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Aurora Indigenous Scholars Study Tour Symposium 2020





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.



Developing 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 meeting, 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.

Bianca Crisp, Griffith University

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

[Leila Smith] 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



Brisbane



Sydney



Wollongong

Bubble Dinners across Australia with Study Tour participants and Aurora Alumni



Building a Community of Indigenous Scholars

I really realised how many people were here to support us in whatever path we decide to take. [...] 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*



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*

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] 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*



Navigating Futures During COVID-19



Bubble Dinners at the Start of the Symposium

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. 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

What I most appreciated [...] was the safe and inclusive atmosphere that existed throughout the day. I felt confident to ask questions that I would normally be hesitant to ask. [...] 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.

Sarah Munns, University of Western Australia



Darwin



Melbourne



Perth

Bubble Dinners across Australia with Study Tour participants and Aurora Alumni

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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