



# Aurora Indigenous Scholars Study Tour Symposium 2020

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## Aurora Indigenous Scholars Study Tour

The Aurora Study Tour takes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students and graduates to visit leading universities, including Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, New York University and Stanford in the US, and Cambridge, London School of Economics and Oxford in the UK.

Many participants have returned from the Study Tour resolved to pursue study overseas. Others have decided to pursue study or employment in Australia. In either case, the Study Tour has supported participants to make better informed decisions about their pathways. Study Tour participants also become part of a strong network of Indigenous peers, all with a record of outstanding academic success. Successful applicants need to have attained a Distinction average or above, or First-Class Honours (or heading for).

Ten years on, the Aurora Study Tour has:

- provided opportunities for over 150 talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain insights into the experience of undertaking postgraduate study at premier institutions.
- seen 62 participants go on to apply to study at the universities visited, with 94% being accepted.

In response to COVID-19, the 2020 Study Tour went online to become Aurora's first virtual Study Tour Symposium. There were 18 exceptional scholars who participated in 20 events over five days. Session highlights included:

- Connecting participants with overseas universities, including Berkeley, Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford and Stanford.
- Charlie Perkins and Roberta Sykes alumni sharing their study experiences and pathways with participants.
- A Black Lives Matter panel discussion, moderated by Gamilaroi Gomeroi woman and journalist, Brooke Boney.
- Nous Group delivering a session on how to get the most out of virtual meetings.
- Sessions on cultural safety, self-determination and systemic change.

To end the week, participants were able to come together with past scholars in different locations all over Australia for face to face "bubble" dinners, so they could meet each other and other alumni.

We have included a snapshot of some of our scholars' reflections on the impact of the virtual tour as they make decisions about their education journey.



## New Perspectives...

Before the Study Tour, I never would have thought that studying abroad at the best universities in the world would have ever been possible. But meet, learning from and talking with such incredible people during this week has made me realise that this is a possibility. Hearing first-hand the experiences of students and staff put into perspective that my goals are in fact a possibility; it was an amazing experience, and really made me feel I was the closest I could be to these universities without being there in person. I feel so inspired by the people around me, and I am even more driven to follow my passion and achieve my goals.

... I greatly admire the immense work the team has put in to transform the Study Tour to a virtual format. I had an incredible experience and I truly learned so much, and I cannot wait to see what this generation of driven Indigenous students achieve in the future.

**Bianca Crisp**, *Griffith University*

I never thought I would consider an undergrad degree, let alone postgrad studies and possibly in another country. Aurora has opened my mind and my eyes and this week was a fork in the road for me which lead will me down a new path. I am excited for the future and am grateful for the work by the Aurora team to showcase possibilities, realities and opportunities to such a high standard.

... Hearing from Richard was the highlight for me ... it is clear he has invested a lot in Aurora and is motivated for it to succeed and keep improving ... I feel Richard has set the bar high for Aurora rather than some other Indigenous programs that are tokenistic. This is very important for Indigenous success and demonstrating leadership in our fields.

**Anna Neumann**, *University of Southern Queensland*

One thing in particular that stuck out to me was Greg Phillips' discussion of how simply being biologically Aboriginal wasn't enough, and that we needed to put that biology into action. His statement stuck out to me and highlighted that as an Aboriginal person I needed to do more, I needed to learn more, and be much more active in the many spheres of life impacting Indigenous peoples across Australia and the world too. This made me ... realise that I can change that and I can put my biology and knowledge into action, and learn and do more over time.

**Ashley Maroney**, *University of Western Australia*

Hearing from Leila Smith and learning about her firsthand experiences with Aurora was incredibly practical and insightful. Seeing a strong and accomplished First Nations woman as the CEO of a large organisation was an incredible highlight, she is an inspiration and clear demonstration of what we can achieve with hard work, determination and a belief in ourselves.

... This week has been truly remarkable! It is an experience that, although brief, has given me so much to think about. I have received such a great deal of practical information which I am certain will inform my future decisions regarding ongoing graduate study. I can honestly say that this week has given me the tools to confidently move forward with pursuing my aspirations of international study. I now feel much more equipped to contact academics and apply for courses, funding and scholarship support.

