



Ancient history meets culture

WIRADJURI woman Zoe Sims came to Macquarie University looking for a fresh start.

Zoe was born and raised on Darug land in Penrith and Zoe saw university as an opportunity to keep studying what she loved – ancient history.

Three years later, and now with graduation in sight, Zoe realises that university gave her so much more than the fresh start she imagined.

Zoe is an active and beloved member of the Walanga Muru community (Macquarie's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and strategy office).

She gives back to her community by working as an Aboriginal tutor with students at Jamison High School and interning at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre. Academically, on the sports field and in everyday life, Zoe is a superstar.

Reflecting on her first year of uni, Zoe said her first year was a "little rough".

"Although I was getting good grades and enjoying my degree, I felt disconnected from my peers and wasn't sure how to break through," Zoe said.

But that all changed for Zoe when she applied for Walanga Muru's Indigenous Nationals team which travelled to compete in Geelong in 2017. Indigenous



Zoe Sims

Nationals is a week-long sporting competition held each year to bring together Indigenous students and staff from universities across Australia to battle it out in four sports.

Zoe was lucky enough to participate each year during her degree, and feels privileged that her final year representing Walanga Muru was with Macquarie University, which was hosting the national event.

She was an integral part of the Macquarie team which won the first place medal in her favourite sport, netball.

It was a special moment she will remember for years to come. Not only did Indigenous



Macquarie University ancient history student Zoe Simms (pictured top left) played in Walanga Muru's Indigenous Nationals team.

Nationals revive Zoe's love for sport, it also gave her the opportunity to establish connections with Indigenous students from across the country. She returned from Nationals with lifelong friends and a better understanding of where she belonged at Macquarie.

From here, Zoe was able to immerse herself in the Walanga Muru community and had the confidence to take more opportunities.

In her third year of study, Zoe completed a Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) unit where she interned at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre.

Zoe said the internship was one

of the best and most valuable experiences during her time at university.

"On a whim, I emailed the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre hoping they might have room to accommodate an enthusiastic yet inexperienced history student," she said.

In this role, Zoe assisted with installing exhibitions, leading NAIDOC activities, worked on proposals and learned the behind-the-scenes duties needed to run a thriving cultural centre. A compulsory component of a Macquarie University degree, Zoe's PACE internship was an invaluable learning experience that revealed a possible future in

Indigenous curating and cultural heritage.

Academically, Zoe has thrived, receiving two Faculty of Arts Highest Achiever awards for an Indigenous Studies and Ancient History subject.

While her passion for ancient history has only grown, what Zoe has come to value most about her university experience is her increasing connection to culture.

From a young age Zoe knew she was Aboriginal, but like a lot of people, due to things outside her control her connection to family and culture ended with that fact.

Although this lack of knowledge generated struggles with identity, Zoe's passion for ancient history and the community she found at university pushed her to overcome these barriers and continue her learning journey both academically and culturally.

When asked what Zoe will miss most about university, she said she's sad her time at Walanga Muru will be coming to an end.

"I will miss the Monday lunches, the weaving, the social sport, uni games, the Deadly Ball and the list goes on," she said.

"But what I will miss the most is the Walanga community, the friendly faces, the relaxed spaces and the supportive staff, which I know will only continue to grow and help students succeed – just like they have done for me."



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