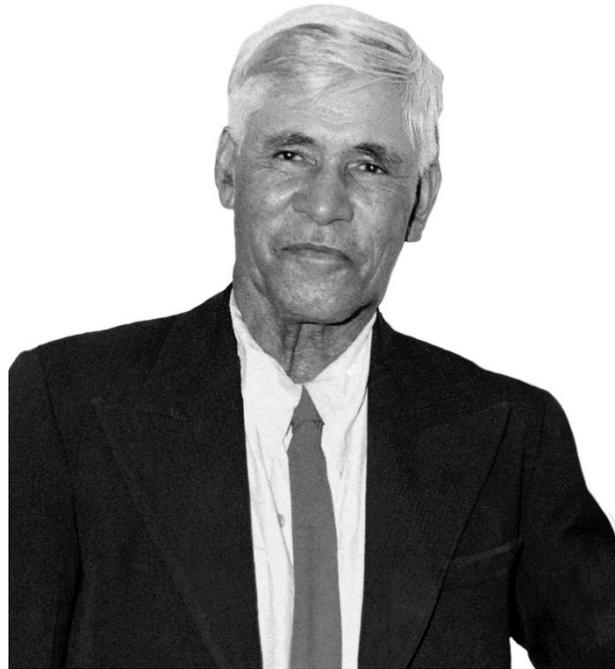


# The Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture Series



2020 Lecture Notes

**Cementing Indigenous leadership in higher education**

Prof. Michelle Trudgett



The Thirty-fourth Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture  
delivered as an online webinar, NSW  
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### **Cementing Indigenous leadership in higher education**

#### **Prof. Michelle Trudgett**

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Thank you Uncle Colin for that warm welcome. I would like to pay my respects to several people and nations. Firstly, I pay my respect to the Anaiwan People whose lands the University of New England occupies. I also acknowledge the Kamilaroi, Gumbayngirr and Dunghutti People who have shared the caring of that beautiful country.

I also pay my respects to the Darug People whose land I have the privilege of being on today as I deliver this lecture from the UNE Parramatta campus. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and extend this respect to all Indigenous people in this virtual room tonight. I extend this to you, your families, and the nations upon whose lands you are on this evening.

I am also aware that there are a number of Elders and community people gathered at The Keeping Place in Armidale. I would like to acknowledge this important group and pay my utmost respect to each of you. It is your leadership which has blazed the trail for my generation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the wonderful staff at Oorala and the Vice-Chancellor Professor Brigid Heywood for the very generous offer to deliver the 2020 Frank Archibald Lecture. This is a truly humbling experience for which I will be forever grateful. Thank you.

The Frank Archibald Lecture is such a vital event in the UNE calendar. I pay my deep respect to the family and friends of Mr Archibald, thanking them for the absolute honour to contribute to this important legacy. I would also like to acknowledge the passing of Aunty Grace and send my condolences to the Archibald family.

The Frank Archibald lecture series commenced in 1986 – eleven years before I commenced studying at UNE in 1997. Over the last 34 years, we have had the pleasure of hearing the wise words of Australians of the Year, Chancellors, pioneers in Indigenous education and other leading scholars, activists, artists, politicians and Ministers as they thoughtfully contributed to this remarkable lecture series. I've always enjoyed learning who, from year to year, was going to be selected to deliver the all important annual lecture. I could not have imagined when I was a student that I would one day have the honour of contributing to the series.

The impressive array of Indigenous leaders showcased by this enduring series highlights a few really important points. Firstly, how respected Mr Archibald is to Indigenous people across the country. Secondly, how well-regarded the University of New England is by the Indigenous community. Finally,

just how strong, clever and deadly Indigenous people are – and in saying that, how important our contributions are to society.

Today I will be talking about the important role Indigenous people play in higher education. I would like to begin by sharing a little bit about my academic journey. I started a law degree at the University of Technology Sydney on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was young and completely overwhelmed by the magnitude of the institution. It's fair to say that I felt like a fish out of water and as a result withdrew after just one semester.

I then took a few years off study and did a number of odd jobs – many of which involved making things - from pizzas to computer modems. Then at the age of 21 I decided that I wanted to go back to university and study. I knew that in order to succeed I would need to leave Sydney and be in an environment with less social distractions.

I found myself having a cup of coffee one afternoon and reading a copy of the Koori Mail newspaper. There were a few ads for Indigenous people to apply to study at various universities around the nation. I liked the look of two of the ads, one for a South Australian university and the other for UNE. I did the one thing that I recommend no potential university student does to determine what institution they should enrol in – I tossed a coin. Heads it was UNE and Tails it was the South Australian university. Evidently the coin turned up a heads and that was the beginning of the most incredible journey – one that would deeply enrich my life and last a lifetime.

In 1997 I moved to Armidale, residing in Austin College for the first semester. I made friends with the most amazing bunch of students, many of whom remain my closest friends today. One of the incredible aspects that changed my life forever was the cohort of Indigenous students I met through the Oorala Centre. Many of us were away from our families, our friends, and our homes. We supported and nurtured one another throughout our journeys, forming tight bonds and ultimately became each other's family.

What I know now that I didn't realise back then, in the 1990s, was that we were part of a collective body of students who were relatively new to the Australian higher education sector and as such we were writing history.

You see, the first university to open its doors in Australia was the University of Sydney, a sandstone institution founded in 1850. This was followed by the formation of several other institutions - Melbourne University in 1853; University of Adelaide in 1874; University of Tasmania in 1890; University of Queensland in 1909 and University of Western Australia in 1911. By 1911, all six states had a university however in comparison to today the numbers were very low with only 3,000 students enrolled nation-wide. Two-thirds of this group were enrolled in Sydney or Melbourne University. A university education was an opportunity for the elite who were centred in the state capitals.

Unlike many of the internationally renowned institutions, Australian universities were usually designed by people who had minimal, if any, knowledge about the higher education sector. Some argued that this proved to benefit the Australian higher education architects as it helped them with their innovation given they were not attempting to replicate another countries institutions.

Higher education has now existed in Australia for 170 years, yet participation of Indigenous Australians within the sector has occurred for just over half a century. This relatively recent entry of Indigenous Australians to higher education has been underpinned by equity aspirations and the ongoing

endeavour to reach parity of participation and outcome. Remarkable change has occurred in those 50-60 years spurred by the energies and ambitions of Indigenous people.

The first Indigenous person to receive a tertiary qualification is believed to be Dr Weir who was awarded a Diploma of Physical Education from Melbourne University in 1959. At the postgraduate level, the first known Indigenous person to receive a doctoral qualification was Dr Jonas who was awarded a PhD in 1980 from the University of Papua New Guinea.

So how might people like myself think about this in terms of our own positioning in society and the academy? For starters it indicates that when my parents were born in 1954, not one Indigenous person had graduated from any degree in Australia. It also signified that one generation later, when I was born in 1975, not one Indigenous person had ever graduated with a doctoral qualification – not one.

I am pleased however to report that things have changed in more recent decades. For instance, the number of Indigenous students enrolled in higher education has significantly increased over time from just one student enrolment recorded in 1959 through to 21,000 in 2019. I should point out here that I'm using last year's statistics as that is the most recent full year data available. Though really notably, of these 21,000 enrolled Indigenous students, a remarkable 542 were enrolled in doctoral qualifications. This is a great sign.

This growth is a direct result of a range of factors including the advocacy of Indigenous leaders who have gone before us, paving the way for Indigenous people to have a rightful place in Australian universities. For half a century the work of Indigenous people has informed the sector.

The pioneers have effectively disrupted education systems through hard work, perseverance and have done so while experiencing relentless racism and discrimination. I cannot for one second imagine the magnitude or volume of barriers the pioneers of Indigenous education faced. However, I would like to pause for a moment and say the most heart felt and sincerest thank you to them for their legacy. They have paved the way and made it possible for myself and others to follow.

It was the early 1970s when we saw the introduction of programs and mechanisms to support Indigenous students. The first Indigenous Support Unit was established in 1973 in association with the Aboriginal Task Force program at the South Australian Institute of Technology. The Aboriginal Task Force was the beginning of Indigenous-specific support in higher education. It created the blueprint for other Indigenous Support Units by establishing the basic functions necessary to support Indigenous students in higher education – such as special entry conditions; academic support; counselling services; the provision of a separate space; and the encouragement and support of an Aboriginal identity.

Many of the Indigenous Higher Education Centres, once largely student support focused, have morphed into fully-fledged schools or departments progressing teaching and research in Indigenous studies, alongside student support. There is also an increasing number of Indigenous led research centres. The Centre for the Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges and Jumbunna Research Institute at the University of Technology Sydney are two examples of outstanding research centres within the same institution.

Curricula, particularly in the professions, now includes discipline relevant Indigenous perspectives – primarily through Indigenous Graduate Attributes. It would be tempting to think that this change has just occurred naturally over time. However, that would be to overlook the vital work done by Indigenous staff, both academic and professional.

Over the past fifty years there have been a number of formal Indigenous groups, networks and organisations formed. The central component that is core throughout all these groups is advocacy. Some of these groups were specifically designed to inform government officials whilst others were established to provide guidance to the sector.

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee (IHEAC) was an all Indigenous ministerial advisory group appointed to provide policy advice to the Federal government on the matters related to Indigenous Australians in Higher Education. The Council, which first met in March 2005, quickly identified a set of priorities, including student retention and success, researcher development, greater recognition of Indigenous studies and workforce and governance issues.

*The IHEAC (2008) submission to the Review of Higher Education emphasised the entrenched under-representation of Indigenous peoples in higher education, calling for the national approach to the ongoing inequity that would echo through the Behrendt Review and finally find expression in Universities Australia's Indigenous strategy.*

Another group worth mentioning is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) which seeks to influence and advocate Indigenous interests with government and education institutions. They also seek to increase the availability of higher education within our communities. NATSIHEC is open to any Indigenous people working in the sector.

The most recently established group certainly needs to be mentioned. That is the Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor/ Deputy Vice-Chancellor Group. This group, which I am an active member of, formed in mid-2019 with a mandate to provide a transformative platform for engagement with the sector at the nexus of the academic endeavour, community engagement and professional practice in preserving and ensuring culturally appropriate higher education services to Indigenous communities.

Despite steady increases in student numbers, there remains a considerable and stagnant disparity in terms of the number of Indigenous people working in higher education compared to that of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people account for a total of 3.1 percent of the Australian working age population yet accounted for only 1.2 percent of full-time equivalent staff employed in the Australian higher education system.

It is apparent that the Australian higher education sector needs to do more to support, develop and maintain Indigenous staff – particularly to ensure that we reach population parity of 3% – which let's face it is really not an overly ambitious benchmark.

The steady increase of Indigenous people choosing to study and then work in Australian institutions has resulted in the gradual increase of formal Indigenous leaders across the higher education sector.

If I may briefly indulge, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik as one of the remarkable pioneers of Indigenous Education. Amongst Professor Bin-Sallik's very long, distinguished and impressive list of accomplishments, she was the first Indigenous person to get a Doctorate from Harvard University. She is someone who has forged a path for others to follow.

I'm incredibly fortunate in my position as Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, Strategy and Consultation at Western Sydney University as I get to work with Professor Bin-Sallik in her role as a member of our Board of Trustees. And of key relevance to us all tonight, Professor Bin-Sallik delivered the Frank Archibald lecture back in 1993.

But back in 2003 Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik wrote a paper called 'Cultural Safety: Lets Name It.' In this paper she stated:

*“Until we have our own Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellors to oversee Indigenous issues, universities will continue to make decisions on our behalf and to date these decisions have not all been positive.”*

Professor Bin-Sallik was well before her time, as it was not until six years later that Charles Darwin University appointed the first Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor in the country with the appointment of Professor Steve Larkin.

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor positions and we even have a couple of Indigenous Deputy Vice-Chancellors. While the pace of change seems rapid, the extent of the corridors to which Indigenous academic leaders have access remain narrow, with trajectories impeded by invisible barricades.

This notion of Indigenous leaders and more broadly, Indigenous leadership, is paramount to the discussion tonight. I have had the fortune to create a strong research partnership with Professor Susan Page, an incredible Aboriginal woman who I have deep respect for.

Over the last decade we have undertaken a number of research projects that focus on important issues impacting Indigenous people in the Higher Education sector. For example, we have focused on improving opportunities for Indigenous higher degree research students, early career academics and are currently undertaking a large-scale project examining Indigenous leadership in higher education.

We have a wonderful Wiradjuri PhD student by the name of Stacey Coates and also a very talented research officer by the name of Rhonda Povey working on this project with us. During the last two years we have conducted interviews with 3 recruiters, 14 Indigenous leaders holding roles such as Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor positions, 31 Senior Executive including 27 Vice-Chancellors, 19 Indigenous academics and 13 Senior First Nation Leaders in Canada, New Zealand and North America.

The project is highlighting how significant and incredibly important Indigenous people, culture and knowledge is to the higher education sector – not just areas that have a primary focus for Indigenous staff and students – but all aspects of university business.

