



N'arwee't Dr Carolyn Briggs AM shaping the future of Indigenous business leadership



IF YOU visit Monash University's Caulfield campus on Boon Wurrung Country, you might see N'arwee't Dr Carolyn Briggs AM

walking arm in arm with a student. N'arwee't is the Master of Indigenous Business Leadership (MoIBL) Elder in Residence at Monash Business School, working closely with the cohort.

"It's all about being an active listener," said N'arwee't. "I listen to their stories one-on-one. I'll tell them how I worked in Communities, and ask about their interests. They've told me their personal stories and journeys."

N'arwee't – meaning knowledge holder – is a senior Boon Wurrung Elder and founder of the Boon Wurrung Foundation.

She's an academic, a successful business woman, and has been integral in protecting Boon Wurrung culture, heritage and language for over 50 years. She's a woman of many titles, with her advocacy having awarded her a Member of the Order of Australia.

"She was the perfect fit to be the Elder in Residence, because she has such a rich history and strong story when it comes to both business and leadership," said Katrina Johnson, MoIBL Co-Director. "She comes alongside our Indigenous business leaders where they're at. She has a beautiful way of encouraging and also challenging them to think bigger."

Monash's MoIBL, a joint offering from the William Cooper Institute and Monash Business School, was the first degree of its kind in Australia. The program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to take up their rightful place in executive-level positions and on boards to lead governance. With Indigenous-led design, the program teaches students to merge cultural knowledge with Western concepts and choose how they want to lead.

"Having her presence at the campus is very calming for the group," said Daniel Howell, current MoIBL student. "It reminds us that it's more than a master's and a piece of paper – it's a way to give back to our Community."

Students come to the MoIBL from across the country. "Some of them have never been in a university environment before. Or they have been rejected by education or had traumatic experiences in education all their life," Johnson explained.

"N'arwee't sees that in people. She's extremely observant. She puts effort into building a genuine relationship with students, asking them about who they are, their people, and where they're from," said Johnson. "It helps them realise they have a place, that they belong, that this is their time to shine and grow. You see students literally square up their shoulders and walk a little taller."

"Her presence affirms why we're there, and that Indigenous people do have a place at the table," Howell agreed.

Johnson and Howell share the same favourite memory with N'arwee't. She took the cohort on the Dirty Mile walking tour through Fitzroy's Aboriginal history. It ended at a large Moreton Bay fig tree at the top of Gertrude Street, where the group huddled together.

N'arwee't told stories of the activists and leaders who used to meet at that very tree to hold Community meetings, which she attended as a child.

"Students were leaning in and soaking up every single word," said Johnson.

"It was just special to walk with an Elder through that street and hear the history of how it used to be back in the day, and how much it's changed," said Howell.

