

Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society

Speakers' Abstracts

Cara Cross


Walking Together: UNSW's Micro-Treaty and the Call of the Uluru Statement from the Heart

This presentation shares the story of UNSW's Micro-Treaty, a binding, community-led agreement being developed between the University and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, alumni, and connected communities. Rooted in the call of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the Micro-Treaty continues the work of Voice, Treaty, and Truth by affirming Indigenous presence, knowledge, and authority within the university. Led by the Indigenous Representative Council and guided by the framework used in the Uluru Regional Dialogues, this process invites Indigenous communities to shape a formal agreement with the institution. The Micro-Treaty is not symbolic, it is a commitment to embed Indigenous self-determination into the University's core structures and future direction. Through a series of pre-Dialogue information sessions and face-to-face Community Dialogues, communities are determining the priorities and commitments of the Micro-Treaty. These will likely span areas such as education, cultural recognition, Indigenous-led research, health and wellbeing, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), community engagement, and truth-telling. The Micro-Treaty reflects UNSW's commitment to continue the work of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, to walk together with Indigenous communities and ensure their voices are not on the margins, but at the heart of UNSW.

Ross Freeman

Perspectives from Work with Advancing Indigenous Language Technologies: How Technology Can Aid Developed Language Revitalization Efforts

As Indigenous communities begin to strengthen their heritage languages in the home, school, and other domains, access to and the ability to craft technology for language specific use can be invaluable. Possessing the ability to send friends and family text or email, as well as providing education and resources in a heritage language, are at the core of more developed language revitalization goals. This talk will provide an overview of the Advancing Indigenous Language Technologies (AILT) initiative at the University of Arizona, which works with Indigenous communities engaged in active language revitalization efforts to create language specific materials and technologies, ultimately created by, owned by, and used for, Indigenous languages and Indigenous education. At AILT, we work directly and collaboratively with community members to provide training for the creation and maintenance of their own language-specific technologies. As this kind of language expansion is vital for language revitalization, language technology development can be a crucial way for communities to achieve their goals surrounding language revitalization.



Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society

Speakers' Abstracts

Rebekah Hatfield

We Are One: Interconnectedness as the Foundation for Community Transformation and Nation-Building.

Interconnectedness in First Nations worldviews teaches that we are not isolated individuals but members of a vast network of relationships. Applied to community or nation building, this worldview promotes inclusion, respect, sustainability, and resilience. It challenges systems rooted in hierarchy and separation, offering instead a vision grounded in reciprocity, balance, and collective prosperity. Embracing this principle can lead to deeper understanding, collaboration, and a more just world. This presentation explores the foundational role of interconnectedness in community transformation and nation-building, grounded in First Nations worldviews and values. Rooted in relational thinking, Goori worldviews emphasise that all beings—human, animal, spiritual, and environmental—are part of an intricate web of kinship. This principle guides how communities govern, resolve conflict, and ensure collective well-being. In contrast to Western models that often prioritise individualism and hierarchy, First Nations frameworks promote collective responsibility, reciprocity, and balance. Authentic and lasting transformation requires reimagining our relationships—with one another and the world. Examples from Indigenous-led initiatives will highlight how interconnectedness not only strengthens social cohesion and resilience but also offers a roadmap for ethical and sustainable development. This presentation invites audiences to see interconnectedness not as a philosophical ideal, but as a practical and necessary foundation for building communities rooted in respect, equity, and shared responsibility.

Atalanta Lloyd-Haynes


Yarn-Why we are here

Remembering who we are and why we are here how we join together Maybe a bit of political history contemporary social realities and pathways to thriving There may be some art-making

Howard Higgs

Developing an Indigenous Knowledge System on and for Country

It is well known that Country speaks to people. Knowledge also flows through and from Country. So, if we care for and nurture the ground upon which our teaching and learning occurs, the classroom which is Country will take up the task of teaching from there.” (Dunleavy, Barlo 2019, p. 5). This statement of understanding lies at the heart of this research project. Yet from an empirical standpoint how can such processes be quantified or qualified? When Country speaks how can we know what is said? These are the fundamental themes and driving motivations which form the foundations of my Artifact and Exegesis PhD, 'Developing an Indigenous Knowledge System on and for Country'. Being Gumbaynggirr is a recent phenomenon for myself. My journey into this dimensional quality from the very outset has been one of outsider looking in yet also insider looking out (Smith, 2022). An outsider to the existing, accepted, cultural phenomena of being Gumbaynggirr and yet a complete insider as to my own first principles, co-creational understanding of working with and interpreting Gumbaynggirr Country (the source of culture). This presentation will consider the appropriate nexus having predispositions towards being both 'insider' and 'outsider' (Smith, 2022). Offering and presenting the case study Jiiginy Miindala, my Gumbaynggirr practise.



Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society Speakers' Abstracts

Zana Jabir & Steph Beck


How can Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) use of imagination help us understand imagination's function and use in school education?

This research explores how the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) utilises imagination to enhance educational outcomes and how such practices can inform broader school education. Grounded in a relational Indigenous epistemology and systems thinking, the study addresses the main question: How can AIME's use of imagination help us understand imagination's function and role in school education? Data collection methods include thematic analysis of AIME's Imagi-Nation {TV} episodes, observations of Mentorclass workshops in selected Western Sydney secondary schools, and yarning circles with students, teachers, and mentors, complemented by photo storytelling. Preliminary findings suggest that imagination pedagogies and practices (IPP) within AIME foster empathy, critical consciousness, and aspirational thinking among Indigenous and marginalised youth. Key elements include culturally responsive, spiritually grounded, and bi-epistemic approaches that support relational, experiential learning. These findings highlight the significance of imagination in transforming educational inequities by connecting personal and collective futures. The study discusses how embedding imagination practices in mainstream education can amplify Indigenous ways of knowing and promote inclusive, equitable schooling experiences. Ultimately, this research contributes to a growing field advocating for culturally and spiritually responsive imagination pedagogies, offering a framework for educators, communities, and organisations seeking to foster transformative educational journeys.

Raymond Kelly

In search of the thurru para and the staging of successful gayi bara

The current desire by the Australian education system for the inclusion of Aboriginal languages from early childhood to tertiary levels evokes a range of responses from within Aboriginal communities. Firstly, there has not been a true reconciliation acknowledging the centuries-long structural displacement of our peoples and languages, nor of the critical and destructive role which both the education system and educators themselves played in this process. Instead, policy and implementation frameworks laud the involvement of Elders, and what my culture terms thurru para, path makers or knowledge holders without the reflexivity to acknowledge that our 'bruised community' still bears the literal and emotional scars of mid-Twentieth Century Imperial education. Secondly, the education system continues to seek a homogenous Aboriginal voice- which conforms to the 'expert' analysis of White linguists and privileges those voices over community based 'enculturated listeners'. Finally, Aboriginal speakers who venture into this forum must negotiate strident criticism, often from within their broader kinship and communal networks which seek to limit language usage in novel situations, harking back to historical notions of purity and sacredness. This paper considers the author's attempts to mediate these difficulties through a model of gayi bara, liberating language from the pages of ethnographies and from a static position which will ultimately empower colonial linguistic. Using examples from his own teaching in multiple contexts, the paper will show that gayi bara was and still is a practice of adaptability, growth, where multiple opinions can flourish and both truth telling and learning can occur.



Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society

Speakers' Abstracts

Mililma May

Gulumoerrgin Maan and the resistance of Danggalaba

This presentation traces the suppressed history of my Batcho family; the rightful Traditional Owners of the Gulumoerrgin (Darwin) region; and the ongoing resistance of the Danggalaba clan in the face of systemic erasure. Drawing from family oral histories, archival silences, and lived experience, I argue that the foundational myth of Darwin's development has depended on the deliberate exclusion of the Batcho people. This erasure is not historical; it is ongoing; legitimising land theft, dispossession, and legal injustice under the guise of settler governance. By centering the truth of who the land belongs to, and how resistance has persisted across generations, this presentation challenges academic and institutional complicity in maintaining colonial lies. As a young Batcho woman, I speak not only to reclaim truth, but to demand accountability from those who have benefitted from our displacement.

Andrew McNair


A qualitative and quantitative analysis of automated speech recognition (ASR) assisted transcription of Chikashshanompa' (Chickasaw)

This presentation will discuss the results of a pilot study conducted in summer 2024 to assess the efficacy of an automated speech recognition (ASR) system for transcribing Chikashshanompa' (Chickasaw), a Muskogean language spoken by approximately two dozen L1 speakers in Oklahoma, USA. This project began at the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) at the University of Arizona in 2023, during which the XLSR-Wav2Vec2 ASR model developed by Coto Solano, et al. (2022) was trained on several hours of fully transcribed Chikashshanompa' conversations and oral narratives. Transcription of recorded materials is one of the most significant bottlenecks for tribal language programs, but access to this transcribed audio is critical for language documentation and revitalization projects. ASR is a promising tool to address this bottleneck, but must take into account Indigenous language sovereignty and community attitudes towards technology-assisted transcription. The goal of this presentation is to showcase a useful tool for Indigenous language documentation work and highlight specific results for the Chikashshanompa' revitalization program. These results include a quantitative analysis of the impact of ASR on the speed and accuracy of transcription and a qualitative survey of impressions from study participants, all of whom are all tribal citizens and second language learners of Chikashshanompa'.