One aspect that dawned on us recently was that we had not stopped to define the concept of Indigenous Leadership. Instead, we spoke about it as though we had developed a mutual understanding of what it entailed. This is unlike many other areas of research where the focal point is defined very early on in the study.

Take for example one of my other research projects where we are looking to build strategies to best support Indigenous Early Career Researchers. For that study we use widely accepted definitions for what an early career researcher meant – that is someone who completed their doctoral qualification in the previous five years. Yet, for the Indigenous leadership research we had not stopped to establish what we believe Indigenous Leadership entailed.

I’ve thought about this oversight quite deeply in recent weeks and realise that it is perhaps due to the fact that the concept of Indigenous leadership is often engrained in us from a very young age. As we grow up, we have great teachers and mentors who kindly share their knowledges. They do so in the spirit of creating a better place for us now, but also with the vision of establishing something dynamic for future generations to come. Our Elders particularly, leave a legacy of knowledge, hope and inspiration. This is an integral part of Indigenous society.

This is also transferable when thinking about the higher education landscape. We need to think of leadership broadly and then from that can build to articulate what Indigenous leadership entails. At present, a working definition is as follows:

Leadership is a practical skill that encompasses the ability to encourage and guide others, to maximize efforts towards the achievement of a common goal. Leadership is not a form of authority or power. Instead, leadership stems from social influence. Characteristics of leadership include (but are not limited to); diplomacy, collaboration, innovation and inspiring a shared vision.

Indigenous Leadership includes the usual aspects of leadership but then advances such concepts to incorporate Indigenous Knowledges i.e. Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing and connecting. Importantly, Indigenous Leadership is heavily connected to our responsibilities and commitment to the Indigenous community with a strong focus on Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous culture informs our practices and draws on our lived experiences to provide a unique form of leadership excellence. Characteristics of Indigenous Leadership include (but are not limited to); resilience, advocacy and activism, courage and commitment.

An additional component of Indigenous Leadership is the fact that it often has a future focus as well as a past focus. It extends beyond the sheer benefits to a particular organisation or group in the immediate time. As such, Indigenous Leaders actualize a vision to create opportunities for future generations.

This is of course a fluid definition, one that we will continue to refine throughout the duration of this research. The main elements that I would like to get across here is that Indigenous leadership is extremely complex, practiced over a lifetime, linked to community and should never be underestimated nor deemed simplistic. Importantly, a key concept of Indigenous leadership is the underpinning foundation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

I would now like to talk about some of the ways that Indigenous leadership can bring enormous benefits to the higher education sector. Indigenous leadership is infused throughout our institutions by a range of Indigenous people.

For example, the leadership we see across our institutions that is provided by our students is an integral component of core business. They often provide leadership through formalised structures such as Student Representative Councils and Academic Senate through to more informal leadership to their peers. The great friends I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture certainly provided me with informal leadership support.

Indigenous academics and professional staff employed in various Schools, Faculties and divisions across the university provide leadership to fellow Indigenous staff and students but also non-Indigenous staff and students. Key components of their work is what many of us refer to as unrecognised cultural business.

Another vitally important Indigenous leadership role in higher education is the role that our Elders play, often through positions such as Elders in Residence. At Western Sydney University we have the fantastic Aunty Jean South who has held that position since 2008. At UNE there is the wonderful Uncle Colin Ahoy. The contributions that these Elders make to our institutions are immeasurable as they share their wisdom with staff and students.

It wasn't too long ago that Indigenous people were denied access to Boardrooms. The only way we got to be near the table was to serve those sitting at the table. However, Indigenous leaders continued

to bang on those Boardroom doors until they began to open. We have been gradually invited to sit at the table, to be part of the conversation, but rarely to be at the Head of the Table.

If we consider this in light of the higher education sector, it is true that we have gradually seen more Indigenous Deans, Pro Vice-Chancellors and even a couple of Deputy Vice-Chancellors emerge over the last decade or so. In this capacity we are joining the Executive tables in our universities. Now this is certainly a good start. We need to be at those tables to be part of the high-level conversations that impact our entire institution.

We have incredible Indigenous leaders in these positions who advocate for Indigenous people through such avenues. I'd particularly like to acknowledge the outstanding body of work my colleagues in the National Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Group undertake to advocate for Indigenous agency in higher education. They are an incredibly impressive group of leaders.

However, despite such Indigenous leadership excellence within our universities, it is important to point out that we are not the Heads of tables in University Executive Boardrooms.

