

Incorporating Indigenous Scholarship Tip Sheet



Guide

What is the purpose of this Guide?

Some background

One of the priorities the School identified in its RAP Implementation Plan was the need to increase the number of Indigenous scholars and perspectives in its course content. The School collectively adopted the goal of having, by June 2022, an overall 10 percent (10%) of all course reading materials written by Indigenous authors.

This document and its relation to the reading list

This document is designed to complement the reference list of Indigenous scholarship relevant to our disciplines. The list contains direct information to help you start incorporating more Indigenous scholarship into your courses. However, we know that this process of incorporation is not simple. There are many complexities, anxieties, political dynamics and epistemological challenges in making these important changes.

Therefore, we have developed this additional tip sheet to assist you in thinking about some of these dynamics. It was compiled in May 2020 from materials written by several people inside and outside the School including James Blackwell, Morgan Brigg, Elizabeth Strakosch and Alissa Macoun, with the input of many Indigenous staff around the university who have contributed to School workshops and discussions.

This guide includes ideas about how to approach your redesign of the curricula, how to support students and tutors in the classroom, and how to think about the contribution Indigenous academics might make to your courses.

Tip 1: Think about your course as a whole

When adding Indigenous scholarship and resources to your class content, it is worth taking a step back to consider how your course might change. Rather than sprinkling a few sources through your existing content plan, you can also think about revising this plan in light of the Indigenous work you discover. There

REMEMBER!

**DON'T LIMIT
YOURSELF
TO MINOR
CHANGES.**

REMEMBER!

**THERE ARE MANY
CHALLENGES IN
DOING THIS WORK
BUT ALSO SUPPORT**

are different approaches which you can take to facilitate these kinds of changes in your content.

- Rather than only trying find Indigenous authors who write about what you want, ask:
 - What are Indigenous authors writing about in this general area, and how can I incorporate this?
 - Often Indigenous scholarship offers deep reflections on and critical perspectives of core concepts such as sovereignty, law, international order, knowledge, research, liberalism, the state, individualism, justice and so on.
 - Sometimes Indigenous scholarship focuses on critiquing mainstream concepts, and sometimes it elaborates alternative perspectives drawing upon Indigenous ontologies, methodologies and experiences.
 - Often these two strands go together, and it is important to note that until mainstream epistemological and political assumptions are questioned, your course and some of your students may not be fully open to Indigenous work coming from alternative frameworks.
 - The colonial politics of knowledge here are complicated, but it is worth noting that mainstream Western scholarship has tended to position Indigenous people as the ‘subjects and objects’ of knowledge rather than as producers of legitimate knowledge (see for example Linda Tuhiwai Smith in the reading list below). Similarly, the history of *terra nullius* in Australia means that often non-Indigenous institutions and individuals do not see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies as constituting political orders. It is *politically as well as academically* challenging for many non-Indigenous academics and students to treat Indigenous polities as polities. Contesting these often unacknowledged assumptions is a large part of the work of critical Indigenous scholarship and of our own contributions to reforming our disciplines.
- We encourage you to try to think ambitiously rather than narrowly about changes to your course, and offer ongoing workshops to support this:
 - Trying to fit Indigenous scholarship into your existing framework without expanding that framework might cause stress when the Indigenous scholarship just isn’t there in places or the volume you need it to be.

- Instead, incrementally expand the way you think about what you are trying to teach, and why you are trying to teach it.
- This means considering the bigger picture of your course.
 - What are some of the broader themes, concepts or assumptions with which this course engages, and which you might ask the students to challenge/interrogate? As mentioned above, some of the big concepts in our disciplines (peace, sovereignty, citizenship, international order etc) are being critiqued and rethought by Indigenous scholars.
 - Are Indigenous authors writing about this in ways which help me do this work?
- Think about (where possible and relevant) making your course more comparative across locations, political relationships and ontologies.

Tip 2: Acknowledge and address your own assumptions

In the work we have done over the past years discussing these issues in the School, non-Indigenous staff have raised several concerns. We have grouped these and offered some responses to think about below. Not all of these are felt by all staff members, and there are other questions you will have too. However, hopefully these provide a place for you to start.

REMEMBER!

WE ARE EXPERTS
IN OUR FIELDS
BUT RARELY
EXPERTS IN THIS.
WE NEED TO
LEARN.

1. Do I know enough or have the rights skills to do this?
2. I am uncomfortable with my position as a non-Indigenous person in engaging with this content.
3. I am worried about raising controversial or politicised topics.

