Discussion Paper.

Conceptualising a Model for Delivery of Foundation/Enabling Programs at Charles Sturt University (CSU).

(to address specific issues outlined in 2010 Review of Indigenous Pathways & Transitions Programs).

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I attribute the underlying philosophy guiding the development of this paper to a community of Indigenous students I knew over a decade ago. Having grown up on a mission, all had received the most basic education, designed to fit them for a life of everlasting servitude. But the world changed, the mission closed and they were left literally stranded on the beach – no work, no capacity to go elsewhere and find work, cast aside in the name of progress (and assertions that they must be given equal rights with their fellow citizens).

By the time, I met them they were mostly elderly women desperately seeking a university education, if only as a role model for the young ones in the community. The majority of young people were walking away from the school and any possibility of an educated future. For most people in that community, education had failed to deliver on its promise and they felt betrayed. These old women, however, were willing to forgive and forget the past if only they could show the way by getting a university education. They could have gone to the local TAFE down the road but they persisted in their struggle to get through the enabling program and gain entry to university. Why? I can still hear their voices telling me with no doubt whatsoever: “Because we need to learn how to think if we want to get jobs these days. That’s what they teach you at university – HOW to think!”

While that thought became a guiding force for me in my own work, I believe it is a critical that we all, as educators, reflect upon the notion that everything we learn, either as teachers or learners, is the product of thinking. Thinking enables us to learn, hence, is the greatest tool education can provide. In general, education has failed to deliver that tool to Indigenous Australians and they know it!

In my opinion, the vital link in providing Indigenous students with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve educational success is to enable them to acquire a deep appreciation of the importance of critical thinking and the capacity to use it as the key to empowering themselves,
Rationale:
In February 2010, Professor Ross Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) commissioned a Review of Indigenous Pathways and Transitions Programs. The sixth Term of Reference requested examination of “The need for Indigenous foundation or enabling certificate or diploma within CSU”. The Report on the findings of this Review were to be submitted on 6 September, 2010.

The Review found that there was widespread support for the concept of a foundation or enabling program to cater for the preparatory and disciplinary learning needs of many Indigenous students seeking to enrol in CSU undergraduate programs. Furthermore the continuing high attrition rates, approximately 35% for Indigenous students in 2008, would seem to support these views. Hence, the Review is recommending that CSU investigate options for possible models that might suit the dispersed nature of the CSU operations and the reality that a high number of Indigenous students at CSU study in Distance Education (DE) mode.

Purpose of Foundation or Enabling Programs in Universities:
As indicated in the Report of the Review, foundation or enabling programs are bridging or supplementary programs designed for students who need extra preparation in academic study or content skills before they begin a university degree. Successful completion of such programs usually provides a pathway into specific first year undergraduate programs.

Table 1 provides the information contained in the Review concerning the range of options for Indigenous foundation and enabling type programs currently available in NSW universities. Although all Indigenous Education Centres provide a designated Indigenous alternative entry pathway which generally comprises a 2-3 day testing and assessment process, the options for students who are assessed as not ready to enter directly into a degree program, vary with some universities providing designated Indigenous preparatory programs and others encouraging students to enrol in mainstream preparatory options with the ongoing support of the Indigenous support services in that institution. Indigenous students undertaking full-time enabling programs in a university with duration of at least one semester (or min 10 weeks) are eligible to apply for Commonwealth Indigenous Enabling Education Costs and Accommodation Scholarships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Indigenous Centre</th>
<th>Alternative Admissions Program</th>
<th>Designated Indig. Enabling Program</th>
<th>Designated Indig. short term prog (&lt;than 1 sem.)</th>
<th>M/stream prep course option</th>
<th>Indig. Enabling S/ships offered</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Indigenous Student Services</td>
<td>Darrambal Skills Assessment Programme</td>
<td>No – students referred to m/stream options</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Studylink CSU Pathways</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>Wollotuka</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes – Yapug – 1-3 semesters f/t with four pathways</td>
<td>Pre-progs – residential intensives - Bus, Law, Soc.Work, Medicine.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>Nura Gili</td>
<td>Indigenous Admissions Scheme</td>
<td>Foundation program – 1 year f/t in humanities, law and social sciences.</td>
<td>Foundation prog – 1 year f/t - sciences and engineering.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UniSyd</td>
<td>Koori Centre</td>
<td>Cadigal Special Admissions Program</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>If entry through Special Admissions compulsory two week academic skills course</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Woolgunyah</td>
<td>Alternative Admissions Program</td>
<td>No – students referred to m/stream options</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>STEPS and UAP offered through UOW College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCU</td>
<td>Gnibi College</td>
<td>Testing and Assessment program</td>
<td>Yes – Preparing for Success – one semester f/t</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>Badanami Indig. Educ. Centre</td>
<td>Badanami Alternative Entry Program</td>
<td>No. Students referred to m/stream option</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>University Foundation Studies at UWS College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNE</td>
<td>Oorala</td>
<td>Internal Selection Program</td>
<td>Yes - Tracks Up to 4 semesters</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Summary of current Indigenous enabling and foundation programs offered by NSW universities
Provision of foundation/enabling programs at CSU:

Historical Context – ADEPT:
It is important to acknowledge that, while CSU does not currently offer a designated Indigenous university preparation program; the previous Aboriginal Education Centres (that have now been restructured as Indigenous Student Services) offered ADEPT - Aboriginal Distance Education Preparatory Training (ADEPT) for a number of years.

ADEPT was a one semester distance education program that included a residential component. ADEPT students were generally mature age students from isolated and remote communities as well as inmates from Correctional Centres throughout NSW. The ADEPT program gave those who successfully completed the program access to tertiary courses at CSU. While the Review was unable to provide data on the number of students who participated in ADEPT, it is important to acknowledge that it is still recognised as an acceptable alternative to a TAFE tertiary preparation certificate in the entry requirements to many CSU courses.

Current Programs:
Although CSU’s annual Indigenous Education Statements to DEEWR over a number of years have identified the need for enabling or foundation type programs, the only program which CSU offers Indigenous students wanting to enter higher education who do not meet the normal entry criteria, is the Darrambal Skills Assessment Programme (previously Koori Admissions Program).

CSU currently offers Studylink, a preparatory program for university studies in distance education mode and the University Certificate in General Studies (CSU Pathway) aimed at recent school leavers who require some additional preparation in order to meet entry requirements for undergraduate programs. Neither were considered as having the capacity to meet the needs of many of the Indigenous students who do gain entry to university but have considerable gaps in their knowledge and skills often as a result of having suffered serious previous educational disadvantage. Without learning programs that enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills they have previously missed, these potential students are likely to experience great difficulty engaging with university studies. While it was agreed that both of these programs provided a satisfactory pathway for some students seeking to gain entry to CSU, it was widely argued that there was a definite need to develop a specific program that would cater for those Indigenous students who need to build their capacity to effectively engage with university learning environments and university level studies, particularly those seeking to gain entry to non-traditional areas. It is this specific issue that this paper will address.

While respondents to the Review contributed a range of ideas concerning how a foundation/enabling program might operate, all were agreed that the requirement is for a program that focuses on academic preparedness in addition to social and emotional skills. It is, therefore, essential that academic staff have responsibility for all curriculum development associated with designing and implementing the program/s.
Justifying establishment of enabling/foundation programs at CSU:
Based on the overall low retention rates of Indigenous students to Year 12, and the low participation rates of Indigenous people in higher education, the Review was asked to consider whether what is currently offered by CSU in preparing Indigenous students for success at CSU is adequate, and to what extent the absence of adequate enabling type preparation programs may have contributed to the high attrition of Indigenous students across all CSU courses.

In responding to this question, the Review team indicated that an Indigenous enabling program within the university could offer a culturally safe environment in which students could develop the skills and knowledges they require to enter a university course. In endorsing this view, however, I would argue that a vital component in enabling the creation of such an environment is to recognize the importance of acknowledging the bi-cultural nature of learning engagements that will occur in this space. It would seem, therefore, critical to begin the process by identifying both student and staff needs.

Student Needs:
Despite students being able to access alternative pathways for entry to CSU, as outlined in the Review, the continuing poor attrition rates would suggest that many of those students who are successfully enrolling in courses do not have either the capacity to engage with the study, or the interest in their course, to overcome the hurdles they encounter along the way. Hence, many fail to successfully complete. While there may be various reasons for such situations, one of the most effective ways of addressing the issue is to have in place a thorough and effective entry process that:
- enables an accurate assessment to be made of the individual’s capacity to engage in university level educational programs;
- provides experiential activities that provide the individual with a realistic taste of the normal social and cultural aspects of university life; and
- identifies various options that will enable students, assessed as not being ready to engage in study at the undergraduate level, to gain the knowledge and skills needed to enrol for success.

Staff Needs:
Due to the long-term, and in many areas of Australia the continuing, impact of the nation’s colonial history, some staff lack an understanding and appreciation of the difficulties faced by many Indigenous students, seeking to engage in studies at undergraduate level. One of the most critical aspects of this country’s racialised history is the tendency to homogenize the First Nations thus failing to appreciate the differences that can exist in any group. Regardless of their place of origin, Indigenous students will have come from a huge diversity of life and educational experiences. That is not to suggest the majority will be not be able to get through their undergraduate studies rather to indicate that some may simply need more ‘catch-up’ time than others. Critically, what all Indigenous students will need is:
- clearly articulated expectations around what they will achieve;
- some genuine interest in their progress together with relevant guidance as needed; and
- a willingness on the part of university staff, in particular academic staff, to treat them with an equality of regard that enables and fosters a
relationship of mutual respect, clearly recognizing the symbiotic nature of their learning engagement.

Such an approach will enable staff to create the inclusive learning environments that will:
- enable Indigenous students to experience a sense of belonging;
- provide a positive, participative engagement and educational role model for all students thus enhancing the quality of the learning experiences they deliver;
- create increasing opportunities for the respectful and valued exchange of knowledge between learners (students and teachers) to the ultimate benefit of all students thus contributing to their capacity for self-empowerment through education;
- improve the learning outcomes of their students; and
- increase their personal sense of job satisfaction.

A range of issues concerning the need for Indigenous foundation/enabling courses at CSU are discussed on p.62-7, in the Report on the Review of Indigenous Pathways and Transition Programs (September, 2010).

**Possible models for future foundation/enabling programs at CSU:**

Given current attrition rates and overall completion rates it would appear there is a need for both enabling and foundation programs for Indigenous students at CSU. The remainder of this Discussion Paper will focus on identifying specific issues that need to be taken into account in designing an effective model for the future delivery of foundation and enabling programs for Indigenous students at CSU.

**Preparing the ground through participative process:**

While there are several possible models for the delivery of foundation and enabling programs, it is suggested that there are some critical issues that are fundamental to establishing programs that are worthwhile and relevant to student and staff needs and have long term sustainability. The following issues are listed to provide a starting point for a collaborative consultation between representatives of potential stakeholder groups - Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic staff and Indigenous students and interested members of local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs). This consultation would provide a stimulus activity designed to motivate and inform members of the curriculum development committee/s and potential lecturers and tutors, as a critical component in the preparation, and subsequent establishment, of foundation and enabling programs at CSU. Issues would include:
- the enabling program incorporates the assessment program for those seeking alternative entry to CSU undergraduate courses;
- the enabling program is operated as a separate entity to the foundation program;
- the contents of both enabling and foundation programs include university familiarization and preparation for tertiary study relevant to specific purpose of particular program;
- the concept of critical thinking will be built into the contents of all enabling and foundation programs;
all enabling and foundation programs will include subjects that ensure students become competent in the use of English language and modern technology skills as critical tools for effective communication and engagement and the achievement of successful outcomes, in higher education and ultimately in the workplace;

lecturers focus on preparing students to make the transition to academic learning by enabling them to identify their own prior knowledge and skills and to use them as the scaffolding for engaging with new knowledge and skills;

all enabling and foundation programs will include specific content around preparing students to engage effectively in the DE mode of delivery by highlighting potential barriers and using collaborative practice to develop strategies for overcoming such barriers. Needs strong focus on importance of maintaining high levels of self-motivation and becoming an independent learner; and

identifying possible strategies for maintaining sustainability of program. Could include ideas for initiatives around future engagement; potential partnerships; innovative delivery; bringing Indigenous cultures into CSU; and so on.

Possibilities for foundation/enabling program options:
1. Discipline specific pre-programs in range of disciplines such as health, business, education, veterinary science, environmental science, social work, information technology, communications & media, justice studies, psychology, fine arts, graphic design, etc. Would consist of 4-6 week full-time residential programs targeting non school leavers (minimum age 18 years). Aim to provide an intensive preparation for the requirements of study in the selected discipline. Those successfully completing pre-program studies will be offered a place in the relevant undergraduate course. Alternatively they may be offered a position in an enabling/foundation course to develop further skills before undertaking the course.

2. Assessment programs that include evaluation of written and oral literacy and numeracy and an interview with panel that includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation from both Indigenous and university communities, including disciplinary expertise for those who have indicated interest in a specific course.

3. Orientation program that includes university familiarization and information about full range of support programs available, including scholarships. Complete registration/application for enrolment processes plus verification during this program.

4. Enabling program that offers specific subjects, such as, English (includes critical literacy and writing skills), mathematics, information technology, science and Indigenous studies, each student needs to complete in order to have the best possible chance of being successful when enrolling in their desired CSU undergraduate program. Depending upon individual capacity, students may complete what they need to gain entry to their chosen course, in 6 months, 12 months or 18 months.
5. Foundation Studies program – up to 1 year enabling programs in specific
disciplinary areas such as health, business, education, justice studies,
veterinary or environmental science, social work, fine arts, graphic design,
information technology, communications & media, psychology.
Depending on individual ability, students may exit after 6 or 12 months,
with a certificate or diploma qualification or enrol in the relevant
undergraduate program. Those who exit program will be able to return
within 2 years to ‘trade-in’ qualification and enrol in degree program.

Foundation programs would be developed and delivered by the Faculties
using innovative and collaborative approaches for course development and
delivery. For example, Faculty of Science could offer a program that
prepares students to enter a range of science-based courses. Within this
case, there could be at least two sources of subjects. Students would
choose from both (a) and (b) streams to enrol in those subjects that best
suited their needs.

a. Specific disciplinary subjects addressing explicit knowledge
requirements of a given course developed by discipline, eg, nursing.
b. Range of general disciplinary subjects, such as scientific writing;
scientific data collection; etc. that would be developed and delivered
through a collaborative group agreement within the faculty.

Alternatively, a general academic foundation skills program, operating out
of a central unit, perhaps located in management sense within Centre for
Indigenous Studies (CIS) while physically located on any campus. Would
provide a broad range of skills (developed through similar process to (b)
above) with students enrolling in faculty subjects (developed through
similar process to (a) above), taught by faculty lecturers to provide specific
pathways into various disciplines, such as health, humanities, education
and sciences.

Similarly, CSU might negotiate partnership agreements (at Faculty or
disciplinary levels) with other NSW universities to share the load in terms
of development and delivery of subjects for Foundation programs.
Students would then have the opportunity to attend residential intensive
blocks in a number of universities thus acquiring a broader experience of
engaging in university studies.

Foundation Studies programs should be developed to reflect national
quality standards in all aspects of the program – content, delivery,
assessment, outcomes. Aligning program development and delivery with
AQF requirements for academic programs will ensure students are not set
up for failure.

Important considerations for effective program delivery:
The following suggestions reflect the specific needs of the high CSU distance
education student profile for Indigenous students. While appreciating the
reasons why many students choose to study through DE mode, my own
experience has revealed that there is considerable value for Indigenous
students being able to engage in:
• face to face participation at some point in the learning process; and
on-campus delivery that enables them to become familiar with the ways in which universities operate and to experience learning within the actual university environment.

Residential components are also important for students wanting to undertake foundation studies where there is a focus on acquiring specific discipline-based skills.

