

# From Student to Superstar



**MEET** Vanessa Sewell, a proud Worimi woman from the Mid-North Coast of NSW, whose path in science is closely tied to her culture and community.

After completing a Bachelor of Animal Science (Honours) in 2019, Vanessa began a PhD in molecular biology and parasitology, focusing on livestock parasites – an important issue for regional farming communities. Alongside her research, she became actively involved with the Oorala Aboriginal Centre as a Student Ambassador, supporting her peers and contributing to Oorala's student programs and events. This role sparked her ongoing commitment to mentoring.

During her doctoral studies, Vanessa also worked on broader initiatives across the university. She helped develop a staff website offering guidance on respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including practical resources on terminology and cultural safety. In recognition of her efforts, she received the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Science Award from the Australian Academy of Science in 2022. She later convened the Academy's Public Speaker Series in 2023 and was featured in Cosmos magazine's 2024 list of 40+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEM Leaders.

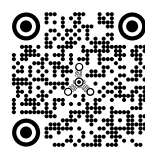
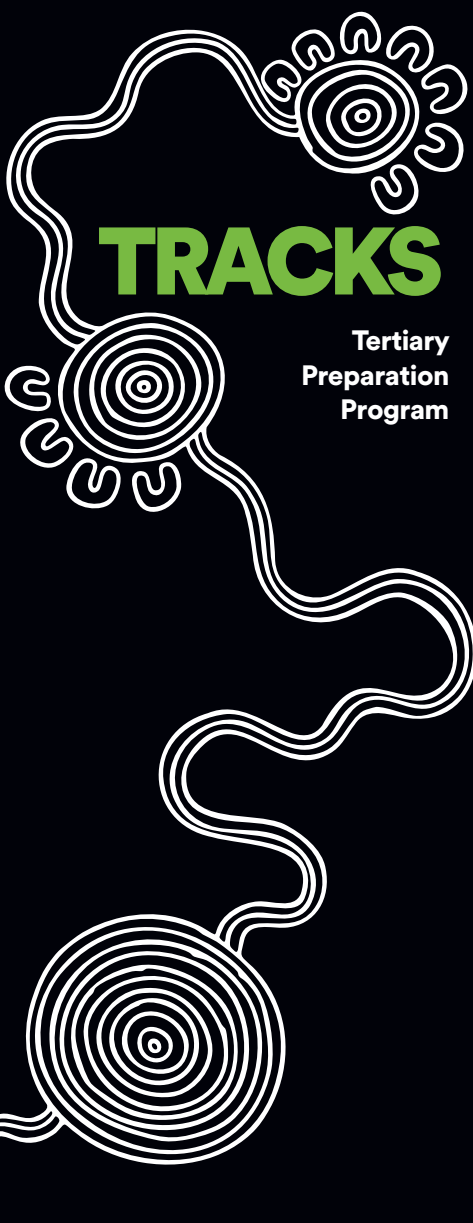


Her leadership extended into mentoring roles as a Max Schroder Indigenous Mentor at UNE and as a panellist for the Academy of Science's NAIDOC Week. In 2024, as her PhD was nearing completion, she received the Oorala Award for Higher Degree Research Academic Excellence and took on a part-time Associate Lecturer role in Indigenous Knowledges within the School of Environmental and Rural Science.

In 2025, Vanessa moved into a full-time Lecturer position with the Oorala Aboriginal Centre, teaching in the TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program and undergraduate units. That same year she was named one of Australia's 2025–2026 Superstars of STEM, a national program celebrating women and non-binary scientists.

Reflecting on this recognition, Vanessa highlighted her focus: "My focus is on helping Indigenous students succeed in STEM, both by promoting STEM to high school students and supporting current university students in their studies. I am passionate about inspiring young Indigenous students to pursue STEM."

Vanessa's journey reflects a balance of academic achievement, cultural pride, and a strong commitment to supporting future Indigenous students in science.



## TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program

### Are you curious about university?

Do you have ambition to become a scientist, nurse, archaeologist, teacher or psychologist? Or perhaps you want to learn more about business, law, agriculture or social work.

Join UNE's TRACKS program where you will transform your aspirations into reality. Connect with a strong community that recognises and values your unique strengths. You'll learn all about university and the study know-how needed to transition into your chosen university course.

Unlock your future at UNE and apply today!

### TRACKS Facts

<b>Duration</b>	1 year full-time or up to 4 years part-time
<b>Start</b>	Trimester 1, Trimester 2, Trimester 3
<b>Mode</b>	Online from home or on campus in Armidale
<b>No. of Units (Subjects)</b>	Total of 6 units (36 credit points). Up to 2 undergraduate units for free*
<b>Campus</b>	Armidale Campus
<b>Entry Requirements</b>	Attendance at an orientation program in Armidale or online
<b>Fees</b>	Fee Exempt
<b>Tuition</b>	Access our free tutoring program

\*Conditions apply

Artwork by Tyler Stackman-Green x Oorala

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