indigenous population this is only 18 per cent (less than half).

This then impacts directly on the types of occupations and careers available to those who do not have post-secondary qualifications, although the impact on the Indigenous community is compounded by the fact that the percentage of those with primary education is significantly lower. The skewed data in the post-secondary school qualifications is reflected in Table IV.

The results in Table IV highlight that senior or professionally skilled job prospects for Indigenous people are rather limited. If opportunities were similar across the two groups (i.e. Indigenous and non-Indigenous), then one might expect this to be reflected in relatively similar proportions of employment by occupation for the two groups. The more senior occupations (managers, professionals and to some extent technical and clerical workers) are under-represented as a proportion of the Indigenous workforce. Only 5.7 per cent of the Indigenous workforce is in management positions compared to 13.4 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Even then, some of the 5.7 per cent may be in positions of community organisations which are very small and located in remote areas of Australia. Similarly, only 11.5 per cent of Indigenous workers are in professional roles compared with 20.2 per cent for non-Indigenous people. For the less-qualified positions, the proportion of the Indigenous workforce greatly exceeds that for the non-Indigenous workforce – for example, 24 per cent of the Indigenous workforce is employed as labourers compared to only 10 per cent of the non-Indigenous workforce.

### Table III.
Comparisons of Indigenous and non-Indigenous post-secondary school education qualifications (% of respective population with post-secondary qualifications)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest non-school qualification</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate diploma and graduate certificate</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced diploma and diploma</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate level</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ABS (2010)

### Table IV.
Comparisons of Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment by occupation (% of respective working population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians and trades workers</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and personal service workers</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and administrative workers</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery operators and drivers</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ABS (2010)
These results demonstrate that there is a significant gap in professional, technical and managerial roles occupied by Indigenous people. These limited opportunities are primarily the result of a lack of basic education and inadequate preparation and training in business and related professions.

The proportion of the Indigenous population undertaking a tertiary qualification is quite low. In 2000, 68 per cent of Indigenous students as compared to 96 per cent of non-Indigenous students were undertaking studies at the bachelor’s level. At the post-graduate level the proportions are even lower (9 per cent for Indigenous students and 19 per cent for non-Indigenous students). When we consider performance, the disparity exists at that level too. Over the same time period, Indigenous students only passed 58 per cent of the subjects undertaken while for non-Indigenous students this amounted to 79 per cent. The failure rate for non-Indigenous students averaged 10 per cent while for Indigenous students it was more than double – on average 26 per cent (ABS, 2002). The poor performance reflects an inadequate preparation for tertiary study, which is the result of low and inadequate levels of primary and secondary education.

The data in Table V provides a snapshot of primary and secondary school enrolments of Indigenous students in Australia. Indigenous student enrolments in primary and secondary education over the period 2002-2012 grew 44 per cent yet as a percentage of total student enrolments in primary and secondary education, Indigenous enrolments grew from 3 per cent in 2002 to 5 per cent in 2012.

It is, however, the proportion of secondary school students that is of most interest when it comes to assessing the impact on higher education. Table VI outlines the total enrolments of Indigenous students in secondary schools across Australia. Growth in enrolments has been substantial, although from a small base. Over the period 2002-2006, growth in Indigenous student enrolments in secondary schools grew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FTE Indigenous students (Primary and secondary) – Australia</th>
<th>% of all students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>122,085</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>140,987</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>175,192</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

%Δ (2002-2012): 44%

**Note:** Data sourced ABS (multiple years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FTE secondary students – AUST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>39,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>49,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>64,364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

%Δ (2002-2006) 26.0
%Δ (2006-2012) 30.4
%Δ (2002-2012) 64.2

**Note:** Data sourced ABS (multiple years)
26 per cent and over the period 2006-2012 secondary school enrolments grew by 30 per cent, reflecting a 64 per cent increase in total enrolments over this period.

The growing number of Indigenous student enrolments (and completions) in secondary schools provides an opportunity to see a greater proportion of Indigenous students undertaking a higher education qualification. Once higher education is a possibility, Indigenous students have a choice – whether to study in a mainstream course where entry is usually very competitive, or to enrol in an Indigenous student only programme, which for students interested in business has been very limited.

