



Charles Sturt  
University

# Report on 2020 Indigenous Research Summit

A professional development  
initiative of the School of  
Indigenous Australian Studies  
and the Research Office

# Executive Summary

The following report provides an overview of the fifth Indigenous Research Summit held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2020 online and includes thanks for those who attended and presented.

The Summit was hosted by the Research Committee of the School of Indigenous Australian Studies with support from the Research Office. The Summit is an annual professional development event for researchers working with Indigenous Australians. The 2020 Summit's theme was: *Working Online with Indigenous Australian Research*. The Summit opened with a Welcome to Country from Wiradyuri Elder, Aunty Narelle Boys. Keynotes were presented by Professor Maggie Walter, Jessica Russ-Smith, and Nathan Sentence.

Charles Sturt University's Research Narrative includes Indigenous Research as a key 'pillar' of the University's narrative in relation to research. It can and should be a part of all other research pillars: Agriculture, Land and Water; Sustaining resilient healthy communities; Regional development; Cultivation of a civic and just society; and Education and professional practice. That is,

“Working in partnership with Indigenous communities to the benefit of those and other communities, research is conducted by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff with an underlying respect towards different knowledge sources, ways of doing, and ways of being.”

During the Summit, approximately 40 delegates from the Faculty of Arts and Education as well as other Faculties and University portfolios came together to understand and explore the complexities of how research is organised and conducted by institutions such as universities. The Summit examined how First Nations knowledge practices are incorporated (or not!) into institutional practices such as data gathering and referencing. The Summit was interactive with key presenters and panels engaging in discussion and reflection regarding the above foci.

Following the Summit, these recommendations were made:

- Continue with a 2021 Summit
- Ensure broad appeal to staff in teaching, professional, and administrative roles in the University
- Incorporate Nathan Sentence's Indigenous Referencing Prototype into individual as well as institutional research practice
- Explore formalising Indigenous Data Sovereignty practices in Research Office and Research Ethics practices

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## Introduction

The Indigenous Research Summit was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2020, online through Charles Sturt University. The Summit was hosted by the Research Committee of the School of Indigenous Australian Studies with support from the Research Office. The Summit is an annual professional development event for researchers working with Indigenous Australians. The intention of the Summit is to bring Elders, community, and other Indigenous organisations face-to-face with Charles Sturt University researchers, at all stages of their careers, to learn about collaboration and ethical research practice. The aim in doing so is to foster the research culture of the University to be inclusive and responsive to cultural safety when working with Indigenous Australians in a research capacity.

## Objectives

There were a number of objectives:

1. Bring together CSU staff and HDR students working with Indigenous Australian communities
2. Hear from keynote speakers about impactful research and collaboration
3. Hear from key note speakers about research ethics and data sovereignty
4. Create an opportunity for CSU researchers working across different campuses, Faculties, and Schools to network around common research issues and goals
5. Provide a forum for Indigenous Australian presence, leadership, and expertise in research

## Outcomes

The Indigenous Research Summit was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November online with approximately 40 delegates attending. A breakdown of the characteristics of the group is included in Table 1 below. The Welcome to Country was performed by Aunty Narelle Boys, Elder, Wiradyuri Country.

*Table 1: Numbers attending and delegate affiliations*

Affiliation	Number of Attendees	Notes
<b>Charles Sturt University</b>	39	Representing all three faculties. (Including HDR Students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faculty of Arts and Education: 14</li><li>• Faculty of Science: 8</li><li>• Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences: 4</li><li>• Research Office: 2</li><li>• Office of Indigenous Engagement: 2</li><li>• Division of Human Resources: 1</li><li>• Division of Learning and Teaching: 2</li><li>• Institute for Land, Water and Society: 1</li></ul>

- Division of Student Services: 1
- Division of Library Services: 1

**External Universities** 1 Keynote speaker Professor Maggie Walter, University of Tasmania

**External Participants** 2 Nathan Sentence, Australian Museum; Jessica Russ-Smith, PhD Candidate, University of New South Wales

During the seminar we heard from three keynote speakers: Professor Maggie Walter, Jessica Russ-Smith, and Nathan Sentence.

