



ASB Community Forum

1000 Indigenous Accountants in a Decade

Never Stand Still

Australian School of Business

"I'm 21 and dream of a day where Aboriginal people in Australia are financially strong and independent; when Aboriginal people are empowered business people, and recognised as valuable contributors to the Australian economy."

Sarah Hyland

ASB Indigenous undergraduate student

In my role as the Indigenous Program Coordinator at the Australian School of Business (ASB), I know we are well placed to offer successful pathways for Indigenous students to access the study and career avenues to succeed in business careers including accounting. These careers can be across many sectors, including corporate, not for profit, government agencies, education and community organisations. When I heard about the national '1000 Indigenous Accountants by 2021' initiative funded by Australia's three professional accounting bodies: CPA Australia, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and the Institute of Public Accountants, with Gavin Tye, Relationship Manager for the accounting bodies, I realised this was a great opportunity for us to meaningfully contribute.

ASB has a close working partnership with the Nura Gili Centre of Indigenous Programs. Together we are continuing to develop forums and programs to create sustainable pathways to enable more Indigenous students to come and study Business in our undergraduate, postgraduate and also our AGSM Executive programs. Collaboratively, we strive to ensure all our Indigenous students are supported in order to achieve their best throughout their studies. We strive to ensure there are no limits placed on our students' potential and to engage them in the many mentoring and industry opportunities both here and overseas.

As Professor Martin Nakata, Director of Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs says:

"Financial independence is at the heart of self-determination."

Well placed within the corporate sector, ASB has many allies and in collaboration with Nura Gili I often consult closely with key Indigenous stakeholders such as Sharon Gray, National Development Manager at Indigenous Jobs Australia, Fairfax and the NSW Department of Education: Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate to develop forums. For example, the UNSW Indigenous Spring Forum is a 3 day residential program held in September for TAFE and other mature age

Indigenous participants to explore their tertiary and associated career options here at UNSW.

On Thursday, 24th May 2012 we hosted our Community Forum on Accounting in our ASB business lounge. Participants included Indigenous high school and TAFE students, ASB undergraduates, community leaders working in business, education, media and government, representatives from professional accounting bodies and corporations. Everyone engaged candidly with the challenges, contributions and positive impact of having more Indigenous accountants.

Following a heartfelt Welcome to Country by Ron Timbery, our Dean Professor Alec Cameron shared his welcome to ASB and our commitment to Indigenous Business Education. This was followed by an introduction by Gavin Tye.

Icebreakers included small groups sharing yarns about personal strengths and how they can be applied in the business world, working on real life scenarios covering budgets, monthly forecasting and management accounting. Themes included exploring how a family could save enough to take Nan on a surprise visit to her family in Nowra, considering June's forecast at the local Aboriginal Land Council, and working as an intern at the NSW Treasury considering agencies' tenders for an Indigenous employment mentoring program.

Panel discussions with Indigenous role models included two ASB Alumni, Anthony Ashby of Ashby & Co. Chartered Accountants and Ron Timbery, Finance and Compliance Officer at La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council. They were accompanied by two of our current ASB Indigenous students, Sarah Hyland and Steven Fogarty.

Anthony set up his own Accounting firm in 2004, having progressed through the ranks in a number of leading Accounting corporations both here and overseas since graduating in 1995. He shared some of the challenges of having been the only Indigenous undergraduate studying for the Bachelor of Commerce at the time and his resolve to succeed in his studies and chosen profession, not least in order to enjoy a good lifestyle for his family, an ambition now realised.

Ron Timbery discussed how as a mature age student he came to UNSW from the TAFE sector. Now, in his current role, Ron builds on his considerable experience in the public sector and his Bachelor of Commerce degree, to clarify and communicate the implications of different financial choices and decisions with community members and stakeholders.

Steven Fogarty shared his current experiences studying as a mature age student and his journey leading up to studying Accounting at ASB. Steven shared how participating in the UNSW Indigenous Spring Forum and the teaching in the UNSW Indigenous pre-program in Business supported his choices and interest in studying

Accounting. Stephen is in his second year of the Bachelor of Commerce and also has an internship with the NSW Treasury.

