

Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education: Trials and Tribulations

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Pre-recorded presentation link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uG8PtrL6fvQ>

Commencing in 2018, the *Walan Mayiny: Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education* project set out to examine the roles, responsibilities and contributions of senior Indigenous leaders across the Australian higher education sector. The wider project is underpinned by Indigenous Standpoint Theory and components of Institutional Theory. The project design comprises of two phases. Phase one consists of five stages of interviews with a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Phase two of the project examines strategic plans and Indigenous education statements from universities across Australia, as well as other relevant data. Findings reported here focuses solely on the data collected in one component of a much larger scale project; i.e. the views Indigenous academics hold in relation to senior Indigenous leadership positions. Invitations were sent to 56 Indigenous academics (levels A to E) across the 39 Australian universities, with 19 (34%) agreeing to participate. Through centring the voices of Indigenous academic staff, the perceived value, characteristics and challenges of Indigenous leadership across the sector were identified. Indigenous academics considered three sets of values be critical to Indigenous leadership: visibility, voice and advocacy, decision making and action, and institutional accountability. In terms of characteristics, Indigenous academics believe senior Indigenous leaders need to be resilient, be committed to the wider Indigenous community and also have the ability to create and communicate a vision. Remarkably, key challenges senior Indigenous leaders are perceived to encounter include the significant scope of the role, racism, and in some cases the value of the role is not understood by other non-Indigenous senior executives and Indigenous leadership roles are considered tokenistic. Findings also highlight the varying levels of engagement between Indigenous academics and their senior Indigenous leader, as well as the beliefs Indigenous academics hold in regard to their own career progression and the role senior Indigenous leaders play in ensuring there are opportunities for career progression. The varying opinions Indigenous academics hold in relation to the qualifications and experience required to fulfil a senior Indigenous leadership position are discussed. Finally, the effects and implications of the social, policy and political conditions that are shaping Indigenous higher education are presented: through better understanding the nuances associated with senior Indigenous leadership positions, the sector can best serve Indigenous staff and students, as well as the broader academy.