1. *Do I know enough or have the rights skills to do this?*

Many staff have expressed a lack of knowledge relating to various things – growing up overseas, not having direct family experience and/or not having a full understanding of the deeper context.

Some couldn't see how to link Indigenous scholarship and issues to their course content, for example when teaching international relations or non-Australian politics. Here are some responses:

- Nobody has perfect knowledge in this area – those of us who grew up as non-Indigenous people in Australia often also grew up in highly segregated conditions or with educational experiences and training in disciplines that ignored Indigenous peoples' knowledges and experiences. Part of what we are doing in this work is ensuring that this situation doesn't continue. Perfect knowledge is not expected; respectful and serious attempts are usually appreciated.
- There is a lot of scholarship and information available on Indigenous issues and by local and global Indigenous peoples. This applies in International Relations and in most other sub-disciplines and topics. We are professional knowledge workers; we can seek resources in this area just as one would in any important area of research or teaching in which one feels under-read. As disciplinary canons have often been unhelpfully limiting, it can be useful to draw on interdisciplinary scholarship. Our School Indigenous scholarship list is a great place to start.
- It's okay to acknowledge limits on your existing knowledge and understanding, and on your authority/capacity to know. This avoids the problem of attempting to speak authoritatively for or about Indigenous peoples. Acknowledging our limits then enables us to comment on what we *think* the experiences of Indigenous peoples, as expressed by them, might mean for a context/issue in classroom teaching, without being definitive.
- Just as we hope that work we do in our disciplines is relevant to all kinds of people and places, so we can draw on ideas and examples from all kinds of people and places. There are many more opportunities than we sometimes think:
 - For example – in a discussion of the political concept of sovereignty, one doesn't have to claim deep knowledge of Indigenous political systems or cultures to move beyond Hobbes/Westphalia and note that many Indigenous peoples don't operate with these assumptions about power and land/territory (you can draw upon Indigenous scholars including Taiaiake Alfred, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Irene Watson or Mary Graham).
 - For example – writing about social and political institutions often defaults to considering inclusion or recognition as a primary goal (socially, in institutions, as citizens). Indigenous peoples - and Indigenous scholars -

have both made this case and challenged this presumption. As a non-Indigenous person, it may be appropriate to note without judgement that just as there have been Indigenous campaigns for civil rights and inclusion, so – often at the same time – there have been campaigns of refusal, for the right to resist assimilation or forcible inclusion (see for example Glen Coulthardt, Audra Simpson, Lyndon Murphy).

- For example – discussions of C20th international relations often refer to decolonisation in former European colonies, but it is still less common to discuss wrangling over the blue/salt water thesis relating to so called ‘settler colonies’, and what this means for places like the USA and Australia.
- Australian Political Science has often reproduced a colonial model of scholarship, understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as subjects of domestic policy/governance with little to contribute to broader metropolitan theory or to global questions of power and order. Indigenous peoples have usually been seen as the subjects of research, despite being creators of research and theory. Engaging with Indigenous issues, scholarship, and knowledges might look different in different fields, but is always possible. You can read an extended discussion of these issues in the special edition of *Australian Journal of Political Science* called ‘Whose Politics and Which Science?’ (2019).

Overall, if your field does not make it possible to engage with the experiences

REMEMBER!

ASK: WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF THERE ARE FEW INDIGENOUS VOICES IN MY FIELD?

and understandings of world’s oldest continuing social, cultural, and political order, this should prompt some interesting questions about the limits of the field. How can we challenge or work to recalibrate existing assumptions, exclusions and requirements in our fields?

2. *I am uncomfortable with my position as a non-Indigenous person in engaging with this content.*

Many non-Indigenous staff members identify concerns about how they can teach Indigenous scholarship and issues without appropriating or over-simplifying Indigenous voices. Do white non-Indigenous people need to ‘leave behind’ their western worldviews in order to engage appropriately?

- As noted above, there are intense knowledge politics at play in this area; western academics have often claimed authority over and

knowledge about Indigenous peoples and cultures in colonising and harmful ways. It helps to imagine and understand the politics of knowledge that flow from colonial relations and to work against repeating them. As part of this, it is crucial to recognise Indigenous peoples' authority over their own experiences, cultures, knowledges, histories, and futures. Adopting a position of humility, and not claiming undue authority over Indigenous issues as a non-Indigenous person, is important.