3. The need for change

University educators need to help address the enduring socio-economic disadvantage of Australia’s Indigenous peoples through the development and delivery of business and management education. The drive for this rests upon the senior executives of universities (IHER, 2012) as well as teaching faculties who need to reflect and reposition existing Indigenous courses and approaches to focus more on business education if society is to tackle the Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage which remains stubbornly entrenched despite the many policy initiatives by government.

Government reviews addressing indigenous education participation

There have been a number of reviews on education by successive federal governments, including the most recent reviews in 2008 – The RHE, and a subsequent one in 2011 – The RHE Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

An emphasis on and investing in social inclusions was a key theme in the government’s RHE in 2008. The RHE (otherwise known as the Bradley’s Review) identified a number of strategies which were needed to bridge the gap in higher education for Indigenous people. The RHE recommended:

- That the Australian Government regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people in consultation with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (RHE, Recommendation 30).

In order to improve access and outcomes in higher education for Indigenous people, RHE (2008) made a number of suggestions to operationalise this recommendation including:

1. “Higher Education providers should ensure that the institutional culture, the cultural competence of staff and the nature of the curriculum recognises and supports the participation of Indigenous students” (p. xxvi);

2. “Indigenous knowledge should be embedded into the curriculum to ensure that all students have an understanding of Indigenous culture” (p. xxvi);

3. “Better support for institutions to assist students from a wide range of backgrounds particularly Indigenous students” (p. 7);

4. “Increase participation from under-represented groups, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous people” (p. 21); and

5. “Developing a more sophisticated approach to outreach activities to increase access rates for Indigenous students” (p. 39).

The RHE also set targets for access, success, retention and completion rates for Indigenous students (see Table VII).

The RHE, however, fell short of recommending specific areas of focus for education where Indigenous people are under-represented in employment and business activities.
While some progress has been made in this area there are still many areas requiring a greater focus of attention.

In 2011, the government embarked on a RHE (The RHE Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – IHER), specifically focusing on Indigenous access, participation and success in higher education. The IHER recognised that:

Higher education comes with the promises of higher incomes and associated intergenerational health and security benefits, and the promise of greater autonomy (p. 4).

And recommended that it is vital that education of indigenous people is treated in the same way as for non-indigenous people and that this right to education should be shared between government, university and the business community and that education at university should not be left to special Indigenous support centres but taken up by the relevant faculties. The IHER made a number of recommendations (Recommendations 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18 and 32) relevant to the discussion in this paper (IHER, 2012).

Matching training to job growth

The need to align education to the needs of business and the community is paramount. Failing to do so engenders a false sense of security within Indigenous communities, reflected by those with a higher education qualification that find it increasingly difficult to find work or be able to apply their knowledge with effect in their communities. Closely aligning the development of curriculum with these collective needs and revising these as these needs change, will prove to be the most effective means of reducing the under-representation of indigenous people particularly in the labour force.

The Australian government’s Indigenous Economic Development (IED) Strategy 2011-2018 “aims to support the increased personal and economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians through greater participation in the economy” (IED, 2011). It provides specific strategies for providing this alignment and was core in the development of the business curriculum discussed in Section 4 of this paper. The IED strategy outlines several considerations, the following of which where most relevant to the development of this degree (IED, 2011):

1. Education and Individual Capabilities – programmes aimed at supporting, developing and building capacity for Indigenous people to work effectively in their communities.

2. Jobs – align employee needs with the skill set of Indigenous employees through education. In doing so employers, in partnership with employees and the community work on ways to improve retention and career development.

3. Business and Entrepreneurship – establish programmes that are aimed at supporting accessibility, planning, establishing and managing a business or an entrepreneurial venture. Provide support and mentoring for Indigenous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous students</th>
<th>Access rate</th>
<th>Proportion that the Indigenous population aged 15-64 years represents of the general population in this age group in the 2006 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success rate</td>
<td>At least 95% of the rates for non-Indigenous students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention rate</td>
<td>At least 90% of the rates for non-Indigenous students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion rate</td>
<td>At least 90% of the rates for non-Indigenous students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table VII.**

RHE targets for Indigenous people

*Source: (RHE, 2008, p. xxvii)*
businesses along with opportunities for partnership with private sector (non-Indigenous) businesses.

