



Tachae Douglas-Miller, a proud Ngunnawal woman, is studying a Bachelor of Dental Science (Honours) at The University of Queensland. Tachae is pictured here enjoying a study break on campus.

Turning her curiosity into a healthcare career

As a teenager, Tachae Douglas-Miller felt like an imposter applying for a role as a dental assistant.

When she put The University of Queensland as her first QTAC preference, she didn't dare to dream that she might actually get accepted into a uni she saw as 'too prestigious' for her.

Discovering her passion

Tachae has found teeth fascinating for as long as she can remember.

"I'm naturally quite curious – I was always a bit of a weird kid interested in weird things," she says.

It wasn't until an appointment with a friendly First Nations dentist that Tachae realised this curiosity of hers could become her career. The chance encounter pushed her to apply to work part time as a dental assistant, as well as inspiring her to start creating quirky necklaces out of teeth.

The second major milestone in Tachae's journey to dentistry was applying to UQ, a brave move for someone who wasn't expected to continue onto university in the first place.

"I was told that I wasn't smart enough or black enough to get into university," she says.

"I always felt like I was underestimated, like people just thought I was the girl who makes silly jewellery. But this started a fire in me – I used that hate and suppression to fuel my drive to succeed."

And Tachae's successes are already starting to add up, beginning with

the letter of acceptance to study her undergraduate degree at UQ.

When the email came, it was unexpected and highly emotional.

"I didn't really want to know when the offers were coming out, so I blocked it out of my mind," says Tachae.

"Then, one day, it just popped up on my laptop. I thought it was a glitch in the computer system, because I truly never thought I'd get into such a prestigious uni."

Tachae's experience at UQ

Tachae started her program at 23 years old. As an Indigenous woman and technically a mature-age student, she didn't immediately feel at home at UQ.

"Campus life is so different to outside life... it was very daunting at the start," she says.

It didn't take long for that initial uncertainty to melt away, though. As Tachae met more students, she connected with people from all different walks of life and – crucially – some peers with similar backgrounds to her own.

"Being on campus is a really nice experience now," she says.

"I've made lifelong friendships both within and beyond the uni, and the St Lucia campus has become a culturally safe space that really feels like being with family."

Connecting with professors and lecturers has been equally valuable for Tachae, and one teacher stands out for her: Dr Nicole Stormon, the Program Convenor for UQ's Doctor of Dental Medicine.

"I remember one day in my second year, Nicole pulled me aside in the lecture theatre and asked me about who I am, where I'm from, who my mob is," says Tachae.

"I felt really heard in that moment... we went on to do a student/staff partnership and even co-authored a textbook together."

Tachae has since gone on to achieve an impressive list of accomplishments:

- receiving scholarships from the UQ School of Dentistry
- being the keynote speaker at the School's 90th Anniversary Gala Dinner
- speaking at UQ's National Reconciliation Week event
- pursuing her honours research project on the Deadly Dental Home
- becoming the first Indigenous Officer for UQ Herston as part of the Student Experience Committee and helping to establish safe spaces for Indigenous students across multiple UQ campuses.

"I never thought a young girl like me from Moggill would make it [to university]. So, for me, it wasn't just an offer to study – it made me feel like I was capable of anything."

Even with these accolades to her name, though, Tachae hasn't become immune to the imposter syndrome she first faced when applying for that dental assistant job.

"I still sometimes feel like I haven't given enough back to culture,

and I have doubts like 'Am I doing the wrong things?'," she says.

"But even when I feel alone at some points, the UQ community always reassures me and makes me feel whole again."



Indigenous support at UQ

Tachae believes she wouldn't be at UQ without the help of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit. When she felt that studying here was nothing more than a pipedream, members of the unit reached out to provide admission support and advice, and motivated her to back herself.



Learn about UQ's admission scheme for Indigenous students at study.uq.edu.au/indigenous-scheme