Phillip Orcher

BigaagaARi: Reclaiming Narratives and Restoring Wellbeing through Indigenous Digital Sovereignty

BigaagaARi is an Indigenous-led initiative designed to support the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal men by fusing traditional knowledge systems with contemporary digital practices. Developed on Gamilaraay and Muruwari Country, BigaagaARi operates as both a community platform and a culturally-rooted research framework, centering Aboriginal agency, storytelling, and leadership. This presentation will explore how BigaagaARi reclaims narratives historically distorted or erased by colonial structures. It will discuss the methodology underpinning the project — grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being — and how digital tools are mobilized to strengthen cultural identity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community resilience. Through case studies and participant reflections, this presentation highlights the impact of culturally responsive co-design in shaping initiatives that not only sustain but also amplify Indigenous voices in the digital age. BigaagaARi offers a model for Indigenous innovation that honors Country, Culture, and Community while forging future pathways for wellbeing and self-determination



Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society Speakers' Abstracts

Shay Sullivan


Evolving Linguistic Work within a Colonial Landscape: Mindfulness of a Colonial Legacy in Linguistic Work

This talk provides reflections of experiences navigating linguistics in academia, at three American universities. Reflections concerning the deep colonial legacy within linguistics are offered. Such a legacy inevitably suggests that linguistic practices, particularly those that work with Indigenous communities, are colonial in nature. Specifically, the practices that involve the collection of "data" from speakers, documentation and archiving, and linguistic analysis will be critically analyzed. It will be proposed that these practices inherently isolate language from speakers, thus removing from those who provide language, a sense of self and sense of place as related to language. Examples of such practices will be drawn from analyzing 'field methods' courses at three universities; these courses provide direct training for linguists in elicitation, documentation and analysis, and are some of the first instances where linguists receive training and exposure to these practices inherent in linguistic research with Indigenous communities and their languages. Further examples are drawn from linguistic work in communities around the world, which demonstrates coercive practices, including researchers deliberately misleading speakers of Indigenous languages regarding linguistic work. These practices impede the progress of language revitalization efforts, as well as they directly harm those who are the targets of such practices. Conclusions offer suggestions for future practices in the field of linguistics.

Birrugan Dunn-Velasco

Systems Building; Goori Language Renaissance

In this talk, I propose a radical shift in how we conceptualise decolonisation. Too often I feel in the collective zeitgeist we reference Marx, Lenin, or Eurocentric ideology as our liberation framework. But if we are serious about "decolonisation" - as a buzzword operating within the paradigm that our languages must be our principal theoretical tool. As an extension of our laws and responsibility to our kin, country and land. I call this Systems Building: the extensions and manifestation of our real political power in the ongoing project of the emancipation of our Goori cultural and political systems. This calls for what i call a Goori Renaissance; whereby thinking and operating in an immersive Gumbaynggirr context will spark development into new ways of thinking that we can't even concieve due to the limitations of the present. I pay homage to the Māori Renaissance of 1974, I'll also reference Fight for Liberty and Freedom (Prof. John Maynard). This will also be a prime callout to our young people and argue that if we do not take radical steps now to create and harness a collective decision to save our languages like what happened in Maori Society then we are doomed.



Raising Indigenous Voices in Academia and Society About the Speakers

Jacqueline Williams

Looking after Country: natural capital, sustainability and social justice

Natural Capital refers to natural assets that deliver ecosystem services essential to human health and healthy economies. The current value of Australia's Natural Capital is \$6.5 trillion and yet the responsibility for caring for almost 90% of the land mass rests with rural and remote agricultural and Indigenous communities with little if any cost sharing from the urban communities. In recognition of the significance of Natural Capital in the world economy international sustainability accounting standards have been developed, with Australian sustainability accounting legislation now in force. However, there are social justice issues for rural and remote land stewards as Australia does not have an agreed farm scale Natural Capital description and assessment method for demonstrating Caring for Country.

Rod Williams

Gongan Cultural and Spiritual Paradigm

The Gongan Cultural and Spiritual Paradigm is a research project that Rod Williams began in the early 1990s while working as a senior manager at Normandy Mining. His work in this area continued as he became a leading national facilitator for the National Indigenous Business and Economic Conferences (NIBEC) and later the founding Director of Gongan Consultancy Pty Ltd in 1993. The central question driving this research was: Where does culture fit within business? This enquiry acknowledged that cultural and spiritual values are fundamental to Indigenous people and must be central in all aspects of socio-economic business frameworks. As a postgraduate student who entered academia in 2021—after 28 years of applying the Gongan Models and Frameworks across various industries and locations— I faced the dual challenge of protecting Gongan Consultancy's intellectual property while navigating academic expectations. At the same time I resisted pressure from the 'theory police' to conform to Western, ethnocentric research methodologies for validation. The Gongan Business Models and Frameworks do not fit neatly within conventional Western paradigms, nor should they be forced to. Instead, my research thesis asserts their legitimacy as culturally grounded and academically rigorous contributions to Indigenous and cross-cultural management research.