



# Empowering Our Future: The UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program

FOR many, pursuing higher education in law may feel like a distant dream. However, with the right support, encouragement, and opportunities, that dream can become a reality.

UNSW Law & Justice stands at the forefront of Indigenous legal education, creating pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to thrive. The Faculty's dedication is showcased through its innovative programs and commitment to elevating First Nations voices within the legal system.

The UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program is a three-week residential course designed to assess and develop the academic potential of prospective Indigenous students applying for an undergraduate law degree at UNSW. Entry through Pre-Programs doesn't depend on ATAR; instead, readiness for study is evaluated through assessments, exams and other measures.

"The UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program is more than just a stepping stone to a legal career, it's a pathway that celebrates and strengthens our students' cultural identity while empowering them to become leaders in their communities," says Charmaine Mumbulla, the Director of Indigenous Legal Education at UNSW Law & Justice.

This intensive three-week summer program was developed specifically for First Nations students and provides the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to transition smoothly into university life and study.

Matt Jarrett, a proud Dunghutti man passionate about social justice, proves that opportunity can

transform lives and communities. From the Indigenous Pre-Law Program in 2019 to working at Gilbert + Tobin as a senior law student, he has also mentored First Nations students in the program.

"I have an enormity of gratitude for both the University Preparation Program (UPP) and Pre-Law programs. Knowing how significant the Pre-Law program was to my current trajectory made the experience of contributing to other First Nations students' journeys in such a way extremely rewarding," he says.

One of the program's greatest strengths is its focus on understanding the law through the lens of Indigenous culture and experience. This approach helps students recognise how the law intersects with the lived experiences of First Nations peoples. It also empowers students to view themselves as future leaders who can contribute to the broader conversation about social justice and the rights of their communities.

The UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program succeeds due to its strong support system. Students receive guidance, resources, and mentorship from the start, including cultural support from the Nura Gili Centre, fostering a supportive community of students, staff, and alumni.

It's not just about hitting the books. The program recognises that each journey is unique and students are encouraged to bring their full selves to their studies, knowing that their unique perspectives are not just welcomed, but celebrated.

For students like Jacob Jakubczak-Phillips and Shardenay Hoskin, who completed the Pre-Law

Program in 2024, it has been transformative, providing a welcoming and supportive environment that feels like family.

"It made me feel like I belonged here and enabled me to realise my strengths," says Shardenay Hoskin. "The staff were extremely welcoming, and Charmaine made me feel extremely comfortable and supported."

Shardenay continues, reflecting on what she learned: "the highlight was attending all the excursions that were planned. I found them very intriguing, useful and informative. My personal favourite was the NSW Bar Association as I enjoyed attending the course and speaking with barristers."

Jacob shares, "I couldn't speak more highly of how welcoming and supportive this program and the people involved were. I feel really fortunate to have had this opportunity."

He also encourages future students: "Pour yourself into this program for the short 3 weeks you're here. It's such a special opportunity where you get to learn so much, see so much, and meet incredible people. Really make the most of it."

The ripple effect of the UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program goes far beyond the students who complete it. Graduates of the program don't just go on to succeed—they go on to advocate for real change within their communities, bringing fresh ideas and new perspectives into the legal system.

"I want to see First Nations peoples and communities thrive as much as possible" says Matt Jarrett. "If I can positively influence the way



Shardenay Hoskin in an Advocacy Skills workshop facilitated by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT during the Indigenous Pre-Law Program.

First Nations peoples and the broader Australian community relate to each other on a large scale through policy work, fantastic. If I get to advocate for people who need a voice in the courts, fantastic. If I help just one person get off an unjust criminal charge or punitive fine that would impose undue hardship, fantastic. The options are ample, and all are worthwhile."

As the UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program continues to grow, it remains focused on one goal: ensuring that more First Nations students have the opportunity to pursue a career in law and use that education to serve their communities. Each year, the program welcomes new students, each with their unique stories and

aspirations. Together, they form a strong network of change-makers reshaping what it means to be an Indigenous lawyer in Australia.

If you're a student thinking about studying law, the UNSW Indigenous Pre-Law Program is an excellent place to start. And if you're a teacher or mentor guiding students on their journey, this program provides a real opportunity to open doors to a brighter future.

**To find out more about the program, how to apply, and the support available, reach out to the Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs or contact Charmaine Mumbulla, Director of Indigenous Legal Education at [c.mumbulla@unsw.edu.au](mailto:c.mumbulla@unsw.edu.au).**

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