In acknowledging the importance of providing such opportunities, however, it is equally important to ensure flexibility that will enable students to engage in the manner which is suited to their needs and desired learning outcomes. Flexibility is possible through the use of a range of strategies including:

- the development of partnerships with Indigenous and school communities in regional and remote locations to increase opportunities for the delivery of components of foundation/enabling programs in various alternative study centres;
- use of the mobile learning units;
- consideration of alternative delivery arrangements such as remote delivery through intensive blocks/workshops conducted in a diversity of geographic locations;
- exploring possibilities around concepts such as employing local coordinators to bring students together for weekly support/tutoring/mentoring activities or use of roving lecturers, tutors, etc.
- bringing students together in various off-campus locations such as Broken Hill, Bourke, Walgett, etc. to deliver intensive subject blocks, thus taking the ‘university to the bush’ and providing opportunities for Indigenous students to engage with Indigenous communities (including school students) across NSW in participative activities that enhance their own learning experiences while also broadening the understanding of university education amongst Indigenous communities ‘out bush’.

The possible options that could be identified are only limited by the imagination of those engaging with the issue. For this reason, I am suggesting that, prior to considering implementation of Recommendation 23 of the Review, that the DVC (Academic) establish a working party of interested innovative and creative thinkers from across the faculties to meet with senior Indigenous academic leader to identify and critically explore the range of options that could provide the solutions to this critical issue. The focus of the task will be to identify ways in which CSU could most effectively structure and locate its foundation and enabling programs to achieve effective flexible delivery while maximizing opportunities to implement strategies to provide students with the learning experiences that will give them:

- the best chance of building their capacity to gain entry to undergraduate courses; and
- the confidence and ability to achieve successful outcomes.

The working party would provide an informative report to guide the DVC and Executive Management’s deliberations in relation to any future development.
Possible models for delivery:
There are a number of options for how the foundation/enabling programs might be managed in CSU. The following issues need to be taken into account when determining the most suitable model for this university.

- The most effective outcomes are likely to be achieved in a model where a senior Indigenous academic, preferably at executive management level, has overall executive responsibility for the effective management of all programs. This will include arrangements around marketing and recruitment which will be a vital element in growing Indigenous participation in these programs, hence, achieving improved retention, completion and success outcomes across all areas of Indigenous academic endeavour.

- Faculty Deans should engage with the Indigenous person who has overall executive responsibility for these programs, to negotiate a collaborative agreement that will determine shared responsibilities for resourcing the development and delivery of all programs.

- While the assessment program is funded out of ISF, the university should consider resourcing the development and delivery of the orientation and enabling programs and any general academic skills foundation program out of the current HEPPP funding.

- Determining the most effective models for achieving high quality flexible delivery for Indigenous students choosing to enrol in these programs in either on-campus of DE modes, is ultimately a decision for CSU’s Executive Management. To assist in this task I have suggested the DVC (Academic) establish a working party of interested innovative and creative thinkers (a Indigenous leader plus 1 person from each faculty) to meet during November, 2010, and produce an informative report to Executive Management, by mid-December, 2010, outlining:
  - options for quality, flexible delivery;
  - suitability of possible sites for on-campus program delivery – this will take account of accommodation and travel needs of students and factors that might influence where specific programs, such as enabling and specific foundation programs, would most effectively be located in both a geographic sense and operational sense;
  - implications for resourcing, in particular, staffing – lecturers and tutors and other support personnel; and
  - strategies to ensure retention and success.

- Following receipt of this report, the DVC (Academic) and Executive Management would have all of the information required to make an informed decision on the structure of the model for foundation/enabling programs at CSU.
Conclusion:
If CSU is to achieve its stated target to increase Indigenous enrolments to at least 3% of its student enrolments by 2015, then there is an urgent need for it to become ‘the university of choice’ for all Indigenous students living in regional NSW. The first step in achieving this will be to demonstrate the university's commitment to finding relevant and meaningful ways of addressing the specific learning needs of Indigenous students seeking to gain access to undergraduate studies. Success will breed success and, as student and community expectations are raised, so the value of university education will become a reality.

Taking the time to ensure that we 'get it right' in terms of the development and implementation of effective foundation and enabling programs at CSU will be a critical step for CSU in enabling Indigenous peoples to realize this reality.