## Opening

Associate Professor Jay Phillips, Head of the School of Indigenous Australian Studies at Charles Sturt University, opened the Summit by asking participants to challenge the way research is conducted and how institutions organise research. How can Indigenous knowledges be expressed outside of dominant western knowledge systems? She then asked participants to position themselves and their interests in relation to the Summit's themes on a Zoom whiteboard (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Zoom whiteboard of participants' positioning and interests in relation to Summit themes.

## Key notes

### 1: Data Sovereignty – In the Online Space.

Professor Maggie Walter was the Summit's first keynote and she mentioned that her first undergraduate degree was at Charles Sturt University. In the talk, Professor Walter outlined how big data agencies set the terms through which data is owned and managed. There is an urgent need for First Nations governance of data in this space. For instance, Best Practice Guide to Applying Data Sharing Principles (2019), produced by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, does not contain any reference to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is not an advisory board or consultation committee. It is about rights that cover the entire ecosystem of data, including: rights to govern collection, management, access, interpretation, dissemination, and reuse of data.

Professor Walter argues that data about Indigenous peoples follows the [B.A.D.D.R](#) framework:

- B = blameworthy, deficit based data
- A = aggregate, may not match Indigenous cartography, Australia-wide, not locally specific
- D = decontextualised, Indigenous peoples are not half of a dichotomised variable with non-Indigenous peoples
- D = disparate, different, disadvantaged, dysfunctional
- R = reductive

Professor Walter drew a connection between colonial era and Protection reports on the plight of Indigenous peoples to contemporary statistical analysis in Productivity and Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reports. Data is an invisible practice of colonial logics. Because Indigenous peoples are positioned as a problem, policy failure is normalised, for instance, Closing the Gap. This form of data collection is insidious when used in predictive algorithms for social programs, which embeds stigma. Research funding in the academy is problem-based and therefore reproduces BADDR as a norm.

Many of the key principles and norms of data are problematic for Indigenous peoples. For instance, open data and interoperability as well as data mining undermine Indigenous governance. There is a need for critical pedagogical approaches that teach data literacy and cultural safety for Indigenous peoples.

It is also important to remember that Indigenous Data Sovereignty has been continuous with Indigenous resistance to settler colonisation.

*Table 2: Resources on Indigenous Data Sovereignty*

Organisation/ Resource	Relevance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• British Columbia First Nations Data Governance Initiative <a href="https://www.bcfndqi.com/">https://www.bcfndqi.com/</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expansive definition of what constitutes Indigenous data</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples <a href="https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-">https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collective rights provisions related to autonomy and wellbeing that are relevant to Indigenous Data Sovereignty considerations</li></ul>

[rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html](#)

- Global Indigenous Data Alliance  
<https://www.qida-global.org/>
- Resources and support for building international Indigenous Data Sovereignty frameworks, in particular to develop own data infrastructure
- Maiam nayri wingara  
<https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/>
- Network supporting the development of Indigenous Data Sovereignty frameworks, includes publications, key summits, and history of Indigenous data sovereignty
- *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda* (2016), edited by Tahu Kukutai & John Taylor  
<https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n2140/pdf/book.pdf?referer=2140>
- Landmark edited academic collection on Indigenous Data Sovereignty, including a key chapter from Professor Maggie Walter
- *Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Policy* (2021), edited by Maggie Walter, Tahu Kukutai, Stephanie Russo Carroll & Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear  
<https://www.routledge.com/Indigenous-Data-Sovereignty-and-Policy/Walter-Kukutai-Carroll-Rodriguez-Lonebear/p/book/9780367222369>
- Landmark edited academic collection on Indigenous Data Sovereignty, focusing more specifically on Indigenous governance and data infrastructure. Charles Sturt University library has a copy of the book

## 2: Data Sovereignty – Outcomes of Literature Review

Jessica Russ-Smith presented on a literature review on Indigenous Data Sovereignty completed for the [Critical Transdisciplinary Indigenous Studies Research Group](#). A key theme from this talk is to reproduce the past (citations) to have research success in the present, reproduces the past to engage a different 'future'. This poses the following question:

- What remediation work are you obligated to do in order to decolonise these structures?

