University of Melbourne: 2017 Faculty of Arts T.G.Tucker Medal for Outstanding Achievement

Dr. Wayne Atkinson

Dr Atkinson is a Yorta Yorta elder who has made an outstanding contribution to Indigenous education. Over a period of fifteen years, including since his retirement, he has taught a subject entitled ‘On Country Learning’ on Yorta Yorta territory in Northern Victoria. His leadership position in the community has enabled this subject, which involves an immersive experience for a group of students for an intensive period, to be developed and sustained. The positive feedback on this course is such that it has been nominated for numerous awards. It is a unique subject, bringing together analysis of Indigenous nations and culture with politics of land and in particular, the Yorta Yorta native title case.

With a background in community development, taking his Diploma of Social Work at the South Australian Institute of Technology (1977), Wayne Atkinson gained his Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree at La Trobe University (1996) and PhD (La Trobe: Law and Legal Studies 2001). He has held academic teaching posts at the University of Melbourne since 1997, as a consultant and lecturer, Senior Lecturer, and subsequently Coordinator and Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Studies (2000-2007) and as Honorary Senior Fellow since 2013. Dr Atkinson has also taught at Deakin, Victoria, Monash, La Trobe and Australian Catholic Universities.

Dr Atkinson’s work on a major native title claim has placed him in the forefront of Aboriginal experience of bringing native title claims through the courts (in the post-Mabo case era). This work has informed his research output, which has been published in books and journals concerned with Australian Aboriginal affairs. He has been frequently invited to address international audiences seeking to put Indigenous debates in a comparative light. His work covers Indigenous land and
heritage rights: the Indigenous political struggle; Indigenous land management practices; cultural resource management and protection, and the use of oral knowledge in Indigenous local history.

Wayne Atkinson has had a significant impact beyond the University. His publications include:


Dr Atkinson won a University of Melbourne Award for Excellence and Innovation in Indigenous Higher Education in 2013. He has been a Visiting Indigenous Scholar at the National University of Ireland in Galway since 2006.

Thanks to Dr Atkinson’s leadership and inspiration, ‘On Country Learning’ has become a Jewel in the Crown of the Melbourne Bachelor of Arts program.