

| CASE STUDY

BUSH UNIVERSITY EMPOWERING FUTURE INDIGENOUS LEADERS

WUYAGIBA BUSH UNIVERSITY

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Australia's first bush university is encouraging young Indigenous Australians to stay in school and pursue tertiary education.

The Wuyagiba Bush University is the culmination of a partnership between Macquarie University, the Aboriginal Yugul Mangi Rangers and South-East Arnhem Land communities to provide opportunities for remote Indigenous students to access university education.

The Nature Conservancy, Origin Foundation and the Federal Government have also provided critical financial

support to help establish the University, which is located on-Country at Wuyagiba outstation in the Northern Territory.

Focusing on combining traditional knowledge and transferrable skills – including essay writing, computer skills, film making and language translation – the University is putting into practice the original vision of local Elders to develop programs that build local capacity for self-management, create future employment opportunities, and maintain cultural and environmental knowledge and practice.

In 2018, the first cohort of students graduated from a pre-university course to prepare them for tertiary study, with 11 students subsequently taking up places in Bachelor degrees at Macquarie University in Sydney this year.

Significantly, students from the program are the first from the remote Ngukurr community to undertake Bachelor degrees in more than 30 years.

Employing local Aboriginal people to run the campus and teach cultural lessons in partnership with Macquarie University staff, the Wuyagiba Bush University will offer places in its pre-university course to 20 students every year.

Importantly, students going on to study at Macquarie will foster cross-cultural sharing of knowledge and experiences with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous students from across Australia.

The Wuyagiba Bush University concept – first considered in 2008 – has stemmed from eco-cultural research and community engagement projects conducted in the region over the past



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decade, with this work ultimately winning the 2017 Eureka Prize for Innovation in Citizen Science.

These projects incorporated Indigenous knowledge to emphasise connection and care for country and culture, with these same principles now continuing in the University's curriculum.

The creation of the University has also had major social benefits, including more people in Ngukurr and surrounding communities recognising the need to keep children in school so they too can go to university one day.

Acknowledged by the Australian Research Council's Engagement-Impact assessment as having a "highly significant contribution" that is "highly effective", the Wuyagiba Bush University is not only providing educational, environmental, social and community benefits, it is also facilitating significant economic and financial growth for a remote region that has traditionally had high rates of unemployment and low rates of education.