(4) Financial Security and Independence – improve the level of financial and money management skills of Indigenous people and business owners/managers. Work on developing programmes that assist Indigenous people to better manage their assets and build capacity by leveraging on these assets.

(5) Strengthening Foundations – developing business skills and the notion of governance.

Each of the objectives above point to a need for educating Indigenous people in business and basic financial skills.

A number of Australian universities (Curtin, Edith Cowan, Macquarie, Swinburne, University of Western Sydney and Victoria University) offer community management degrees where the focus of these programmes is specifically on community development, self-determination and capacity building for Indigenous people. Other universities (Murdoch, Southern Cross, Newcastle, South Australia, Wollongong and Victoria University) offer degrees in Indigenous Studies, usually as a Bachelor of Arts or at times combined with education or health. These Indigenous degrees focus on issues affecting Australian Indigenous peoples, their culture and history. Others have majors in Indigenous studies as part of a degree in business, education or health. A growing concern with degrees specifically focused on community management is the limited business skill which is included in the curriculum while degrees focusing on Indigenous studies, while providing a good understanding of Indigenous issues they, however, fail to provide the industry-specific knowledge which a graduate working in the Indigenous community would need. Our review of the various courses and curricula for Indigenous students across Australia suggests there is a need for a course which incorporates Indigenous issues, Indigenous cultural sensitivities and an interdisciplinary business curriculum. This approach has been recommended by both RHE (2008) and IHER (2012).

Indigenous entrepreneurial developments have often been controversial within the Australian Indigenous community. Private enterprise is sometimes seen as inconsistent with traditional responsibilities of reciprocity and collective ownership. Indigenous community enterprises, like co-operatives, do not have a strong track record of success and survival. Corporate-Indigenous business partnerships often divide local Indigenous communities. Yet, research (e.g. Foley, 2003; Frederick and Foley, 2006) highlights the importance of Indigenous entrepreneurship to achieving self-determination through economic independence. The literature on Indigenous enterprises in Australia suggests that Indigenous businesses face a wide range of barriers and problems in establishing and developing business enterprises.

Some of the issues that an indigenous degree needs to address highlighted by research is; a lack of basic business skills including maths, communication and financial literacy (Schaper, 1999; Collins, 2004; James et al., 2008; Thomson et al., 2010); a limited pool of skilled labour (Flamsteed and Golding, 2005; Schaper, 1999); poor mentoring and inadequate business advisory support in the establishment phase (Altman, 2001; Collins, 2004; Hossain et al., 2008); a lack of access to finance and education (Collins, 2004; Frederick and Foley, 2006) the problems of racism and insensitivity to indigenous cultural issues including the curriculum (Gunstone, 2013; Morgan, 2003; Sonna et al., 2000).
A major issue that needs to be addressed is remoteness for many of the Indigenous people. The report by Deloitte Access Economics (2014) found that employment rates of Indigenous Australians are 39 per cent lower compared to major cities. However, Biddle (2010) found that jobs per resident is higher in remote areas where indigenous people make up a greater percentage of the population but jobs in these areas tend to be filled with non-indigenous people (Deloitte, 2013; Hughes and Hughes, 2010).

Another important finding has been that university outreach activities have not always had the best results for Indigenous people (IHER's final report, 2012). There is also a lack of information on what is available to assist Indigenous people in obtaining higher education and the support networks they can use including help with fees and travelling costs. These information gaps may in part reflect Indigenous students’ lack of awareness of pathways to university. This is a result of the inability of family members to provide guidance on attending university, poor career counselling especially and a lack of Indigenous role models who have attended university (see IHER, 2012; Lamb et al., 2004; Craven et al., 2005; James and Devlin, 2006). This gap could be filled with more strategic outreach programmes run by universities.

The combination of this research, government recommendation, needs of business and the community and the experiences in higher education curriculum, highlight the need for change in the business curriculum in higher education. It is through approaches like the case study highlighted in the next section, that changes can be made to the level of equality and well-being for Indigenous people in Australia. It is to this case study that we now turn.