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a process involving deep living and Indigenous voices on knowledge, data, and planning. For this reason, Indigenous Data Sovereignty is inextricably connected to Nation-Building. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is [not a metaphor](#) – it has a material impact on the bodies of peoples and Nations and is central to Indigenous futurity. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is also already embedded in communities and the ways knowledge and data are practiced and governed through relationships.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty offers a critical lens for understanding how data is conceptualised in western epistemologies where data is constructed as property. There is a colonial (and capitalist) paradigm related to the collection and storing of data and the value that accrues to these activities. Indigenous Data Sovereignty approaches work to decolonise homogenous notions of 'Indigeneity', all First Nations are distinct with their own data sovereignty knowledge and governing processes.

University researcher processes a crucial vector for enabling or not the authenticity of Indigenous Data Sovereignty by ensuring Indigenous bodies/staff are present in Higher Education. Indigenous Data Sovereignty goes beyond publications and outputs, it needs to be embedded in all research processes. This raises questions about the need to potentially restructure disciplines and the ways we position ourselves in relation to data.

### 3: Indigenous Referencing Prototype

Nathan Sentence presented on his [Indigenous Referencing Prototype](#).

The Indigenous Referencing Prototype is a powerful form of decolonising as it removes the naming and authorising of observers of Indigenous knowledges in context and, where it's possible, to reclaim knowledge authority for First Nations. It also enables researchers at a glance to establish the authorship credentials of knowledge reproduced on First Nations.

Key questions and practices from this talk relate to subverting the institutionalised authoritarian nature of the western academy. A first step in answering some of the questions from the Opening would be to integrate the referencing system into your work. It is also important to situate yourself as a knowledge holder and challenge the neutrality assigned to knowledge production.

Associate Professor Jay Phillips recommends the following resources to contextualise further the impact of the Indigenous Referencing Prototype:

"It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations." (L. Smith, 2012, *Delocolonising Methodologies*, Zed Books)

The Optimistic Art of the Impossible Measuring Impact of Indigenous Research in the Era of Historic Denial and Evidence Based Policy in Higher Education:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpisrVd0LRs>

### Conclusion

Associate Professor Phillips concluded the Summit by outlining some of the key discussion points from the day. In relation to research, she discussed the notion of re-search and establishing Indigenous data sovereignty from the very beginning of research. She also noted the importance of guidelines and maps for research.

In Professor Walter's talk, she discussed data ecosystems. Associate Professor Phillips posed the following questions:

- [What is your place in the ecosystem?](#)
- [What connections and relationships do you have to facilitate to make an impact?](#)
- [What needs to change or shift at individual, disciplinary, institutional, structural levels?](#)



- How does the interaction of these levels work against 'making an impact'?
- What are the dimensions of your discipline's practice that reinforce normative and normalising practice at an institutional level?
- How is your discipline or individual research reproducing colonial structures in positioning of First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples?

And, not just, reproducing but assuming these structures and systems are neutral, un-raced, ahistorical.

## Thanks

On behalf of the School of Indigenous Australian Studies we would like to offer the following thanks:

- Many thanks for the generosity of the Elders and Leaders who provided their expertise to Summit participants: Aunty Narelle Boys
- Thanks to all those who spoke including our keynote speakers: Professor Maggie Walter, Jessica Russ-Smith, and Nathan Sentance.
- Thanks to the keynote presenters for their willingness to be involved in the discussions over the day and for the insights they were able to share about opportunities moving forward for Indigenous data sovereignty.
- Many thanks to the attendees for their engagement and contributions to the discussion over the day.
- Thank you to Ms Dale Bonham for their assistance in supporting the Summit and ensuring participants' engagement.

## Feedback

Feedback overall positive, with a genuine commitment expressed by participants to action changes in research culture and processes for Indigenous data sovereignty where possible.

## Costs

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Research Office for the costs associated with running the Summit.

## Recommendations

Following the Summit, these recommendations were made:

- Continue with a 2021 Summit
- Ensure broad appeal to staff in teaching, professional, and administrative roles in the University
- Incorporate Nathan Sentance's Indigenous Referencing Prototype into individual as well as institutional research practice
- Explore formalising Indigenous Data Sovereignty practices in Research Office and Research Ethics practices

If there is someone you would like to connect with, or a specific project you would like to discuss or develop, please contact the School of Indigenous Australian Studies Research Committee Chair Professor Sue Green ([sugreen@csu.edu.au](mailto:sugreen@csu.edu.au)).

Report compiled by Dr. Holly Randell-Moon  
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