**Juanita Kelly-Mundine**, *University of Melbourne*



Leila ... evoked in me the passion to continue on this journey, that no particular way of doing this is the right way. I did have strong imposter syndrome, in a way that I felt I may be disadvantaging another student who does not have a family and would be more suited to international study. But after her introduction I realised we are all worthy of being on this tour regardless of where we are at in life and that having children isn't a reason not to explore these options.

**Kirsty Nichols, *Charles Darwin University***

Since finishing university earlier this year, I have felt a bit lost. Not to say I have no purpose, but as a goals-oriented person, the lack of consistent deadlines and end goal to aim for has left me feeling muddled. This last week of the Study Tour has changed that completely. I am now more confident that overseas study is something I want to do, and I now have the knowledge and understanding to make it happen. I am so grateful for this experience to opening my eyes to potential universities to study, many of which I would have never considered beforehand. I am so excited for the next few years of working towards this new goal and I am motivated to be able to return and contribute more to my Indigenous community than I ever could have imagined.

**Kishaya Delaney, *University of Newcastle***

Overall, I felt like the Symposium was a very positive experience. Despite not being able to travel to the universities themselves, I felt like I learnt a lot and discovered new pathways to postgraduate studies that I hadn't thought about before. As someone who had previously never considered postgraduate education, I feel now that this might be something that could become part of my education future. That's kind of scary but also exciting. Even better, I'm now considering pathways that I once thought were totally unfeasible and too expensive.

**Mara Willingham, *University of Wollongong***

This week was so valuable. I would never had found out about all these amazing scholarships or information about international universities without this Symposium. There is only so much you can take from a website so finding out information directly from universities and current students is unbelievably valuable, especially when it comes to the lifestyle, support networks, finances, and postgraduate life.

**Rachael King, *Macquarie University***

This week really opened my eyes to the different possibilities of postgrad studies overseas, but also I've been introduced to so many amazing and high achieving scholars and academics. I feel like I've not only gained an insight into the different academic options available, but also met so many people who have demonstrated that we can do this. As First Nations students, it's not so much as that we are beating the odds by completing postgrad, but that we are all so capable of doing so when given the tools and advice that we have gained this week.

**Rebecca Beutel, *Australian National University***





An incredibly insightful week! I am so thankful to be a part of this year's cohort and to have had the opportunity to meet so many exceptional First Nations scholars and leaders. I have left this week feeling inspired, motivated and incredibly proud of myself and my peers.

**Hope Kuchel**, *University of Melbourne*

The debriefs and informal chats we had throughout the day helped me deepen my understanding of myself and my life journey (past, present and future). These conversations helped me realise many things, including how I have grown and developed as a person over the week. I am more self-confident and have learnt many valuable skills for how to overcome imposter syndrome. The support of all the Aurora staff, our Symposium Mentors, Sarah and Kris, and all the participants has been amazing. I feel like even though I have never met some of these people in person I now have friends for life.

**Sarah Munns**, *University of Western Australia*



*Brisbane*



*Sydney*



*Wollongong*

*Bubbles Dinners across Australia with Study Tour participants and Aurora Alumni*

## Connecting with Overseas Universities

### US Universities & Scholars

It was good to see that Graham Akhurst and Tui Nolan (both in New York) have still been able to continue their studies despite COVID and weren't forced to go home. Good to know how flexible some of the scholarships are, especially with the COVID situation and the Monash scholarship giving students more freedom to decide what they need to spend the money on.

**Brooke Ottley**, *University of Technology Sydney*

I really enjoyed the session with Sasha Purcell today. Whilst each of the sessions with the academic staff have been really insightful, it has been difficult to draw parallels between the different options. Sasha was able to provide insight into the differences between the universities and cities in the United States. Without these conversations, or the Study Tour, I wouldn't have known where to start.

**Kishaya Delaney**, *University of Newcastle*



Getting inspiration from Todd to go to Harvard! Whilst listening to him talk about the campus, I found myself thinking about what I could contribute to the academic world by completing a PhD in Ethnomusicology (the study of music in culture).

**Hayden Ryan, RMIT University**

The brief presentation by Tim Goodwin was outstanding! He was incredibly inspirational and expressed his experience of study in America with such verve. His personal perspective and positive attitude, as well as encouragement to pursue study the US, energised me so deeply. He was very eloquent in explaining the benefits of studying internationally in order to develop personally and academically, which in turn enabled him to come back and better serve the community. This conversation solidified my US academic aspirations and has helped me to see the myriad of benefits which can come from international study. I feel more motivated than ever to pursue study in the States largely thanks to Tim and his enthusiasm.

**Juanita Kelly-Mundine, University of Melbourne**

Today's session made me feel like Harvard is where I want to be. I'm sure I'll change my mind 100 times before the tour is over, but the opportunity to directly ask questions to staff and students at one of the best universities in the world is a privilege like no other.

**Kishaya Delaney, University of Newcastle**

Patrick (Berkeley), Greg and Joseph (Stanford) were all great to hear from around the potential benefits of study in the US especially around the presence of First Nations culture, people and supports. [Their presentation] gave me some good insight and a greater interest in studying in the US.

**Karl Williamson, Monash University**

Having a zoom conversation with some of the admissions staff from Stanford has given me a confidence and a desire to study at Stanford. All the staff I have spoken to have been passionate about their University, even giving up some time whilst on vacation in Barbados to talk to me. The various opportunities within research in and around Silicon Valley have sold me on applying for Stanford's Electrical Engineering program.

**Mitchell Strange, University of Wollongong**

I found [the video meeting with academic staff] especially valuable since I am positioned more towards to US universities. Stanford especially stood out as a university that is full of support, diversity, employment opportunities, as well as great weather and lifestyle options.

**Rachael King, Macquarie University**

I have enjoyed this morning's meetings with Stanford and Berkeley immensely. Neither were on my radar however I am definitely intrigued after this morning's chats, which goes to show how amazing these sessions really are.

**Renee Briggs, Griffith University**



## Cambridge, Oxford & Scholars

It was so great to hear from Nina and Malcolm for me partly because their areas of study interest me and I am also thinking of going to the UK. Both Nina and Malcolm shared their stories openly and honestly ... Hearing the benefits outweighing the challenges was inspiring from both of them. What we hope to undertake is not easy feat, financially, emotionally and physically but they helped me understand the worth of the experience.

**Anna Neumann, *University of Southern Queensland***

Nina mentioned the positive role of having other Indigenous students at the same institution. She said this contributed to her Cambridge PhD experience. Her statements help me see the importance of having other Aurora Indigenous mob studying at the same place. Nina's comment cemented this, that the 'Aurora network is invaluable!'

**Hmalan Hunter-Xenie, *Australian National University***

The highlight of today for me was the discussion with the Cambridge Trust in the afternoon. Trudi and all the Cambridge students offering to read over our applications really felt like we had now been introduced to a collective of academics and students rooting for us to win, and that was both really reassuring that people believe we could do this, and that we would have help getting there.

**Rebecca Beutel, *Australian National University***

Minnie Salmon and Sarah Bourke were truly inspiring, hearing from them put into perspective the fact that following my passion and studying abroad is achievable for a student like me. These sessions have ignited the flame of my passion for learning, study and greatness and I cannot wait to see what the future holds.

**Bianca Crisp, *Griffith University***

The meeting with the Cambridge scholars was amazing. I didn't realise how important the college aspect was until today and how much of an integral part of the Cambridge experience it is. It was also fabulous to hear about the Cambridge Trust and all the support that is available to international students through these scholarships. Everyone on the call today was so lovely, helpful and kind that I can already see how amazing the community at Cambridge is.

**Sarah Munns, *University of Western Australia***

Wow! It was so inspiring hearing from Minette and Sarah. I was blown away with their presentations and how passionately they talked about their areas of study. Hearing about their journeys made studying overseas feel more realistic and accomplishable. I loved how specific their answers were regarding why they chose a particular university and how to have a successful scholarship application. I'm definitely leaving this conversation with a page full of hints and tips that I'll look back on when applying for scholarships.

**Hope Kuchel, *University of Melbourne***



## Building a Community of Indigenous Scholars

The Black Lives Matter and Systemic Change Panel was really good and I like that Bhiamie Williamson and Brook Andrew just raised issues straight up rather than dancing around things that affect and are important to us all such as colourism, giving back, racism, gender. They provided a space for people to think about these issues and then discuss with our mentors afterwards and it is clear we all come across similar things.

**Anna Neumann**, *University of Southern Queensland*



It was really great to have Brooke Boney facilitate [the Black Lives Matter and Systemic Change Panel] and see our mob running the whole show. Bhiamie is such a deep thinker, being across all the intersectionality in the BLM movement. Great to listen to his responses on all the questions raised. Memorable quote from him today for me was when he flagged that, “colonisation is a disease of the mind.”

... It was excellent when the conversation shifted focus to the positives. Like when Brook said, ‘focus on all the good stuff already happening and work within our own protocols...feel empowered by our culture.’

**Hmalan Hunter-Xenie**, *Australian National University*

*The BLM Panel, clockwise from right, Brooke Boney, Leila Smith, Alison Whittaker, Brook Andrew and Bhiamie Eckford Williamson*

I continue to be amazed by the other scholars participating in this year’s Study Tour. The debriefs we have with [our Mentors] Kris and Sarah have been extremely valuable and have allowed our cohort to get to know each other on a deeper level. It has also provided a space to reflect and let our guards down, hearing each other stories, and the similarities make us feel connected. The other students are so passionate, inspiring and memorable people, and it really has motivated me to continue to kick goals!

**Hope Kuchel**, *University of Melbourne*

There’s something to be said for listening to other students’ experiences. At the end of the day there is only so much you can learn from a university website. The Aurora online Study Tour Symposium gave us all the chance to speak directly with people who have been in our shoes and know the ins and outs. This is so valuable. It’s difficult to imagine yourself one day studying somewhere like Cambridge or Harvard until you meet the people who are just like you who have gone through the experience and thrived.

**Mara Willingham**, *University of Wollongong*





Being able to travel to Melbourne [for the Symposium 'Bubble Dinners held across Australia] and meet some previous Aurora scholars in-person was a great experience, especially during the pandemic. It was great to meet with Tim Goodwin and talk about his journey from studying law in Australia to Harvard. The conversation really opened my eyes to the possibilities that the Aurora program opens up for Indigenous Australian students such as myself.

**Nathan Hucker, *University of Melbourne***

I really found the debrief session [following panel discussions with guests] with the other Study Tour participants afterwards super impactful. We each vocalised our own thoughts on racism, colourism, and identity struggles which made me feel that my own opinions were heard and valid.

**Kishaya Delaney, *University of Newcastle***

The week has been great! So much more than I expected. The knowledge sharing with the broader network, inspiration from others studying overseas and the support that Aurora offer was so great to experience. I am excited to continue my journey with Aurora backing me overseas study or not.

**Karl Williamson, *Monash University***

The debrief sessions with [our Mentors] proved to be a highlight of the day. These periods were a welcome pause throughout the week in order to decompress and speak openly about our feelings regarding the plethora of information we were receiving.

Thank you, [Aurora], you have created such a welcoming, vibrant and safe space to explore these wonderful study opportunities. At times I forgot that I was on the other side of the country to most of the participants, it felt like we were all in the same room.

I have struggled with imposter syndrome a lot since moving to Perth and starting university and after hearing Leila's candid discussion, it made me realise that no, actually, I have got this, and I can do this. I have worked so hard to get here, I belong here. I think this conversation, and all the advice given by everyone will stay with me for the rest of my life. I will draw on it to inspire others and myself to pursue their interests and passions.

**Sarah Munns, *University of Western Australia***



**Darwin**



**Melbourne**



**Perth**

*Bubbles Dinners across Australia with Study Tour participants and Aurora Alumni*



**AURORA**  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIPS

Aurora has done an outstanding job in bringing people together via this new online format and I believe that it is a testament to the wonderful and dedicated staff that the Symposium has been able to go ahead despite the challenges 2020 presented. I have so much gratitude and appreciation for this week and I hope that I can continue to engage with this incredible group of people, as well as take with me the learnings from all those who contributed to this first-class symposium. Thank you to everyone involved for supporting Indigenous excellence and providing opportunities to help make our dreams a reality!

*Juanita Kelly-Mundine, University of Melbourne*

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