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# Research aims to improve wellbeing of communities

The Doctor of Indigenous Philosophies program offered by the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University encourages candidates to pursue in-depth studies on issues relevant to Indigenous communal futures. During this three-year postgraduate degree, students use Indigenous methodologies to answer Indigenous questions.

For Doctor of Indigenous Philosophies candidates Rosemary Norman-Hill and Nick Freeburn, exploring historical and contemporary topics offers the opportunity to help improve the wellbeing of present day Indigenous people in their communities.

Rosemary Norman-Hill's research investigates the Parramatta Native, the first residential boarding school founded in 1814 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie to 'educate, civilise and Christianise' Aboriginal children.

"It is clear from the General Orders that the intention was for these children to lose their language, their culture, their heritage and their Aboriginal way of life," said Rosemary, who has extensive experience in Indigenous child and family welfare, and a Bachelor of Social Science from Southern Cross University.

"These children, who included my great-great-great grandmother Kitty, were the beginning of the Stolen Generation.

"As an Aboriginal researcher, I'm analysing and interpreting primary documents and pictures through the lens of an Indigenous paradigm to discover the extent to which they can reveal the impact on the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the children who were placed there."

The Darug community endorsed the study for Rosemary (a Darug woman herself) to work with the Parramatta City Council. She organised the 200 year anniversary commemoration of the Institution's opening by Governor Macquarie on 18 January, 1815.

Rosemary is the founder and Chief Executive of Kirrawe Indigenous Corporation, a not-for-profit organisation on the Gold Coast. Its program Kirrawe Kidz helps young people develop identity and pride as First Nations' youth.

"The research is exciting because I'm learning new knowledge that informs the work I do with the Indigenous young people at Kirrawe."

Nick Freeburn is passionate about Casino, the beef town near Lismore in northern NSW, where almost 10 per cent of the population is Indigenous.

For his doctoral thesis, Nick is creating a mini-documentary 'On Common Ground - Casino NSW' as a platform to investigate the contemporary social issues affecting



Aboriginal people living in a small country town; the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Casino; and the way the media portrays Aboriginal people.

"I want to raise awareness in Casino that regardless of your skin colour, it's important we all get along," said Nick who delivered a public lecture, 'Indigenous Story Telling in Australia', at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik last year.

"For example, when people talk about racism, some of the time it's usually taken out of context - it can be as simple as a misunderstanding"

Nick's research draws its inspiration from his own personal observations of the media including the ABC TV series 'The Gods of Wheat Street', created by his nephew Jon Bell and filmed around Casino.

A series of yarning circles Nick organised uncovered the town's main issues: education, unemployment, lack of services, training, health, welfare, isolation and a lack of role models. For the documentary, he interviewed some of the town's role models - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - identified in the yarning circles.

"They share their opinions and perspectives, without prejudice, on history, colonisation, cultural identity, media and social issues," he said.

Nick sits on the board of directors of Social Futures based in Lismore and has served on the Ethics Council for the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. He has a Diploma of Indigenous Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Research Methods, both from Southern Cross University.

# Indigenous values are key in natural resource management



Emma Stone has a passion and talent for connecting people and organisations as Landcare Coordinator for the Border Ranges-Richmond Valley Landcare Network.

"I love engagement at the community level, talking to people about what's important to them, connecting people on a locality or issues basis to build collaborations," said Emma who has a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies (now Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge) from the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University.

"In the natural resource management sector it's important to acknowledge

Indigenous values, connections to place and both historical and contemporary Indigenous land management practices," Emma said.

"My study major in Sustainability accommodated my interests in land management and Indigenous issues both in Australia and the Pacific Islands."

Emma is also a board member on the Dorrobee Grass Reserve Trust.

The Dorrobee Grasslands at Dunoon, near Lismore in the NSW Northern Rivers, is culturally significant to Aboriginal people as a rare example of the grasslands that were once dotted throughout the forest-

dominated landscape.

"In bringing back traditional burn management, the native grasses have once again flourished," Emma said. "We have built linkages to the Firesticks project and the Grassy Pathways project."

Throughout her studies Emma pursued a number of voluntary roles, like Rous Water's Reconnecting to Country project, in partnership with Widjambul Elders, designed to foster people's connection to the landscape.

"I worked closely with Aunty June Gordon to develop the publication 'Coopers Creek - A Place of Many Stories'.

## Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples

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