

Taimeka Mazur

Project Officer – Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Aboriginal Research and Leadership University of Tasmania

Taimeka.Mazur@utas.edu.au

Indigenous student success in higher education

In Australia, as elsewhere, Indigenous students remain underrepresented in University enrolments. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders make up around 3% of the Australian population, but represent less than 1% of domestic students enrolled in an Australian tertiary education course. The literature shows that Indigenous students are not only less likely to undertake tertiary education, they are more likely to withdraw from their tertiary studies, with high rates of attrition. Indigenous students face a range of factors that contribute to these poor outcomes, many of which differ from those faced by non-Indigenous students. The literature also shows that Indigenous students respond to factors such as the existence of culturally safe spaces where students can feel a sense of belonging, acknowledgement of culture and Indigenous knowledges, culturally relevant curriculum, Indigenous support staff, academic support and role models. This research uses mixed methods to investigate factors that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, success and completion at the University of Tasmania. Quantitative data is analysed to identify points at which students are most vulnerable to course withdrawal. Qualitative data drawn from interviews with two groups of Aboriginal students, one group who have withdrawn and one group who have graduated from their course are analysed to identify factors that support student success and retention. This paper takes a strengths-based approach to demonstrate the factors that help to improve Indigenous student success, rather than using a deficit discourse. While specific to Tasmania, results have salience in other first world colonised nations. The outcomes of this research indicate Indigenous ways of knowing and being in education can inform the measures Universities can take to support Indigenous student participation and completion rates.