

Celebrating our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates

Thirty-six outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students graduated from the University of Adelaide in the first semester of 2024. Their accomplishments were celebrated at a special event hosted by Wirltu Yarlu, marking a significant moment for the University's First Nations community. These graduates have demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and courage in overcoming challenges and obstacles to achieve their academic goals.

It was a proud day for Professor Steve Larkin, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement). "Today, we celebrated not just the academic achievements of our graduates but also their collective resilience, determination, and courage. They have overcome numerous obstacles and challenges to get here today, a testament to the strength and character of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities".

For the graduates, this event marked the culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance, with the University playing a crucial role in their journey. Many of them overcame significant challenges to reach this point in their lives. Steve Pepper, a proud Kurna man, graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce. His journey has been a testament to his determination. "Wirltu Yarlu made a big difference for me during my studies. It's a great space to go to focus and do some work. It was a massive help for

me. It's not as hard as it seems. With a little bit of time, effort, and help from tutors and Wirltu Yarlu, it can be done, even when working full-time". Steve is currently working at The Department of Human Services with the Aboriginal Languages Interpreting Service, helping keep Indigenous languages alive and helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who can't speak English to be able to understand their medical treatment and support them through their journeys.

The graduates were presented with a cultural sash to wear proudly over their graduation gown during the University of Adelaide official graduation ceremony, identifying their cultural heritage as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both. This was a powerful moment, as it recognised the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and its role in shaping the graduates' identities.

For Mackenzie Weltman, a proud Torres Strait Islander woman graduating with a Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary) Arts, it feels like a full-circle moment. She has lined up her first full-time teaching role at Kadina Memorial School, her old High school. "I'm now working alongside teachers who taught me and teaching the siblings of my old classmates. The conversations I have with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially those not sure what to do after high school, are fulfilling as I can

show them that it is possible to pursue higher education. And now they want to do something like what I did. They want to go to university and make something of themselves, which is so important for our community".

Mackenzie has been supported by Wirltu Yarlu since year 12 in High

School when she joined the Karnkanthi Program. "I was supported and looked after since year 12. They helped me with guidance, well-being, and information leading to my degree. Then, during University, Wirltu Yarlu helped me with tutoring, which was a great support; they

always had my back. The whole experience has shaped me into someone who's beyond what I would have ever expected."

Below: Wirltu Yarlu Graduation, The University of Adelaide, April 2024



'Lifting Up' your career opportunities



Avah Topp, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery students, The University of Adelaide

The prospect of pursuing higher education can be overwhelming. Fortunately, the Karnkanthi Education Program is here to offer a helping hand and make the journey less challenging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Translating to 'lifting up' in Kurna language, this innovative program, coordinated by Wirltu Yarlu at The University of Adelaide, provides a range of services that assist High school students from years 10 to year 12/13 in navigating the complexities of tertiary education and prepare them by building on their unique personal, academic, and cultural strengths.

Avah Topp, a current student in the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery program, believes the Program was fundamental to help her cement her chances of accessing university education. "I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for the Karnkanthi Education Program. Without their support, I wouldn't have been studying medicine. It provided me with an endless number of opportunities. I would have been lost without the program", says Avah.

Through mentorship, academic support, and cultural connection, the Karnkanthi Education Program is breaking down barriers and providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander High school students with the opportunity to pursue higher education, helping them to achieve their goals and seize their dreams.

The free initiative allows participants to join an ever-growing community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who aspire to develop their resilience and leadership skills to succeed in life. Wirltu Yarlu works closely with students to ensure sustainable academic growth and success, aiming to build their confidence in pursuing higher education pathways that will empower them for life.

Students in years 10 and 11 can apply to join the program any time of the year. Year 12 students must apply by June 30. Applicants can participate in free academic, cultural, social, and career development activities, access private tutoring for school subjects, receive financial support for educational costs, travel and accommodation, and receive student development scholarships. For more information, please email us at wirltu.yarlu@adelaide.edu.au