We have however seen two Indigenous Chancellors – the first being Dr Pat O'Shane who held the Chancellor position at UNE from 1994 – 2003. On a side note I must say that I take tremendous pride in the fact that two of my three degrees from UNE have Dr O'Shane's signature on them – the nation's first Indigenous Chancellor.

Canberra University appointed the second Indigenous Chancellor, Professor Tom Calma who has held that position since 2014. Now when we think about it, it's terrific that we are seeing an emerging group of Indigenous Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors, and it's great that we have started to see a couple of Chancellors – but overall this is just not good enough for a nation's higher education sector that prides itself on being inclusive, innovative and ethical. There is a stark void at the Provost and Vice-Chancellor levels of university leadership.

No mainstream university in this country has ever appointed an Indigenous Australian person to the position of Vice-Chancellor. We now have well over one hundred Indigenous Professors, many of whom have held senior leadership roles for some time. They are expected to have the same leadership attributes to that of non-Indigenous leaders plus an additional skillset that encompasses complex cultural pieces and considerations.

During the course of the leadership research we asked several of the Vice-Chancellors when they think we might see an Indigenous person appointed to the position of Vice-Chancellor. The more optimistic responded by saying perhaps in the next five years or so whilst others believed it was a long way off.

Let's think about this, why might it be a long time before we see an Indigenous Vice-Chancellor? The answer was clear – they believed that most of the senior Indigenous leaders held Indigenous specific portfolios and that these portfolios were indeed too narrow and limited, not encompassing enough broader university work.

Now this is indeed an interesting observation, as when we asked the Indigenous leaders a set of similar questions, they believed their positions had both breadth and depth – encompassing all areas of the university.

These positions stretch across a range of areas including learning and teaching, research, philanthropy, marketing and branding, buildings, procurement, engagement with a range of internal and external stakeholders, recruitment and human resources, events, internationalisation, finance and of course all strategic pieces that underpin those areas.

There is a clear discrepancy between what the Vice-Chancellors believe these senior Indigenous leaders do in their roles and what the roles involve. And I should point out here that this is certainly not a disgruntled comment as I am extremely fortunate to have a highly engaged and incredibly supportive Vice-Chancellor at Western in Professor Barney Glover whose leadership is simply outstanding.

But rather the question I pose is how do we get the senior leaders across the higher education sector to acknowledge and even respect the size and scope of such positions so that those holding these positions are in fact deemed suitable candidates for Provost and Vice-Chancellor roles? How do we convey that our leadership is informed by tens of thousands of years of survival and resilience?

Despite the frequently lamented barriers to success in higher education for Indigenous Australians, there is some cause for celebration and quiet optimism. Arguably in some universities Indigenous Australians are no longer on the margins, but central to the institutional mission; recognised for their intellectual and professional contributions. It is not however a time for reducing our efforts.

Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy acknowledges that Indigenous success in universities is both an important national project and a project of national importance. No university is doing exceptionally well in all areas of Indigenous Education, although some clear frontrunners are emerging.

Every university in Australia should aspire to have a senior Indigenous position, who is trusted and supported to drive whole of university approaches to Indigenous success. Parity in Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate completions will fuel higher education sector growth in workforce and research as well as contributing to Indigenous communities. Vast numbers of graduates entering employment with the capacity to work effectively with and for Indigenous Australians is an ambitious aspiration with genuine transformative potential.

Predicting what the sector might look like in the future is a gratifying task, as there is so much opportunity to transform it. We need to alter the architecture of our institutions so that they deliberately consider and respond to incorporating Indigenous people in the strategic design.

We have the opportunity to transform how we talk and think about our universities, refraining from labelling them as Western Institutions, and instead shifting the dialogue so we start referring to them as global institutions.

Martin Luther King is famous for saying that he had a dream and on the 28<sup>th</sup> August in 1963 delivered a speech that would go down in history. I too have a dream.

I dream that in the near future we will see our universities as central components to Indigenous communities.

I dream that our Indigenous students will know that they have a place and every chance of success.

I dream that non-Indigenous students will learn more about Indigenous culture and people.

I dream that all non-Indigenous staff will be our allies, and that new relationships are formed to share the load.

I dream that we will have Indigenous people fulfilling senior roles throughout all portfolios in the university.

I dream that we will see Indigenous Vice-Chancellors and more Indigenous Chancellors.

## The 2019 Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture Notes

I dream that the original pioneers of Indigenous Education will be proud of what the sector becomes. Afterall, my dreams are only possible because of the legacy they have provided.

Thank you for listening.