

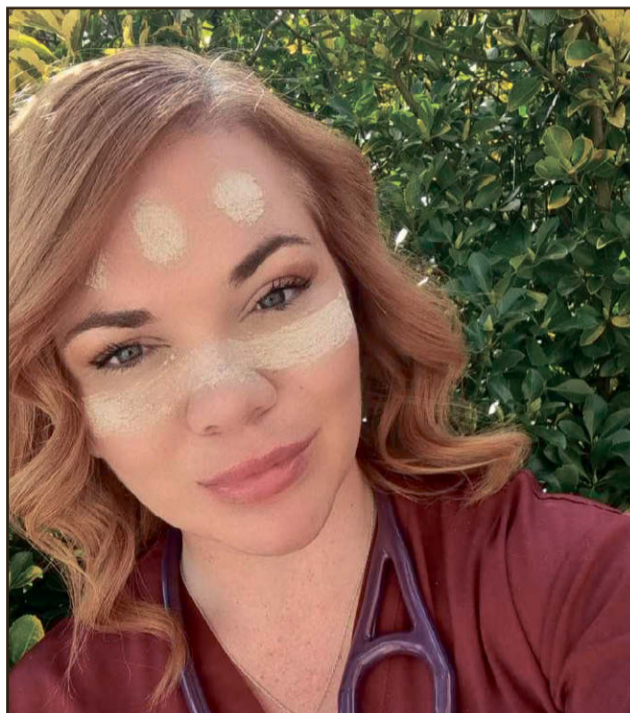
higher education 2025

YOUR GUIDE TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HIGHER EDUCATION

A First Nations student's journey to Charles Sturt University



Billie O'Bryan



Nikki Trudgett



Quinton Connelly

First Nation student success has a proud and strong track record at Charles Sturt University. Alongside academic study, there is a strong commitment to community engagement, direct entry programs and comprehensive student support. One of the biggest factors in student success is the motivation, dreams, hard work and determination invested by each student in their journey.

Students can register for First Nations Student Connect, as a starting point for accessing services to meet their needs and to be part of a First Nations community within the University. Every student is different and can choose how they opt in to First Nations Student Connect. On seven campuses, there is a First Nations Student Centre which provides a culturally safe space for students studying on that campus or online students who are in the area. Students can catch up with a First Nations Student Adviser, as well as gain access to computers, printers, internet, kitchen areas with coffee, tea and snacks.

Billie O'Bryan I had a dream even as a young child to go to university.

My mum told me that as a toddler I would walk around the house repeating an ad on TV "university education!".

I knew what I wanted.

University was a big step for me.

Neither of my parents had finished high school let alone gone to university.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into or how I was going to go about it, but I knew I wanted to go to uni.

I come from the small town of Condobolin in Central West New South Wales; population 3,000 with a high Aboriginal population.

Coming from a rural area I knew that I wouldn't feel seen, heard or supported at a metro university; a regional university was for me.

I applied for a Bachelor of Environmental Science & Management at the Port Macquarie campus through the Charles Sturt Advantage program and received my offer before I sat my HSC.

When I applied, I honestly had no idea if this was what I wanted to do.

I applied for this course because I love being outside; I feel at home in nature, especially on Country. I feel it's my responsibility to care for Country and I could do that through this degree.

As for why I chose to study at our Port Macquarie campus.... um the beach obviously.

My course was offered at the Albury-Wodonga campus or Port Macquarie. For me it didn't matter how far from home I was, nowhere was going to be like home.

So decided to try out the beach life.

Port Macquarie was a big change for me. I was moving 9 hours away from home to a completely different environment, knowing next to no one.

I was a little anxious.

Being Aboriginal and from a community with a high Indigenous population, I was nervous to move somewhere where that is not necessarily the case, where I might be different.

I was also moving out of home for the first time. My family helped as much as they could by gifting me second-hand pots and pans and I asked for things like towels and bedsheets for Christmas.

I am very close with my family I knew I was going to miss them, but they have supported me every step of the way.

I worked hard to save up for uni and applied for many scholarships because I didn't want to be stopped from achieving my dreams due to a financial barrier.

I was lucky enough to be awarded the Birrang Enterprise Development Company Aboriginal Scholarship. To say I'm grateful, is an understatement.

I honestly don't think I would've been able to go to university and achieve what I have so far, if it wasn't for Birrang.

Settling into uni life was a challenge. I had to really put myself out there to make new friends and I'm grateful to call these people my family now.

Balancing uni with the rest of my life is hard but I've always felt supported.

From day one I've felt like the First Nations centre on campus is a safe space where I am comfortable and supported by everyone around me. I remember saying to

someone "it's just a place where I can be black". Don't let anything stop you from achieving your dreams. Especially if it's a university education.

Nikki Trudgett started her journey with Charles Sturt when she was 19, studying an education degree. She returned to study in 2024 in the Doctor of Medicine "We as First Nations people not only come from a place of intergenerational trauma, we also come from a place of strength and determination and a lifetime of knowledge of our people and our ancestors that could never be taught in a classroom.

To be valued for our knowledge and connection to country is something rarely seen in education let alone the professional world. I have valued the support that is available in the First Nations Student Centre with tutoring, referral to services across the uni, but also the connection we have with our peers. At the Centre in Orange, you can always find a collection of students studying together, sharing notes or just having a well needed laugh. The bond that I have shared with my peers is something that I have truly valued".

The First Nations Student Connect team are here to walk with you on your journey. There's more than one way to get started, check out csu.edu.au/firstnations for more information.

Quinton Connelly, a proud Wiradjuri man, is currently undertaking his second year in the Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) degree. "My degree is delivered online, with intensive schools that take place twice a year for a week at a time. It gives me a chance to connect with my classmates and lecturers in person. Students have access to financial assistance with intensives schools and placements. Eligible students can get funds to help with the cost of travel, and accommodation. I am being supported through the away from base service in First Nations Student Connect this year for my upcoming placement in Goulburn."