Sarah Hyland shared her insight into the key role that financial control plays in any organisation, large or small. She explained the importance of Indigenous people being able to influence and understand policy decisions through ownership and understanding of financial information. Now in her fourth year, as a University of New South Wales Co-op Scholar, Sarah has been able to apply her studies by working in industry and government agencies, participating both as a mentor and as a mentee in various leadership programs.

Anthony, Ron, Steven and Sarah, are testament to the relationship between business knowledge and practice as a key driver for Indigenous empowerment and shaping a better future.

As Ron observes:

“It is a great initiative, and if the initiative can realise its goal, then many Aboriginal communities will definitely benefit from the skills and expertise gained by the participants”

During the round table discussions, the national ‘1000 Indigenous Accountants by 2021’ initiative was further explored. Chaired by Sharon Gray participants contributed their perspectives and experiences, considering: How is it going to work on the ground level? How will it work at a national level? What support is needed from industry, government and other bodies? If we established an ‘AIAA -Australian Indigenous Accountants Association’, what would it do?

Responses included:

- To facilitate self-realisation (the next step after self-determination)
- To enrich the accounting profession
- To generate credibility and professional respect for Indigenous initiatives through peer-to-peer interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous accountants
- Accounting is behind the scenes of all businesses and is vitally important if Indigenous communities want control of their businesses. Financial literacy will allow Indigenous communities to take control of their own resources and provide an opportunity for them to be business savvy.
- Indigenous people are the oldest business people in the world and have been trading with other countries for thousands of years.
- To create a support network for Indigenous accountants already working in the industry so that they are able to connect and share with each other, and possibly help deal with the pressures of being a role model.

- It is not about reinventing the wheel but looking at best practice and the decision-making process students go through when they decide what career path they want to take.
- In order to empower individuals we must bring together the right people to the right table from joint accounting bodies, top tier firms, smaller firms and the government. It will involve breaking down silos and pulling resources together in order to build interest, awareness and engagement.
- Educating parents of students on the importance and benefits of tertiary education. It is important for our young Indigenous Australians to have family support.
- Let us encourage more Indigenous Australians to study accounting and business at a tertiary level so they can pass on business knowledge to their communities. Encouraging Indigenous Business will help to create sustainable communities.

As our Associate Professor Peter Roebuck, ASB's Head of School of Accounting shares:

“The thing I came away from the forum most in my mind was the journeys of all those who spoke. The young accountant who was the youngest of 11 and started life on the ‘block’ along with all the others who spoke of how they came upon accounting. The thing they had in common was they were not asking for anything other than a chance. They had all been brought up not to expect things but rather to work hard and you can get there. This is a message for all students and a truly inspirational one for Indigenous students.

The other thing that struck me was the level of genuine support and goodwill that filled the room coming from firms and professional bodies. The challenge now is to get the message to the community that accounting is the language that makes things happen. If we can get the message that accounting is not about control and the negative aspects that have been part of accounting for many of the Indigenous community, rather it can be the liberating language of business, then we will get our 1000 Indigenous accountants”

The ASB Community forum: 1000 Indigenous Accountants in a Decade was developed by Rebecca Harcourt in consultation with Gavin Tye, Sharon Gray, Peter Roebuck, Jeremy Heathcote, Nura Gili Indigenous Employment Coordinator, Maxine Greenfield, TAFE NSW Western Institute, Dr. Kar- Ming Chong, ASB Senior lecturer in Accounting and ASB Indigenous students including: Sarah Hyland, Mackenzie Russell and Steven Fogarty.

To learn more about what ASB has to offer Indigenous students, please contact Rebecca Harcourt, Indigenous Program Coordinator on tel: 02 93859746 or via email: rebecca.harcourt@unsw.edu.au. To learn more about Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs at UNSW check out: <http://www.nuragili.unsw.edu.au/>.