

# Supporting Indigenous students to become top architects



There were just 28 Indigenous registered architects at the last Census – an increase of one since the national head count five years earlier.

With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples representing 3 per cent of the population, the number should be closer to 500. But Indigenous architects make up just 0.2 per cent of the roughly 12,000 architects in Australia today.

This gap is the target of a new scholarship fund to support Indigenous architecture students like Marni Reti, now in her fourth year of architecture at UTS and the only Indigenous student in her class. Marni, who grew up on 'The Block' in Sydney's Redfern, hopes to use her skills in her local community – an urban environment where she wants to bring an Indigenous perspective and give local communities a voice.

Indigenous architects have a wealth of knowledge about country and land, and how to create a space that is specific to Australia, she says.

The Droga Indigenous Architecture Scholarship has been made possible with a \$1 million donation from cultural philanthropists the Droga Family Foundation. With additional support from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the aim is to eventually support up to 10 Indigenous students a year in their studies with UTS's School of Architecture.

Lyndell Droga explains, "We decided to team up with UTS, working in collaboration with their Jumbunna [Indigenous Education and Research] program to develop a comprehensive scholarship that supports students not only with tuition and accommodation expenses but with meaningful career development opportunities such as mentoring and internships."

"Through David's business, Droga5, they have worked on numerous social interest campaigns, such as the Tap Project, UN World Humanitarian Day and the New York City Board of Education's Million

project." [Droga5 is a New York-based, independent advertising network.]

"We're all thrilled to be involved in working towards meaningful change for Indigenous participation in Australian architecture," Daniel Droga says.

The Drogas' donation is the largest single donation to the education of Indigenous architects in Australia.

The goal is to support up to six undergraduate and up to four postgraduate architecture scholarships each year. The awardees will also be mentored by the industry, with the Government Architect NSW and the NSW Architects Registration Board supporting the initiative as the first industry partners.

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Professor Michael McDaniel, UTS's Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement, and Director of the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, says Indigenous architects have the potential to make a valuable contribution "not only to their communities but to society as a whole, by bringing architectural skills and knowledge together with an understanding of culture, community and environment".

UTS will support the Droga scholarships through Jumbunna, which includes the Galuwa Experience program introducing Indigenous high school students to a broad range of higher education opportunities, such as architecture.

UTS Professor of Architecture Anthony Burke says the perspective and knowledge of Indigenous architects is needed not just in Indigenous or remote communities but in urban spaces too.

"There's an enormous, untapped wealth of Indigenous knowledge that has never made it across the threshold into architectural practice or environmental design," he says. "An Indigenous perspective on architecture is a real source of inspiration and a resource for us as a discipline."

He hopes that by starting to build Indigenous representation in Australian architecture, yet more Indigenous people will be inspired to join the profession.

The Droga program aims to award the first two scholarships to commence in 2019 and we'd be delighted if you let your friends and family know about this new scholarship opportunity.

For more information about the Droga scholarship visit: [www.uts.edu.au/scholarship/droga-indigenous-architecture-scholarship-program](http://www.uts.edu.au/scholarship/droga-indigenous-architecture-scholarship-program)



Above: Daniel and Lyndell Droga with UTS Vice-Chancellor Professor Attila Brungs.



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