4. Designing an indigenous interdisciplinary business curriculum: a case study

In keeping with the discussion in Section 2 and the lessons drawn from the various Indigenous programmes across Australia in Section 3, the design of the business curriculum gave full consideration to the educational and employment gaps outlined in Table IV, the government’s 2012 RHE, the needs of employers in regional and remote areas of Australia and those of the Indigenous community and their organisations. Our attention primarily focused on the professional, technical and managerial roles in business where Indigenous Australians are significantly underrepresented and where future employment demands are also expected to grow (Deloitte, 2013). Much of what is discussed in this section aspires to develop opportunities to help narrow the divide and provide a model for business education that can contribute towards the reduction of the economic and social disadvantage experienced by so many Indigenous Australians.

The design of the curriculum also ensures that Indigenous students working in Indigenous enterprise, government and community organisations, both private and social, have a working knowledge of these enterprises and organisations and the skills to manage them effectively.

Informing curriculum design – for the national interest and graduate success

An important starting point for framing the direction in which to shape the curriculum was the development of an appropriate set of graduate attributes that need to articulate what we want students “to be” at the end of the course. These attributes also need to account for all the objectives (government and community) identified in the preceding sections of this paper. These graduate attributes become an important validation tool during the development of the curriculum for evaluating the effectiveness of the content. The activities within the curriculum provide opportunities for students to
practice and develop the relevant skills to achieve these outcomes. To ensure that these attributes are achieved, a set of corresponding learning objectives were developed which specifically define what we want our students “to do”. These learning objectives inform the content and associated activities which are incorporated throughout the degree. To ensure that these are cultivated throughout the degree, these learning goals are “introduced”, “developed” and then “assured”, where “assured” involves a process of data collection on outcomes so that staff can use these results to reflect, refine and improve the curriculum.

The first step in developing the graduate attributes required the faculty review committee to identify a set of broad objectives for the degree to take into account the various government initiatives and community needs. These in turn were distilled into a set of knowledge and professional standards to give a context to the objectives. The review committee identified the following broad objectives so as to ensure students:

- develop an informed professional approach to enterprise, organisational development and the management of organisations which takes account of issues of cultural diversity, the experiences and aspirations of community members and ethical standards for managing a range of enterprise initiatives;
- acquire new and more advanced skills in designing, implementing and evaluating enterprise and development programmes for Indigenous people and organisations in various settings;
- be able to locate enterprise and economic development opportunities in organisations in a cultural, social, economic and political context;
- be able to critically analyse relevant contextual factors and competently assess their impact;
- recognise, understand and apply useful theory to practice in business and the management of enterprises or organisations; and
- develop the personal capacity to be self-directed in approach to self-development.

Within the degree, these broad objectives would be distilled to incorporate two broad areas of learning – specific business and management content areas (or the Knowledge Learning Standards); and more general skills and capabilities with broad relevance (or the Professional Learning Standards). Running though these two learning standards is the theme of Indigenous cultural sensitivity that is incorporated into the content and delivery of the degree.

The Knowledge Learning Standards include:
- an integrated view of the various disciplines of business: understand how a multi-disciplinary perspective can be used to address economic, financial and social issues including those relevant to the Indigenous community;
- human resource management: develop skills to work with people and manage performances in an organisation;
- managing organisations: demonstrate an understanding of what is required to successfully manage and operate within an organisation;
- external factors: understand how global factors, government and its policies impact the organisations and the economic and social landscape;
finance and accounting: apply the concepts and tools to successfully manage the financial resources of an organisation;

managing supply chains (goods and services): understand the theories and applications as they contribute to the operations and supply chain process of an organisation;

risk management: demonstrate an awareness of the enterprise risks associated with operating in a business environment; and

innovation, creativity, developing new products/services: capacity to contribute to innovative practices, projects and new ventures using project management skills.

The Professional Learning Standards include:

communication: produce well-written texts and communicate orally to a variety of audiences;

teamwork and self-management: capacity to work independently and in a team environment;

critical thinking: interpret, analyse and critically evaluate arguments and evidence;

ethical approach: awareness of the ethical and social responsibilities that are an integral part of operating in society;

creativity and innovation: apply creative and innovative thinking to problem solving;

research for life-long learning: knowledge of research methodologies that fosters a capacity for life-long learning; and

indigenous perspectives: demonstrate an understanding of Indigenous perspectives and contributions, and how they can apply to management practices.

