

A Brief Insight into the Views Expressed by some CSU Students - 2018.

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In a recent survey designed to focus on a diversity of issues associated with examining the effectiveness of Charles Sturt University's Indigenous Education Strategy, 418 past and present Indigenous students, responded. While responses revealed that 'Reconciliation' appears to be a complex issue, many students did appear to consider the process might provide CSU with solutions that would effectively address issues of the past.

"Celebrating culture, the uniting of both cultures to accept what happened in the past and to look forward to the future and what good things are available to each culture. Now it is time to equal out the hardship that indigenous people went through by working together in a cooperative manner to aid each other to prosper".

"Reconciliation is about trust, respect and promoting positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian public. It's also an opportunity to build a unified path and close the gap on disadvantage".

"Reconciliation has a number of meanings for me, 1. Respect (Yindyamarra) for our people to be shown the respect by all, for who we are as Wiradjuri people. 2. Trust to be shown for our people by all. 3. Great opportunities for our people given by the community. 4. Ending racism and discrimination towards our people and moving forward all together".

"Being treated as an equal instead of being made to feel like you're a sub species. Having recognition of what really happened when white settlers arrived and having that (truth) taught in schools. Being a regular citizen vs an aboriginal outcast".

"Reconciliation means acknowledging and honouring the truth of our history as Indigenous peoples, forgiving, healing, repatriation, compassion, empathy, equality, moving forward as one nation. Allowing for Cultural practices to be continued in line with living in the western world".

"Acknowledging the wrong done and sorry business, accepting what the impacts have been, being able to say sorry and MEAN it, and to work together as one to people to make REAL improvement within Aboriginal lives".

Others viewed it as simply another token gesture.

"Nothing- it's a political word that means nothing".

"Have seen it as tokenistic and irrelevant in organisations I have had experience with. This has been a concept that makes non-Indigenous individuals feel better with themselves and appears that the organisation is 'seen to be doing something'. It should be about real action and not just pretty pictures and art work".

"Left wing bleeding hearts making excuses for previous bigotry and blaming current advantaged majority in order to get better funding for their basket weaving masters".

Others appeared to have little or no interest in engaging in the Reconciliation process. They expressed their weariness over always being the focus of attention as 'the' individuals or groups, within Australian society, who are expected to change/adapt to societal rules of incoming individuals or groups whose cultures originated in other parts of the world.

"Nothing. I don't believe Aboriginal people have anything to reconcile about towards non- indigenous people. Aboriginal people have not committed anything against others in order to have to reconcile with them. However, on the flip side of this, non-indigenous people have a lot to reconcile about, with Aboriginal people".

"Reconciliation does not mean much when equity, respect, self-determination and disadvantage hasn't changed for most Indigenous people and communities. A Constitution that doesn't recognize the First Nations People of Australia proves that there is no reconciliation".

This suggests that a framework does not exist to accommodate real reconciliation. At present there is no real imperative for major structural change – or any existence of pointers towards this eventuality. Reconciliation at present, in this view, doesn't demand any significant change on the part of Australia/Australians, to actually reconcile. This appears to be what some survey respondents are suggesting.

Interestingly, another significant point to emerge was that while diversity would appear to be a highly-valued characteristic of what is often called the 'mainstream society', it continues to be unnoticed and unacknowledged, rendered virtually invisible, within and across the 200 odd groups that constitute Australia's First Nations. We are all the same!

So what is significant about the issues that we have identified above as having emerged from the data provided by student respondents in this survey?

1. Reveals that, Indigenous Australians are 'not all the same' despite assumptions to the contrary that are voiced by those less educated or more biased peoples in the wider Australian community.
2. In their responses our Indigenous students have demonstrated they highly value the consultation involved in this process and have quality input to offer.
3. Demonstrates that Charles Sturt University needs to make a 'whole of university' commitment to improving the way in which we communicate with our Indigenous students in all their diversity. We need to be able to clearly identify how our communication strategies enable us to build a vital sense of inclusion and belonging into our course delivery for all of our Indigenous students, in particular, those who are on-line students. Obviously, it is going to necessitate some seriously focused thinking regarding how exactly we will achieve this but it is essential that we heed the message our Indigenous students have delivered through their survey responses. This is the only way in which we, as a university, can demonstrate our commitment to 'Yindyamarra winhanga-nha' and deliver the university education experience will enable our Indigenous students to achieve the life outcomes they aspire to and deserve.