

Stan Grant Conferral Ceremony, speech by Professor Jacobs, President and Vice-Chancellor UNSW Sydney, UNSW, 29 July 2016

Thank you, Dr. Stan Grant for an extraordinarily powerful speech and call to action.

Everyone here tonight has been impassioned by your moving address, in a week when we have been shocked and angered by the appalling mistreatment of Indigenous Australians. Your rightly passionate and emotional speech was a stirring, sobering wake-up call to a nation reeling from disturbing and shocking images of abuse. A Royal Commission will investigate 'what happened and why' - but our task, at UNSW, is to help shape a future in which the lives of young Indigenous Australians can be fulfilling and enriched and their opportunities expanded, not crushed. We are committed to that task.

Tonight we are meeting close to places of great learning - I'm referring not just to the University of New South Wales, which has been here for a mere six decades, but also to an 8000-year-old site around which the Bedegal people taught their children about a culture that spanned many hundreds of generations. Now, as then, this is a place for meeting up - and sharing knowledge. And now, surely more than ever, it's a place for repairing wounds and righting wrongs.

Universities have a key role to play in addressing the most challenging divisions in society. I say that, knowing that UNSW, like most of Australia's universities, has a lot of catching up to do. We still have only a dozen Indigenous academics, under one-percent of our academic staff - that is not good enough. Indigenous students make up less than one-percent of our student body - that is nowhere near good enough. We have made a firm commitment in our UNSW 2025 Strategy to ensure that indigenous staff and students at UNSW at a minimum reflect the percentage of Indigenous people in our population - and we mean it.

As we implement our 2025 Strategy we will be taking determined steps to make this happen. We have created the new position of Pro-Vice-Chancellor Indigenous and are now commencing recruitment to that post; we will develop our partnerships with Indigenous communities and our interactions with Indigenous children in schools. It has been an honour to be personally involved in our special partnership with Matraville High School which has one of the highest enrolments of Indigenous students in Sydney. That work led from our School of Education is improving lives and creating opportunities for the pupils at Matraville - raising their aspirations and giving them pathways to university and other institutions, as well as improving the training of our own UNSW teacher education students. The plans in our strategy are of course about education and research, but critically they are about connection, understanding and community, building the foundations for cooperation and reconciliation and lifelong understanding. I believe that a great university is characterised by the way it helps society to overcome its biggest problems and fault lines, teaching tolerance, understanding, mutual respect and bringing people together to prevent racism and abuse.

We take inspiration from the powerful words of Stan Grant and others from the indigenous community - at UNSW we are committed to embedding Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in our programs right across the university, so that students and staff from all backgrounds will have a stronger understanding and appreciation of, and respect for, what

it means to be Aboriginal - to be part of the First Peoples of this nation. Above all, our commitment is to Indigenous students. We are proud of our Indigenous Programs Unit here at UNSW, Nura Gili, led until recently by Martin Nakata and currently by Reuben Bolt, which is recognised nationally and internationally as a leader in achieving academic excellence in Indigenous higher education programs, research and student support services. The words Nura Gili come from the language of the Eora Nation, Nura meaning 'place' and Gili meaning 'fire, light'. Nura Gili is indeed just that, a 'place of fire and light' - where Indigenous students can come together to work, to share, to study and learn on the traditional lands of three Aboriginal communities: the Bedegal (here on the Kensington campus), the Gadigal (our City and College of Fine Arts campuses) and the Ngunnawal (in Canberra). I am full of admiration for the great team at Nura Gili who contribute so much to improving the access, retention and completion rates for Indigenous students at UNSW and through changing and improving lives.

UNSW academics *are* committed to driving real progress: through the work of people like our world-class criminal justice researchers Professors Chris Cunneen and Eileen Baldry, who highlight the appalling over-representation of Indigenous children and adults in Australian prisons; and the work of Dr. Megan Davis, Professor of Law and, among many other roles, Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples. Last year Megan was appointed by the Prime Minister to the Referendum Council and is deeply involved in discussions on constitutional issues relating to the forthcoming referendum. Our Law Faculty now led by Professor George Williams has a long association with Indigenous issues. Hal Wootten, who's with us here tonight, the founder of the Faculty in 1964 and its inaugural Dean, was a member of the ground-breaking Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. UNSW Law graduated Australia's first Indigenous Magistrate, Pat O'Shane; the first Indigenous District Court Judge, Bob Bellear; and the first Indigenous member of the Federal Judiciary, Matthew Myers. This year, we have over 50 Indigenous law students enrolled and will see our 90th Indigenous law graduate. That is an immensely important part of UNSW's contribution to a better future, through advancing Indigenous rights and legal protections but it is not enough. We can and will do a lot more in many ways through education, research and our commitment at UNSW to social justice, equality and diversity.

I believe passionately that the true hallmark of any great university is the positive impact it has on the broader community and society. We will work hard to develop leadership around social values and social justice, and I think we can all agree that nowhere is this more important - and right now, critical - than in championing the rights of the First Peoples of this land.

Tonight we've recognised the work of a great Australian in furthering that cause. Stan Grant has spoken eloquently of the pain and suffering of his people. He has reluctantly but rightly become a beacon and a spokesperson for Indigenous Australia and he has our thanks and admiration for taking on that role. We are immensely proud that Stan is associated with UNSW and we will do our part to advance the rights of his people. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure now to invite you all to join me in a show of appreciation, a vote of thanks, for our newest honouree, Dr. Stan Grant.