The content and processes embedded in the Indigenous business curriculum are designed to realise both the knowledge and the Professional Learning Standards listed above. Moreover, the degree conceptualises content and process not as distinct components of the curriculum but as integrated and inseparable. Each subject in the degree should offer different opportunities to contribute to this realisation. However, taken together, the subjects provide a developmental, integrated and learner centred approach to both professional formation and academic achievement.

The collection of these targets ensures that the Indigenous business degree will:

Prepare students for a career in business management and a thorough understanding of core functions of management and business administration.

Give students the opportunity to explore the various divisions and responsibilities of an organisation thereby providing a sound platform for further study in a business specialisation at the post-graduate level.

Provide students with a broad understanding of business management to operate effectively in a dynamic global business environment.

Provide an emphasis on decision making and problem solving thereby supporting the student’s development in leadership and management skills.
Provide students with an understanding of the economic and social environment in which private, public and not-for-profit organisations function.

Provide students the operational, creative and analytical skills to solve business problems.

Develop the cognitive analytical skills to synthesise organisational knowledge, to problem solve in diverse contexts and to communicate clearly the ideas/solutions developed through a creative-led process.

Explore and provide a thorough understanding of the various functions of an organisation including an understanding of the management of people, financial resources and operations. The final year of the course should provide an opportunity to integrate and consolidate the various business disciplines and functions of an organisation in an innovative and entrepreneurial setting.

In combination, these objectives and learning standards intend to produce graduates with a high level of generic and business management skills. The degree is designed within a format which foregrounds the Indigenous contribution that students bring to the learning environment, and with content that addresses Indigenous issues at the layers of the individual student, the student within the family and local community, and within a social, political economic and historical context.

To facilitate access to Indigenous students around Australia and to acknowledge that a number of local Indigenous students are working full time, the degree is offered in residential (block) mode, where students attend university for three separate six-day blocks per semester and in between study independently and online utilising flexible learning approaches. This is supplemented by the availability of online learning software for consultation and group work discussion. Assessment tasks in all subjects require students to apply theory to practice and to relate this to their experiences at work and in the community. The residential (block) delivery of the degree is also conducive to home, work and family life obligations, which for a number of Indigenous students may be quite challenging.

The design of the curriculum offered a great opportunity for the Business School to collaborate with the university’s Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, which was established to provide a range of individual services and learning development opportunities for Indigenous students studying at the university. Much of this collaboration also served to contribute to the University’s Indigenous Education and Employment Policy (IEEP, 2011) and as well as the RHE Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (IHER, 2012).

Course design – a modular approach
The degree has been structured to be delivered through six modules of four subjects each over a period of three years. Each module is themed around the structure of an organisation that allows them to focus on a theme rather than what could be seen as a set of disparate subjects. The first module, Integrating Business Skills, introduces students to the various core business disciplines including accounting, finance, economics, legal studies and marketing, in an interdisciplinary setting. The objectives of this module are to introduce students to the business landscape, the interrelationships of the various business functions and the contributions to the value of the firm and society more broadly. It also is the module that introduces the development of generic skills, including written, oral communication and team work skills.
Modules 2 through to 5 develop business management skills that align directly with the core functions of an organisation, namely: the management of the organisation and organisational structure, the management of people and the development of human capital, the management and oversight of the organisation’s financial resources including sources of funding and the management of its operations and supply chain including the consideration of financial and other operational risks an organisation may typically be faced with.

The final module, Managing Innovation, is a capstone module that brings together the knowledge developed throughout the degree in the context of new venture creation and entrepreneurial activity. The final subject, Business Model Generation, within this “capstone module” serves as the capstone subject in the degree. The name capstone is extensively used in education to describe a subject that provides potential for students to consolidate their learning gained throughout the degree. In this subject students will demonstrate their employability skills and ability to combine their graduate capabilities through a final year project. Business Model Generation draws upon the earlier knowledge capabilities in the degree by building upon the previous project subjects (or quasi-capstone subjects) nested within each of the preceding modules.

The degree is structured in such a way that each of the six modules encompasses a project subject, which collectively can be described as a “capstone stream”. This “capstone stream” is intended to consolidate and thoroughly deepen a student’s understanding of the core business functions and how they all interrelate in a progressive fashion while also incorporating the theme of Indigenous cultural sensitivity throughout. The following figure illustrates the linear development of the capstone stream while Figure 2 illustrates the interdependency of all the project subjects in the degree.

