



Aboriginal Studies: A Good HSC for Students and Community



Cath Jeffery explains why your school should offer Aboriginal Studies and shares student experiences of the subject's personal, social and career benefits...

A great deal!

Perhaps no other subject offers such varied opportunities for schools to establish and maintain authentic relationships with their local community as Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies. At Inverell High School the Aboriginal Studies course has fostered the development and consolidation of a positive authentic partnership whereby the community has a degree of ownership of both the subject material and also student outcomes. These relationships have also provided opportunities for older students to become mentors to their younger peers and facilitated greater communication and collaboration between all key stakeholders in the education of all students.

HSC success for students

Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies is an exciting and engaging course for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The subject offers an opportunity for individuals to enhance their analytical skills, think creatively and critically and develop a comprehensive understanding of both the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous people around the world. Students who undertake Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies will develop an understanding and appreciation of the concepts of shared histories and social justice.

The Preliminary Course investigates traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies as well as other Indigenous societies around the world. It examines the process of colonisation and the legacy of this and the subsequent dispossession on these people up until the 1960s. There are two core studies, Aboriginality and the Land and Heritage and Identity.

Section 3 of the course provides students with an opportunity to investigate a specific International Indigenous community. Students examine the location, environment, culture and lifestyle of their chosen people. This allows students to compare and contrast the experiences of the two groups.

The Local Community Case Study encourages students to develop their research and inquiry skills by conducting an investigation of the experiences of their local Aboriginal community. The focus of this component of the course is to consolidate students' skills in relation to:

- Appropriate community consultation procedures
- Various research methodologies
- Acquiring, processing and communicating information

The HSC course focuses on the period from the 1960s where the world experienced monumental social change, to the present day. The core study of Social Justice and Human Rights – A Global Perspective offers students the opportunity to examine the various treaties, covenants, and agreements which are being worked towards for all people across the globe, as well as the various strategies and initiatives to



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address racism. Students study two options from health, education, criminal justice, economic independence and employment when they conduct an in-depth investigation examining the ongoing impact of colonisation, the current issues facing Indigenous Australians and other Indigenous Peoples, along with the various government and independent initiatives and programs which are focused on bridging the socioeconomic divide.

Students are then given the option to study either:

- **Aboriginality and the Land**, which investigates the Land Rights movement and the recognition of Native Title. Students also analyse the effectiveness of government policies and legislation and non-Aboriginal responses in relation to the ongoing land rights campaign.

OR

- **Heritage and Identity**, which analyses contemporary aspects of Aboriginal Heritage and Identity as well as government policies and legislation and non-Aboriginal responses in relation to the celebration and preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expression.

The Major Project presents an opportunity for students to utilise their strengths and ignite their passion to conduct a personal investigation into an area which they are interested in. It is envisaged that through this research journey students will consolidate their researching skills and knowledge of ethical practices.

Patterns of study

There are also significant cross-curriculum advantages for students who study Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies. Similar syllabus content and key concepts overlap in a number of various HSC subjects. Some examples are outlined below.

Community and Family Studies (CAFS)

Syllabus content	Link with the Aboriginal Studies course
<p>Research Fundamentals</p> <p>Students learn about sources of data from individuals and groups as well as print and digital sources. They discuss the advantages and limitations of each source of data</p> <p>Students investigate ethical behaviour in research practices, including conducting investigations respectfully and with integrity. They assess the importance of practising ethical behaviour when conducting research by considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive research topics • Confidentiality • Research bias and data validity 	<p>In both the Preliminary and HSC courses, students in Aboriginal Studies have to conduct a major research project. A significant component of research and Inquiry methods is for students to develop a comprehensive understanding of ethical research practices as well as observation of cultural protocols which are to be observed when conducting investigations.</p> <p>In both projects, students must acknowledge how they have observed these in their projects.</p>

<p>Research Methods Students become familiar with the following research methods;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Interviews • Case studies • Observations • Literature reviews 	<p>As outlined above, students utilise all of the research methods highlighted in CAFS, both in the Preliminary and HSC courses. Students who study both CAFS and Aboriginal Studies develop not only skills in using such methodologies but also which ones are more appropriate in particular instances.</p>
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Supporting teachers with accreditation

Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies provides teachers authentic opportunities to connect with a number of the Australian Professional Standards.