- The somewhat tricky terrain does not absolve us from a responsibility to engage with Indigenous issues. Indigenous peoples and issues exist around the globe, and all who live in Australia are in political relationships with Indigenous peoples.
- Engaging with Indigenous issues/perspectives for teaching purposes does not require deep knowledge of Indigenous experiences, pedagogies, cultures or epistemologies. (This type of knowledge is more likely to emerge in a research specialisation, and requires thoroughgoing navigation of location, relationships and protocols). There is extensive scholarship, political activism and public engagement by Indigenous peoples that we can draw upon to inform ourselves and support our teaching. We can refer to this without claiming authority over it. This is why the Indigenous scholarship target in our reading lists is so important.
- As in other aspects of our teaching, in areas of controversy it can help to present a range of views; Indigenous people are no more unanimous about politics and strategy than any other group. Sometimes it can be difficult to discern where real controversy exists on contemporary issues (over the Recognise campaign regarding Australian constitutional reform for example) and where it has been manufactured or inflated by media. If you're not sure, examine published work by Indigenous scholars, then look to sites like The Conversation or IndigenousX, or review the statements of Indigenous peak bodies and organisations.
- Ultimately, this process of engaging with Indigenous issues, perspectives, knowledges and scholarship in our scholarship isn't intended to provide a fuller account of Indigenous people – it's about

providing a fuller account of the systems and processes we all purport to study. One doesn't need to stop being 'western' in order to appreciate that others are sometimes different – in fact, it's almost a truism to say that understanding ways that others do things differently is important to a fuller appreciation of one's own assumptions and claims.

3. I am worried about raising controversial or politicised topics.

Integrating Indigenous perspectives into the classroom requires support for students. You will need to create opportunities for the students to engage with the material, both in tutorials and during lectures.

This means that you, as the academic leader, will also need to think through the content and your own reactions as you prepare to guide students. Here are a few tips we recommend for trying to approach this and integrate these perspectives into your teaching:

- You don't need to be Indigenous to talk about Indigenous perspectives in the classroom if you work with care and commitment:
 - Treat the topics sensitively and with respect.
 - Don't disregard Indigenous perspectives because they fit outside the mainstream
 - Equally, don't disregard Indigenous perspectives if they are within the mainstream. There are diverse Indigenous perspectives.
- Not all Indigenous students self-identify, and it is important to assume that there are Indigenous students in every discussion.
- It is important to balance the need for open debate with the need to provide a safe environment for Indigenous and other students. Know where you draw the line regarding racism and communicate this to students. It can be helpful to engage in a collaborative discussion with your students, to set the principles you wish to abide by. This also makes it easier to raise problems and means that all the class will be invested in the kind of learning environment you create.
- Reconsider inviting Indigenous guest lecturers just because you are uncomfortable talking about the subjects at hand. We are all able to learn how to discuss Indigenous issues in our courses, and Indigenous lecturers can add depth and complement your own teaching on the subject.

- Invite Indigenous guest lecturers because they bring their own expertise or perspectives to the Indigenous scholarship
- Commit to learning and speaking about Indigenous issues yourself as well
- Adding an “Indigenous week” is not the same as integrating perspectives into a course
 - It is a good first step, but deeper engagement requires content across several weeks. See tips above about offering critical Indigenous perspectives on core concepts.
- Consider assessment questions based on Indigenous scholarship/content. Offering options or scaffolded support to students when introducing Indigenous related assessment is a good idea.
- Consider the role that your tutors play, and how you can facilitate their own critical engagement with the content and develop their skills to handle class dynamics. They are on the ‘front line’ of the difficult and important conversations you will be generating in your class.

REMEMBER!

YOU DON'T KNOW
WHO IS IN THE
ROOM WITH YOU!

There are also a few things to be aware of in relation to student responses to this content.

- Students may find some of this content confronting, uncomfortable, or distressing. Give them the space to work through what that means. For non-Indigenous Australians, it involves problematising their own identities and assumptions. Aftercare is important, and so is being open about the challenges of the material.
- For Indigenous students, focusing only on colonisation or harms might be distressing. It is important to pair this with discussion of ongoing Indigenous sovereignty, resistance, political activity and cultural authority.
- Students who find it difficult to engage with the content still need to be part of the classroom. It is useful to try to talk about emotions as part of our political identities. Again, consider getting all students to develop a code of conduct in advance which you can use to keep conversations on track and safe for all.

A culturally safe classroom is important when teaching and engaging with this kind of content. We will continue to build our capacity as a School and as individuals in this area.

REMEMBER!

**THIS GUIDE IS NO
SUBSTITUTE FOR
DOING THE REAL
WORK**



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OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

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