

Cultivating Blak excellence through business leadership practice



When Maria Lovison was growing up, her community of Beagle Bay in the West Kimberley region was connected to Broome by an unpaved bush road. The proud Nyul Nyul woman recounts her journey to boarding school, which started with a 2.5-hour drive along the bush road to Broome, where she would then catch a plane to Perth where her school was. She remembers her first day there and when she saw a TV for the first time. She was glued to it. One of the programs she saw was a documentary on Canada, and from that day on, she's always dreamed of going to Canada.

In a few months, Lovison will achieve her long-term dream of travelling to Canada, where she will visit on a study tour as part of her final unit of Monash Business School's Master of Indigenous Business Leadership. It's a full-circle moment.

This study tour will take her and fellow students from the course to meet First Nations communities in Canada where they will learn about creating businesses on Country, and how to address similar challenges faced by First Nations communities in Australia.

Learning from and embracing First Nations knowledge and practices is a key element of Monash Business School's Master of Indigenous Business Leadership. The course has a hybrid learning approach, that weaves traditional learning throughout the course with business strategy, theory and industry connections. In their final unit, students can choose to join an international study program or be part of a research project.

"We're ensuring that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are recognised, valued, and enacted. Our students inform us that's why they excel in their studies and that their impact in business leadership within this country and beyond our shores is meaningful and powerful", said Katrina Johnson, Gooreng Gooreng woman and the Co-Director and Senior Lecturer in the Master of Indigenous Business Leadership.

The course encourages students to integrate their heritage, life experiences and ancestral wisdom with business leadership practices to develop innovative business solutions that can be brought back to their communities.

For Lovison, being able to integrate her professional background in areas including Native Title, domestic violence and community development with her cultural customs and new business learnings is key.

"It's a program you can take back to your community and share with community and develop an economic base for your community. That's what it's all about," said Lovison.

Another student excelling in the program is Tanya Robinson, a Butchulla, Western Yalanji and Wagedagamand woman who is part of the 2024 student group of the program. With an extensive career background in healthcare, social work and creative healing, Robinson is already a leader in her community. She works as a Healthcare Executive with Anglicare



The ongoing commitment to cultural sustainability lies at the heart of the program ... prioritising First Peoples' first.



Maria Lovison

and has a goal to create a First Nations healing studio for women.

She came up with this idea in response to the mental health crisis that has an unprecedented effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Robinson says her studies have allowed her to sharpen her focus, and to build rational and evidence behind her creative goals.

Only two units into her studies, the learnings have already been both profound and tangible, allowing her to break through the glass ceiling of what she believed she could achieve in her sector.

"I felt like my mind, heart and spirit have completely cracked open and I have stepped into another world that I didn't even know was there," said Robinson.

Robinson credits the strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundations of the course as the reason she and her peers could have so many breakthrough moments, even so early in their journey with the course. She describes the way students are received at Monash University as an affirming experience rooted in Blak excellence.

"Yes we were students who were entering



Katrina Johnson

the university, but we were also seen, welcomed and celebrated as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders first. That was the foundation which we built the course off, and our student journey," said Robinson.

This level of cultural care and safety is the key to success. The way it's done is entirely intentional.

Course Co-Director Johnson reiterates that students can only achieve their potential if they feel culturally safe, so ceremony and culture are engrained from the get-go.

"We invite [students] to bring their full selves to the space each time we gather. All their knowledge and experiences, their strengths and weaknesses, their families and communities, their dreams and aspirations, and even the things that limit and inhibit their success. We remind them that sharing these things is important to the success of their learning and that of others," said Johnson.

Johnson encourages any First Nations leaders considering taking the next step in their personal and professional development to reach out to the program coordinators.



Tanya Robinson

"If you're looking for a transformational education experience, grounded in unmatched Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture and coupled with Western business excellence, come talk to us," said Johnson.

"This course is designed to stretch [students] but they have our full support. We come alongside them, sometimes reminding them of who they are and just how intelligent they are when feeling defeated or unsure, other times we challenge them to push harder, dig deeper, and to pay attention to the tension to realise their potential. For many, this will be a crucible moment in their life. A moment that will transform their leadership and set them on a new path."

To learn more about the Master of Indigenous Business Leadership, please scan:

