



**AURORA**  
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

# Aurora Indigenous Scholars International Study Tour Reflections

# 2018



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## A new perspective...

*It was very liberating to be able to picture yourself as a student at one of these prestigious universities. It made the possibility of postgraduate study all the more real.*

**Gemma Tierney, University of Sydney**

*My meeting with Dr Steven O. Roberts [at Stanford] gave me a new perspective on my own ambitions, drives, and passions – and allowed me to feel as though it was possible to do postgraduate studies abroad ... Our conversation allowed me to realise what I needed to do if I wanted to do postgraduate studies and gave me insight into where I should take my research passions.*

**Makayla Jennings, Griffith University**

*I loved chatting with the current students about their experiences living and studying at Stanford, but for me the most impactful meeting was with Rachel in admissions. She put me in touch with so many academics in fields similar to my own, and really showed me how I could tailor the program to suit my research interests. I left her office feeling like this is something I could actually do.*

**Josephine Newman, Curtin University**

*The Study Tour gave me a profound appreciation for the enormity of the academic research and learning taking place [at Stanford]. The expertise hidden behind the beautiful buildings walls was not only elite but welcoming.*

**Joel Steele, University of Technology Sydney**

*The visit to the UK was very valuable in that it opened my mind to the possibility of study at Oxford and Cambridge, which if not for the Tour, may not have even been a consideration.*

**Dylan Collard, University of Western Australia**

A new perspective (cont'd)...

*I walked into my meeting with the Director of [Stanford] Graduate School feeling unsure if any of the courses would fit me. After discussing my interests, I found there were several directions I could take in both Masters and PhDs – this was quite exciting to hear.*

**Eliza Barnett, University of New England**

*I had two meetings at NYU ... both meetings were an incredible experience and have greatly impacted my perception of what I thought I could and could not achieve. The visit was a significant factor in me even considering NYU as an option and I don't believe I would have applied just from researching the college online.*

**Sasha Purcell, Queensland University of Technology**

*Overall, this has been an absolutely pinch-yourself 2 days at Stanford. It is weird to think that I am walking away from this campus with a real interest in studying here. Studying at Stanford was never an option in my mind, but after walking the campus tour and meeting other graduate students, I can easily see it being one of my top preferences.*

**Gemma Tierney, University of Sydney**

*I never thought I could ever actually study at [Harvard] and I went in feeling very intimidated by it. However, the visits, my meetings and the symposium changed my thoughts drastically, not only did I feel like I could study there if I decided to, but I also felt welcomed.*

**Dylan Collard, University of Western Australia**

*The final and possibly most valuable lesson learnt from the Tour was the confidence that Indigenous students do belong in institutions like those we visited, that they are capable of being accepted on a merit basis and furthermore they are capable of succeeding while there. Being able to meet with Indigenous scholars currently studying overseas at such prestigious institutions cemented in my mind the reality of postgraduate study overseas. Knowing that students have walked this path before me and succeeded so tremendously makes the experience seem far less daunting.*

**Audrey McInnerney, University of Queensland**

## Superstar academics...

*My favourite moment of the Tour was meeting one of my research idols [at Stanford] and him living up to every possible expectation. We had such a stimulating conversation that has opened up so many possibilities that I cannot even begin to comprehend where this could take my future.*

**Joel Steele, University of Technology Sydney**

Superstar academics (cont'd)...



*Dylan and Chloe presenting at the Aurora Symposium at Harvard.*

*The academics highlighted the realities and expectations upfront but were also very informative and very encouraging, making it a positive first step on this journey. It felt good to know that academics high in their corresponding fields take your interests seriously and want to help you make the most of your degree.*

**Kasarina Mann, University of Sydney**

*I met with a Native Indian professor in law at Harvard. We spoke for over an hour about comparative analysis between Indigenous Australia and Indigenous America and the lack of substantial research focusing on this comparison. We spoke about treaties and the importance of community empowerment and self-determination. I actually had a chance to teach the professor about the progression of Australia in these areas. The professor I met with didn't care about my credentials, he just wanted to hear my thoughts. That was refreshing.*

**Chloe D'Souza, Curtin University**

*Being able to meet two academics [Professor Sharon Long and Assistant Professor David Erhardt] whose research contributed so strongly to the field of nodulation studies, and subsequently my thesis work, was the highlight of my time at Stanford. I was able to engage with academics from other branches of plant science and to hear about their approaches to research, broadening my overall perspective of the field and learning different approaches that research can take.*

**Audrey McInerney, University of Queensland**



*I met with an amazing post-doc fellow, Dr Alicia Harley [and this] meeting has been my highlight of the Tour so far ... [it] was incredibly authentic and refreshing. Rather than selling Harvard, Alicia provided me with insights into food security academia, suggested academics to follow and courses to explore. Alicia also strongly encouraged me to gain work experience prior to graduate studies and to consider my preferred method of study (e.g. studying food security from an anthropological perspective rather than an economic standpoint). Overall, my meeting with Dr Harley gave me clarity and confidence in pursuing a career in addressing food security.*

**Faith Considine, Bond University**

*Following the meeting, [Niobe Way] invited me to one of her classes and introduced me to her class. She asked me to explain my family history – which was very special to me – and also my research interests. I felt so respected by her and it was an amazing experience. She was amazing to speak with and I feel like I would love to have her as a supervisor.*

**Makayla Jennings, Griffith University**

*I knew that NYU was renowned for its excellence in medical science and development from my undergraduate studies. What I came out the other side with is that NYU has amazing down to earth scientists that perform amazing research as well as being open to collaboration.*

*Both my academic meetings secured me collaborators and one maybe a potential Post-Doctoral employer in later years of research. These meetings also provided me with knowledge of who else to contact at other universities on the Tour which I otherwise wouldn't have considered.*

**Joel Steele, University of Technology Sydney**

*I attended the Anglia Ruskin open evening and met Dr Tiffani Angus and Dr Helen Marshall from the creative writing program, and they were both lovely and super enthusiastic about my research interests and the possibilities available for me at Anglia Ruskin. Richard organised a meeting for me with Dr Una McCormack the next morning and she was equally as lovely and enthusiastic. We had a great conversation and pretty much planned out my PhD proposal, with herself and probably Tiffani as supervisors. These three ladies have made me feel like studying here is a real possibility for me, and that I would be supported to pursue the research that I really want to do.*

**Josephine Newman, Curtin University**

## A community of Indigenous scholars...

*What was most influential was the meetings and lunches with current graduate students and really getting a feel for life at Stanford. Meeting with other Australian graduate students studying here had the biggest impact on me. This created a greater sense of reality and strengthened the possibility of studying at Stanford as a feasible option.*

**Gemma Tierney, University of Sydney**

*It was fantastic to be able to meet and talk with American and Canadian Native students at the Native Ivy Council Summit. I feel as though I learnt a lot about the similarities and differences between our cultures and the struggles that they face today. Being able to form connections and international networks was an immensely valuable experience.*

**Audrey McInnerney, University of Queensland**

*It's only been a week and I'm already sure that these friendships will last a lifetime. The networking opportunities that this Tour provides are amazing—and they're not boring, business-ey networking events either—it's really easy to connect with people on a human level and just talk and talk for ages.*

**Josephine Newman, Curtin University**



*Aurora Scholars debriefing at the University of California, Berkeley.*

A community of Indigenous scholars (cont'd)...

*The Stanford Native American Cultural Center hosted a lunch for us and we met some incredible students and scholars that run the center. Their library showcased some important books, maps and digital sources and I found this space to be very moving and extremely welcoming. A home away from home.*

**Robyn Oxley, Monash University**

*There were three significant events for me that together, made me come to the realisation that Stanford is a university that I will strongly consider. Firstly, meeting Kim McCabe from the Graduate School of Education had an impact because she explained the options available to me and displayed genuine interest in my particular passions. Secondly, going to the Native American Culture Centre and seeing the presence of Indigenous Peoples on campus. This is of paramount importance to me because wherever I decide to study in the future will need to have something for me to be able to engage with as a Noongar man. Finally, meeting with a PhD student who is doing the same course that I want to do was really good, especially because he was from a similar background to me and was finding the people at Stanford to be supportive and genuinely good humans.*

**Dylan Collard, University of Western Australia**

*I really loved lunch at the Stanford Native America Centre and afternoon tea at the Bechtel International Centre. These places felt very similar to my Indigenous common room back at home. I was worried that if I were to study overseas, I would lose that sense of community. However, meeting with the staff and students from these centres made me feel welcome and that if I were to study here, there would be support.*

**Gemma Tierney, University of Sydney**

*It was incredible to see all the past scholars who have elected to study in the UK – very inspiring for me.*

**Chloe D'Souza, Curtin University**

*I had the opportunity to meet several Australian PhD education students, Vince and Olivia. Both individuals made me feel extremely welcome and gave helpful insight into the programs available and what it is like to attend the university. I found meeting fellow Australian scholars to be the most interesting and beneficial part of visiting Cambridge.*

**Eliza Barnett, University of New England**

*I feel the theme of UC Berkeley was definitely sharing, which felt so raw and natural. This was an incredible experience and I am so grateful to have spent the time with amazing people at this University. I am definitely all the richer from this exposure.*

**Robyn Oxley, Monash University**



A community of Indigenous scholars (cont'd)...

*It is truly a privilege to be on the Tour and it is likewise an excellent opportunity to meet and build friendships with the Aurora staff and other participants on the Tour, as they are individuals who are already, or who will be future role models and leaders in their prospective communities.*

**Robert Shaw, University of Notre Dame Australia**

*The Study Tour provided me with an opportunity to connect with other Indigenous Scholars and become part of a nationwide network of high achieving Indigenous people in a variety of academic fields. I have also developed lifelong friendships with scholars on the Tour. It was very valuable to learn from my peers not just about their specific fields of research or work, but also about their communities and experiences as Indigenous students in tertiary education. I am thankful for the opportunity to have been able to present my research and further enhance my science communication skills. To be able to meet and connect with students indigenous to Canada and America was a true privilege.*

**Audrey McInnerney, University of Queensland**

## Finding the right fit...

*I found the prospect of studying at Stanford both promising and exciting. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Stanford, particularly meeting with academics, students and staff. After speaking to Dr Bill Durham, I feel encouraged to pursue a Masters degree at Stanford.*

**Faith Considine, Bond University**

*[My] meeting was a wonderful and frank conversation about the Stanford Program in International Legal Studies (SPILS) and the career/academic stream that follows from it. I came away from the meeting excited about some thesis ideas that we came up with and he was supportive of me applying.*

**Sasha Purcell, Queensland University of Technology**

*Having returned from the Tour and spent some time reflecting on the opportunities available, I have decided to apply to the Master of Philosophy in Biological Sciences (Plant Science) at Cambridge University for a 2020 start ... The MPhil program at Cambridge has a one-year duration and many opportunities for building skills and networks in one of the world's leading tertiary institutions.*

*I would relish the opportunity to study there amongst world leaders in my field and to be able to bring this back to UQ to share with my fellow students.*

**Audrey McInnerney, University of Queensland**



Finding the right fit (cont'd)...



*Aurora Scholars at Christ's College, Cambridge*

*It wasn't until I visited TISCH, a faction of NYU's makeup, that I felt my world fall into the groove of the city. It felt right there – a place I didn't particularly want to leave. I spent close to 3 hours meeting students and teachers – I asked about their craft, their passions and knowledge. But for the most part, I just watched. It was the first stop of the Tour I felt out of my depth, like there was knowledge there I didn't have but desperately wanted ... I could definitely see myself coming back to New York to study, to live and learn in the confines of TISCH. The department seemed to focus on innovation – but less drive towards pure technological advancements and more about how those advancements could enable human progression. This was what interested me most.*

**Jake Duczynski, University of Technology Sydney**

*I could absolutely see myself studying at either Columbia or NYU, with a strong preference for NYU ... I attended a meeting with a Human Rights advocate and professor at NYU. This professor runs human rights clinics for NYU students and one particular project that we discussed in the meeting resonated with me – the students were involved in developing technology that responds to a breach of land rights by miners in a reserve owned by a particular Native tribe. We face so many land issues in WA in relation to mining and communities, so I saw an opportunity to further my practical skills and bring what I learn back home.*

**Chloe D'Souza, Curtin University**

Finding the right fit (cont'd)...

*New York brought out the best of me, and I connected with all aspects of this visit. I loved everything about the Universities I visited and the Academics I spoke to. I can definitely see myself studying and teaching at NYU, in particular. After a somewhat rocky start, it ended with losing myself and leaving my heart in New York City. I do see myself moving to New York to study.*

**Robyn Oxley, Monash University**



*Kasarina (left) and Robyn (right) with Patrick Loftus-Hills and Konnin Tam at the New York Reception.*

*Before the Tour, overseas study at institutions like Oxford and Cambridge always seemed beyond me. The Tour has allowed overseas study to become a very real possibility for my future. I am confident I will be able to encourage my fellow Indigenous students to look at overseas study in the light that I now do: a fantastic opportunity they are capable of accessing, as opposed to an unreality.*

**Audrey McInerney, University of Queensland**

*This Tour has shown me that it is possible for me to undertake postgraduate studies at the top Universities around the world, not only the ones we visited. It has given me the confidence to look at other Universities and programs and apply. This has been an incredible experience and I cannot thank Aurora and my family for allowing me to take this opportunity.*

**Robyn Oxley, Monash University**

*I could definitely see myself at Harvard. My decision however will be highly contested with not only NYU, but another institution in the same area – MIT. Particularly the innovation labs. These places are at the forefront of technological advancement, and incredibly inspiring to see some of the collaborative work happening there – particularly between specialists in different fields. It was refreshing to hear how many of these designs were devoid of egotistical indulgence – and instead focused on the health and advancement of humans, many of which came from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

**Jake Duczynski, University of Technology Sydney**

*I could see myself going to [Stanford]. The degree I'm interested in is looking for unique students and I feel like I am quite different to the other students and would be able to fit in to the department easily.*

**Jacinta Koolmatrie, Flinders University**

*I could see myself studying at Oxford if I were to consider going back to study and complete my Honours year. The visit was confronting in the best way possible, it made me realise that there are still many academic pathways that I can take in Australia in order to improve my potential as a potential postgraduate student at Oxford.*

**Chloe D'Souza, Curtin University**

*Without going on the Tour, there is no way I would have considered Harvard as an option, but now I can't wait to get home and start preparing my application.*

**Josephine Newman, Curtin University**

*Despite my initial hesitation towards Harvard, the medical program is definitively growing on me. After meeting with people in the medical program, I have had to do a lot of reflecting on the possibility of studying medicine, let alone at Harvard Medical School – the number one medical degree in the world. However, after talking to the staff and faculty here, the possibility of studying medicine at Harvard was scarily a reality. This is something I never would have imagined, or thought was possible until this Tour.*

*The meetings with the admissions officer from the Harvard School of Medicine was really eye-opening. This meeting was the first time I really thought I could study medicine and would be smart enough, let alone knowing that I would be a strong applicant for the number one medical school in the world. This meeting made me realise how intelligent I am and how far I have come in my academic career so far as well as recognise all the amazing possibilities that may lie ahead.*

**Gemma Tierney, University of Sydney**



Finding the right fit (cont'd)...



*Gemma at Harvard Medical School (Photo: Gemma Tierney)*

*After visiting [Oxford], I do feel it is a place I could study, that I would be competitive in getting a place and that I could fit in with the labs that I visited. The labs have a very collaborative approach to working, with a number of courses available to upskill in areas to assist with research ... I felt I gained so much from this Study Tour, particularly the confidence to apply, and the ability to see myself living and studying there. I am so glad I went and will be applying to several DPhil programs at Oxford.*

***Minette Salmon, Australian National University***

*I am seriously considering applying for a Masters at Harvard in 2020 and I cannot wait to start the process! I have more family now and I am so proud to be an Aurora Scholar from the 2018 Study Tour. I am all the richer for meeting and connecting with this mob!*

***Robyn Oxley, Monash University***

*I would like to thank absolutely everyone for the Study Tour who made it possible. I will never be able to articulate into words how much this will benefit me, but I can show you by becoming a world class researcher and bringing my skills, expertise and knowledge back home to benefit our people.*

***Joel Steele, University of Technology Sydney***



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