Figure 1 is an illustration of the staged interdependency of the project subjects that leads to the final capstone subject. The first three project subjects (Contemporary Issues in the Indigenous Context, People Management and Resource Development) are presented to students as the building blocks for understanding the core functions of business management and administration as they deal primarily with understanding the business disciplines that underpin the knowledge and capacity of an organisation, the management of its people and the management of the organisation’s financial resources.

The second stage of the “capstone stream” illustrated in Figure 1, introduces the students to the operations of the organisation and the overarching management of the organisation from the person(s) responsible for its leadership. The significant interdependencies between overseeing the organisation’s operations both internally

Figure 1.
Capstone stream – development of the capstone subject
and externally (via the supply chain framework), within the overall management of the organisation including its people and resources, is highlighted in Figure 1 as the overlapping of circles between the projects of Modules 4 and 5. The final project module (or the capstone subject) encapsulates all that has been taught in the degree but consolidated in a separate project subject.

Overall this capstone stream provides an opportunity to recreate a workplace environment whereby students are taken through (or “move” between) one core business division at a time to help understand how an organisation functions and how all these divisions interconnect and together can solve business problems.

The overarching representation of the degree is given in Figure 2. All of the modules that define this degree are illustrated as an orbiting set of four subjects outside of the large blue arrows. The centre of the diagram illustrates how each of the project subjects (from the series of orbiting modules) are taught independently but constitute an important element of the capstone subject that builds upon the knowledge of the earlier projects.

The degree will prepare students for a range of career opportunities within the public, private or not-for-profit sectors. It will also provide graduates the skills and knowledge to further develop their career options to include more senior roles in management (business administrator, middle manager, general manager or management consultant) and other opportunities including business analyst, strategic planner and entrepreneur.

Strategies for integrating the theme of Indigenous cultural sensitivity

There are a number of approaches that can be used to design learning opportunities to embed the theme of Indigenous cultural sensitivity into the curriculum. The literature also provides various rational and examples that are useful here (see Loban, 2011; Ranzijn et al., 2008; McLaughlin and Whatman, 2008; Guilfoyle, 2008; Anker, 2008; Douglas, 2005). Loban (2011) identifies numerous approach to embedding Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum, namely through case studies, professional experience, use of experts, community engagement and through assessment. A number of these strategies will serve as a framework to integrate these into the curriculum.

During the various stages of the course, students will explore issues from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective. Through the learning activities and assessments students will be able to relate their knowledge and skills to the development of business and community initiatives for local community and national Indigenous organisations. Students will also be exposed to the perspectives of people working in non-Indigenous organisations, and how these perspectives may either align to or be in conflict with Indigenous perspectives. The course aims to develop students’ capacity to work effectively in either an Indigenous or non-Indigenous context. These strategies for embedding Indigenous cultural sensitivities were developed in collaboration with staff from the university’s Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning and used to frame the content in the curriculum.

This strategy aligns and operationalises the University’s Indigenous Reconciliation Statement (UTS, 2005) by ensuring:

- “ongoing collaboration with Indigenous staff/people to develop and implement educational programmes/courses/subjects that recognise Australian Indigenous people, knowledge and experience”;
- “continued development of a supportive organisational culture which values and respects Indigenous culture and accommodates cultural differences wherever possible”;

Fresh approach to indigenous business education
Module 6: Managing Innovation
S1 = Opportunity Recognition and Ideation
S2 = Innovation and Entrepreneurship
S3 = Competitive Positioning
P6 = Capstone Project 6 Business Model Generation

Module 1: Integrating Business Skills
S1 = Principles of Money and Finance
S2 = The Business Environment
S3 = Principles of Marketing
P1 = Project 1 Contemporary Issues in the Indigenous Context

Module 2: Managing People
S1 = Managing People and Work
S2 = Negotiations: Theory and Practice
S3 = Performance Management Theory and Practice
P2 = Project 2 People Management

Module 3: Managing Financial Resources
S1 = The Economic and Social Landscape
S2 = Accounting for Managerial Practice
S3 = Investment and Financing Decisions
P3 = Project 3 Resource Development

Module 4: Managing Organisations
S1 = Understanding Organisations
S2 = Advocacy and Social Change
S3 = Sustainable Value Creation
P4 = Project 4 Government, Community and Organisations

Module 5: Managing Operations
S1 = Operations Management
S2 = Supply Chain Management
S3 = Enterprise Risk Management
P5 = Project 5 Business Operations and Risk Management (PROJECT)

Figure 2. Relationship between project subjects and capstone project
• “fostering of communication and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, students and community members”; and
• “promoting awareness and appreciation of Australia’s Indigenous heritage across the broader community.”