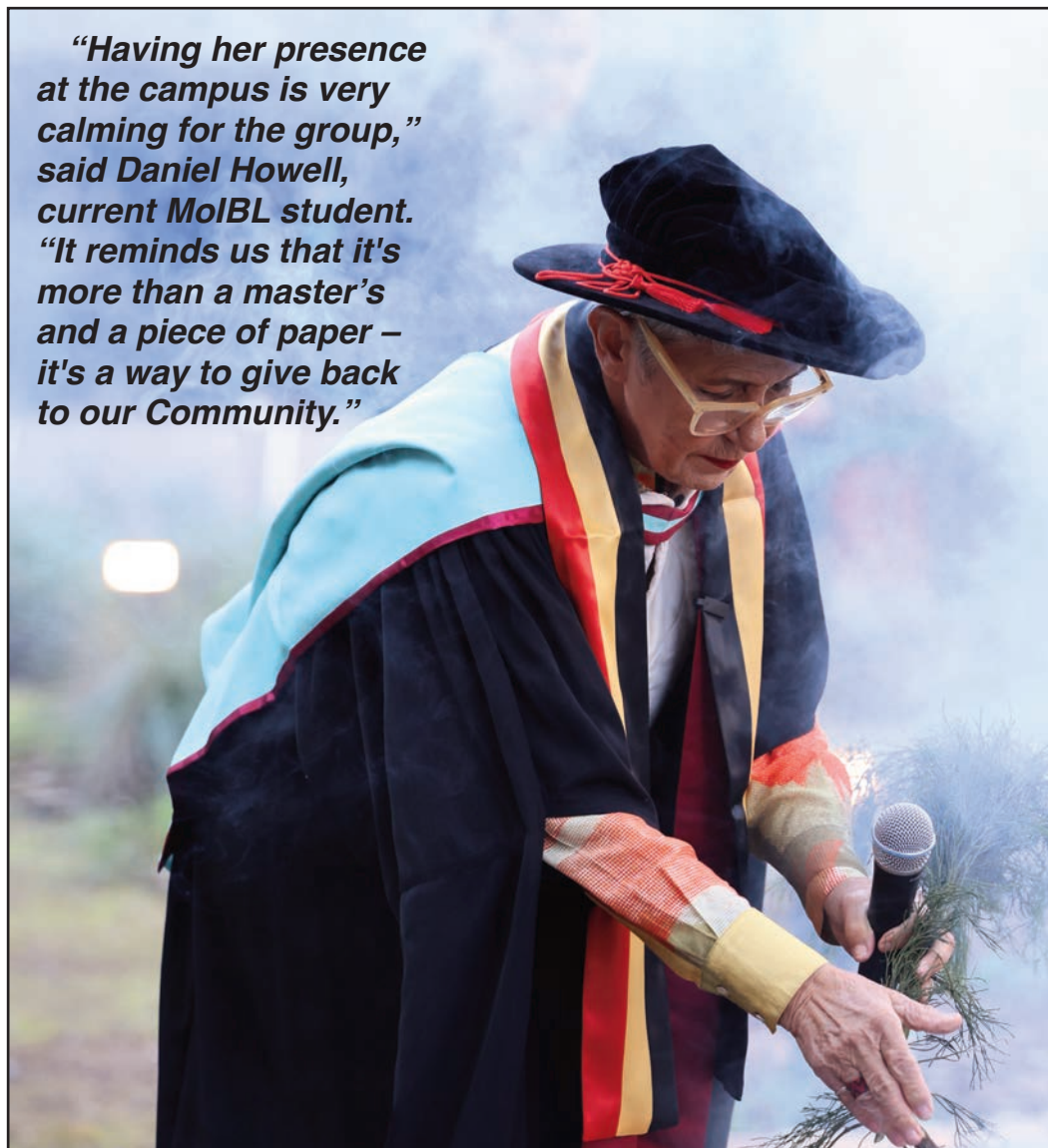
For Monash students and staff alike, N'arwee't is a business mentor and cultural anchor. "She's generous with her wisdom and I love the way she teaches from her own experiences," said Johnson. "When I'm her age, I hope I still have enough fire in my belly to do what she's doing."

"She's still doing research, she's still traveling, and anytime we ask her to be there, she will show up for the students no matter what," said Johnson. "She lights up the room every time she comes."

For N'arwee't, who began her research journey at Monash back in the 70s, it's a full circle moment mentoring the MoIBL students. She believes they're continuing a legacy of staunch Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. "I'm getting to see the fruits of the early activists," said N'arwee't.

"If you've got a sense of what your purpose is in your community, there are resources out there. We just need to know how to tell the story," said N'arwee't. "I hope to see the students achieve their goal, however they measure success."

Find out more about the Master of Indigenous Business Leadership at Monash Business School.



N'arwee't Dr Carolyn Briggs AM attending a welcome ceremony for the 2023 graduating student group.



2023 student group graduation.



N'arwee't Dr Carolyn Briggs AM walking in Fitzroy.



Learning about legacy leadership under the historic Moreton Bay Fig Tree in Fitzroy with 2024 student group.



We acknowledge and pay respect to the Elders and Traditional Owners of the land on which our Australian campuses stand.