The standard	How teachers can work towards the standard
<p>1:4:2 Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</p>	<p>Aboriginal Studies provides an opportunity for teachers to regularly consult with their local Aboriginal community. The curriculum content provides a foundation by which schools can build authentic relationships with Aboriginal parents and caregivers and other key stakeholders.</p>
<p>2:4:2 Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</p>	<p>The course investigates traditional Aboriginal society and culture, it explores the effect that colonisation had on Australia's Indigenous peoples and the legacy that that has in contemporary Australian society.</p>
<p>7:3:2 Establish and maintain respectful, collaborative relationships with parents/carers regarding their children's learning and wellbeing</p>	<p>Aboriginal Studies enables parents to have a strong voice in not only the curriculum but also the teaching strategies that will be used to deliver the content. This provides Aboriginal parents with the opportunity to have regular contact with the classroom teacher and the wider school community.</p>

Community wins too!

Aboriginal Studies includes local community case studies as well as many opportunities for community members to contribute, not only to the curriculum content but also to assist in the delivery of subject material in the classroom. At Inverell, it has also encouraged a sense of reconciliation in the wider



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community where residents display a sense of pride in the fact that the school celebrates the town's local history.

The Stage 6 course also provides schools with the opportunity to develop real relationships with pre-schools, infants and primary schools.

Arguably, the most appropriate way the value of an HSC subject can be assessed is its potential to assist students as they move into the workforce or undertake tertiary studies. The following testimonies from the alumni of various Inverell High School HSC classes attest to the widespread value of Aboriginal Studies to students post-high school.

Chelsea's story

From this subject I built a solid foundation of knowledge on the history, culture, and health of Aboriginal Australians.

This has been very beneficial to my career as a job consultant in a community with a significant Aboriginal population. It has allowed me to look at my clients with a different perspective and take a holistic approach in assisting them to move forward. Using my knowledge of socio-economic indicators that I gained within Aboriginal Studies has allowed me to identify the areas that may be affecting my client without them being aware.

The knowledge of Aboriginal Australians' culture has also allowed me to be more flexible with requirements and considerate around times of funerals within the community. The history of Aboriginal Australians and the subsequent fear of authority has also had an impact on their participation with our services and this needs to be considered when utilising compliance.

The knowledge base that I gained from Aboriginal Studies has greatly improved my ability to interact and work effectively with Aboriginal Australians in both formal and informal situations.

Chelsea Thom (Job Coach, BEST Employment Ltd – Inverell)

Alex's story

During my schooling I chose to do Aboriginal Studies as an elective from when it was offered in Year 9 right to having it as one of my HSC subjects in Year 12, and the content I have learnt from the subject has been highly useful in my various career choices. After graduating in 2018 I attended NAISDA Dance College as a developing artist gaining my Certificate III in Dance Practise for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Having prior experience in Aboriginal Studies was of significant benefit during my training. One of core components was Cultural Learning where we investigated Indigenous history, protocols and other issues and inequalities. From previously studying this I found I was able to have more depth conversations with guest tutors such as Carol Johnson, founder of NAISDA, and attendee of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. As well already having experience in community consultation during my schooling through Aboriginal Studies, when we had cultural residence in the Torres Strait Islands, I was able to effectively connect with the community and develop strong relationships.



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After finishing my certificate I enrolled at the University of Newcastle to begin my new chapter of becoming a secondary teacher. Many of my subjects again involved Indigenous people such as Introduction into Aboriginal studies (core subject) and Working with Aboriginal Communities (elective). Both subjects were very similar to the Preliminary syllabus of Aboriginal Studies with additional focus points, therefore once again the subject proved to be of significant advantage to me. During this subject I met another student who also previously did Aboriginal Studies in high school and we both felt noticeably more confident and well prepared in a number of our university units.

Being someone who has begun a variety of careers in the past two years since leaving school every career I have pursued has had an element of Aboriginal culture or education. I cannot recommend enough for school students to participate in Aboriginal studies because it has been one of, if not the only, subject I have had continued to use post schooling.

Alex Jeffery (current university student, Newcastle University)

An enriched educational journey for all

The diversity of the topics investigated in the subject along with the various mediums by which students can express their understanding of core themes and concepts caters for diverse learning styles and interests. The subject offers schools an opportunity to establish and sustain authentic relationships with their local Aboriginal community with a focus on collaboration and consultation in relation to shared ownership of the curriculum.

Cath Jeffery is the Head Teacher of Teaching and Learning at Inverell High School. She established Aboriginal Studies in Year 9 in 2007, it is now one of the most popular subjects in Years 9 to 12. Cath also works with the NSW Department of Education Curriculum Innovations team and the Australian Human Rights Commission developing teaching resources for Stages 5 and 6 Aboriginal Studies and Stages 3,4,5 and 6 History.