In the context of this degree, Indigenous education includes opportunities for non-Indigenous Australians to gain knowledge about Indigenous history and culture. The design of the curriculum, which involved a collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, resulted in a broader level of awareness of indigenous cultural, issues and a collective determination to contribute towards helping close the gap for Indigenous people.

The new degree would not have been possible without the collaboration of the academics from the various business disciplines and the indigenous staff for the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning. Once the residential mode and concept of modules were agreed to, it became apparent that the standard teaching mode of delivery would not work. The review committee realised that objectives of the degree would only be effectively achieved when the delivery of the subjects are designed and delivered in collaboration. The process then involved academics from the various disciplines working in teams (representing modules) to design the subject content while the review committee oversaw the overall integration of the content. The delivery of the subjects in each module would be collaboratively undertaken so that the project subjects (or quasi-capstone subjects in the “capstone stream”) would work seamlessly with the other three subjects in the module. As each module was developed, the responsible team presented to the team of the next module until all modules were completed. Each team took to their discussion with the next team the entire curriculum development up to that point. This whole process led to great camaraderie amongst staff and a true sense of ownership not only of the degree but also the outcomes it is intended to achieve.

**Career and further education opportunities**

The degree should provide a range of career opportunities in business management by specifically providing students the opportunity to understand the workings of the various divisions and responsibilities of an organisation. The different aspects of business management are taught through the various modules in the course, which in turn lead to further study opportunities through specialised post-graduate programmes that align to the various modules in the degree.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the structures of the Bachelor of Business Administration, the graduate’s career opportunities and options for further (specialised) post-graduate education.

Modules 2-5, which focus on the managing of people, financial resources, operations and the organisation, are illustrated by a double helix to illustrate how career opportunities and post-graduate study in these areas build upon the knowledge gained through undertaking a Bachelor of Business Administration. By having a broad exposure to the various functions and divisions of an organisations, graduates of the course can then opt, in conjunction with their work experience, to undertake specialised study in one of these areas by undertaking a master’s programme (or one of the nested courses: graduate certificate or graduate diploma) in the related field. The same figure also aids employers to think/plan the most effective strategy for developing their employee’s career path.
5. Conclusion
A great deal has been written on the social and economic disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the cost it adds to the economy and society. This paper looks at the disadvantage (“gap”) faced by Indigenous Australian’s in higher education and how significantly under-represented Indigenous Australian’s are in many facets of Australian life. Despite numerous Government initiatives and policies the gap remains stubbornly wide although some progress has been made. A review of the employment data highlights the significant gap in professional, technical and managerial roles occupied by Indigenous people. The limited employment participation rates are primarily the result of a lack of basic education and inadequate preparation and training in business and related professions.

As various reviews have found and our research indicates, if the gap is to be closed then there needs to be a change in university education tailored for Indigenous people that involves a repositioning of business courses taking into account Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage, and Indigenous cultural sensitivities. Although several universities are offering community management degrees and others offering programmes in Indigenous Studies, there does not appear to be a business degree that adequately prepares Indigenous students for a career in business or the business skills needed to underpin the object of self-determination.

We provide a case study into the development of an innovative degree that aims to narrow the divide by contributing towards the higher education needs of Indigenous Australians in the areas which are in great need. It is a degree programmes that produces the “T-shaped” graduates expected by business while also embedding the Indigenous cultural sensitivities so often recommended for such courses. The degree commences with a cornerstone module that introduces the various core business disciplines in an interdisciplinary setting and concludes with a capstone module. The residential feature allows Indigenous students from around Australia to participate in the programme while the training it provides gives the graduate the capacity to undertake further studies in specialised masters courses. We believe this degree provides a solution that specifically caters for Indigenous Australians as a way to bridge the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

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**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**

Dr Christopher Bajada can be contacted at: chris.bajada@uts.edu.au

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