Dr Wayne Atkinson: Profile on Awards for Scholarship, Teaching Excellence and Innovation in Education, 1996-2019
1. 1996: Indigenous Scholar of the Year: National Aborigines Day Observance Committee, NADOC.

2. 2001: Award for Scholastic Excellence in PhD Studies, Centre for Indigenous Education, University of Melbourne.
3. 2004: Faculty of Arts, Deans Teaching Award for Excellence in Teaching.

5. **2013:** University of Melbourne Award for Excellence and Innovation in Indigenous Higher Education.

6. **2017:** The University of Melbourne: Thomas George Tucker medal, for Outstanding Achievement. The award is in recognition of Dr Atkinson's 'outstanding achievements, excellence in scholarship and substantial academic contributions to the University, the Faculty of Arts and to public life'.


Dean of Arts Faculty, Announcement of Tucker Award, 2017

'The TG Tucker Medal', for an outstanding contribution to the University of Melbourne, Arts Faculty, has been awarded to Dr Wayne Atkinson. Dr Atkinson is a Yorta Yorta elder who has taught the unique and widely celebrated subject On Country Learning in our Bachelor of Arts over a period of fifteen years.

Dr Atkinson's 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. This Tucker Medal is awarded in recognition of Dr Atkinson's outstanding impact on Faculty of Arts teaching and learning'.

Background

Dr Atkinson is an Elder of the Yorta Yorta/ Dja Dja Wurrung Indigenous Nations of the Murray-Goulburn and Central Victoria region.

Dr Atkinson completed his undergraduate studies with LaTrobe University and was selected as Indigenous Scholar of the Year in 1996. His studies are in the disciplines of Archaeology, History, Politics, Legal and Indigenous Studies, which he used to complete a PhD on the Yorta Yorta Struggle for Land Justice, 2001.

For a lifetime, Dr Atkinson has worked in Indigenous Affairs, specialising in research, writing, teaching Indigenous Studies, and in land and heritage reform. Over the past three decades, he worked on Yorta Yorta land and heritage legal recognition. He was responsible for researching and preparing the Yorta Yorta land claim of 1984 which formed the basis of the *Yorta Yorta v State of Victoria and Ors* (1994-2002) Native Title Claim.

Dr Atkinson was recently appointed as a Senior Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he continues to teach Indigenous Studies. He also teaches and is a Visiting Fellow at other Education Institutions in Australia and overseas.

Head of the School of Social and Political Science, University of Melbourne, Professor Adrian Little praised the 'outstanding and overdue recognition of On Country learning for repeatedly achieving 'exceptionally high Quality of teaching scores' (close to 99% for key teaching criteria). The Dean of the Arts Faculty proclaims the course to be 'one of the most imaginative-jewel in crown programs in the country'.

Students doing the course are deeply affected with what they see and learn and with what they are taught by Yorta Yorta people. The course introduces students to the enormous timeline of Yorta Yorta occupation, use and enjoyment of the ancestral lands-60-120000 years. It examines the tangible evidence of past occupation and then looks at the more recent history of Maloga and Cummeragunja, from the 1860s to the present. Students then visit the key organisations in the region that deliver major services in education, health, sport and community based programs. This experience in learning is a transformative process that students take with them and share with other people including their families.

‘The experience is profound’ Dr Atkinson comments and 'one that stays with students for the rest of their lives, many of whom pursue other Indigenous studies subjects which they combine with their general academic studies.’

In his quest for teaching excellence, Dr Atkinson encourages independent learning, rational argument and critical analysis. He often challenges students to take a broader and more lateral approach to learning and to also enjoy the
learning process along the way. When introducing students to the On Country Learning program, Dr Atkinson encourages them to approach their learning with an open mind, free of those misconceptions and stereotypical notions of Aboriginality they may have learned, and to come with a willingness to learn from the Indigenous viewpoint. "Students certainly respond to these challenges in a positive way", Dr Atkinson says “which comes back to us in their inspirational reflections of the course”.

Dr Atkinson has travelled extensively and endeavoured to build bridges between local and Indigenous groups throughout the world. His journeys of learning have included North America, Europe, the South Pacific, central and south east Asia, Mauritius, India, Sri Lanka, Morocco and South America, where he conducted research, collected genealogical data and presented papers on comparative Indigenous issues.

Teaching Indigenous Studies has been a special career path chosen by Dr Atkinson which he says was ‘inspired by his people’. His great grandfather Thomas Shadrach James studied medicine at the University of Melbourne before the turn of the 19th Century and was the community leader at Maloga and Cummeragunja Aboriginal reserves (1881-1947). His great uncle William Cooper and relatives Sir Doug Nichols and Marj Tucker were students of Grandpa James. They are the founding leaders of the Aboriginal political movement, established in Victoria and New South Wales, in the 1930s. Their inspiration as teachers and community educators has continued through Dr Atkinson’s family, many of whom have chosen education as a means of empowerment. It is an important pathway to achieving greater reconciliation and understanding between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians.

‘The power of the voice, the spear of the pen and collective organisation (people’s power) are key strategies and educational tools’ that Dr Atkinson says ‘have been passed on to us by these great leaders’.

To find out more about courses in Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne or read about Dr Atkinson’s international study visits or visit his Facebook page.

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