World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) Accreditation

The Wollotuka Institute embarked on an accreditation process with WINHEC in 2012 to acknowledge and recognise the strong outcomes being achieved within Australian Indigenous higher education.

The Wollotuka Institute prides itself on being one of the stand-outs of the University of Newcastle, ensuring its cultural integrity and values are at the forefront of all its endeavours. It is for this reason that the Wollotuka Institute chose to test itself against a proven Indigenous accreditation process, by a well-respected international Indigenous body. The process has attracted a high level of both international and national attention to Wollotuka. The Commonwealth Department of Education has been following our progress and it is hoped that the success of Wollotuka through this process of accreditation will highlight the capacity of Indigenous higher education in Australia as a contributor to global higher education agendas through the recognition and validation of an educational system grounded in Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing.

WINHEC

WINHEC was established at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education in Alberta 2002, bringing together professionals from Indigenous nations across the world pursuing common goals through higher education.

The WINHEC Goals include:

- Accelerating the articulation of Indigenous epistemologies (ways of knowing, education, philosophy and research);
- Protecting and enhancing Indigenous spiritual beliefs, culture and languages through higher education;
- Advancing the social, economic and political status of Indigenous Peoples that contribute to the well-being of Indigenous communities through higher education;
- Creating an accreditation body for Indigenous education initiatives and systems that identify common criteria, practices and principles by which Indigenous Peoples live;
- Recognising the significance of Indigenous education;
- Creating a global network for sharing knowledge through exchange forums and state of the art technology;
- Recognising the educational rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Protecting, preserving and advocating Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights, in particular the reaffirming and observance of the Mataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples (June, 1993); and
- Promoting the maintenance, retention and advancement of traditional Indigenous bodies of knowledge.

(WINHEC Accreditation Handbook, 3rd Ed. 2010)
Accreditation

WINHEC adopted an Accreditation process in 2002, allowing for either Indigenous higher education providers or an individual program to be accredited, affirmed or affiliated. Given the successful outcome of the review the Wollotuka Institute will be the first in Australia to achieve accreditation and the second in the world to be accredited as a provider of Indigenous higher education within a mainstream/western dominant university system, following the School of Hawaiian Knowledge, University of Hawaii, successfully gaining accreditation in 2013.

Our journey:

- WINHEC Taiwan 2012 – Letter of Intent
- WINHEC Albuquerque 2013 – presentation of Wollotuka Cultural Standards
- WINHEC Hawaii 2014 – Wollotuka Self Study
- WINHEC Accreditation Panel site visit at Wollotuka - 3 May to 9 May 2015
- WINHEC Canada August 2015 – Outcomes of Accreditation process

Accreditation review team:

- Dr Peter Hanohano (Native Hawaiian), WINHEC member
- Laura Horton (Dene, Canada), Chair WINHEC
- Mr Hohaia Collier (Maori), Chair WINHEC Language & Culture Group
- Delbert Horton (Ojibway, Canada), WINHEC Member
- Conjoint Professor Bob Morgan (Gumilaroi), Australian Representative
- Deirdre Heitmeyer (Koamu), local representative

Accreditation process:

The process outlines 21 criteria in which institutions are assessed against informed by their own local ‘Cultural Standards’.

The Wollotuka Institute Cultural Standards are defined within five key areas including:

- Respect and Honouring
- Community Responsiveness
- Cultural Celebration
- Academic and Research
- Inter---Institutional Relationships

The accreditation review team will ensure that all core activities of Wollotuka are informed and considerate of the five areas defined within our Cultural Standards.

The itinerary for the accreditation site visit incorporated meetings with:

- Nguraki (Elders Council)
- Student engagement, academic, research, community engagement and employment teams within Wollotuka
- Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Wollotuka Directors
- Students
Also through various activities/functions there was opportunity to engage with –

- the wider university community
- the Aboriginal community

Outcomes of Accreditation

- Formal recognition and acknowledgement of WINHEC accreditation status
- One position on the Accreditation Authority Board, invited to participate on reviews of future applicants
- Inclusion in the planning and implementation of cooperative activities, eg. Conferences, scholar/student exchanges, shared programs/curricula, cooperative research initiatives
- Opportunities for staff and students to form partnerships on joint research activities and staff/student exchanges among other accredited members
- Contribution to and access to database of Indigenous scholars for external review of research papers, theses, grant proposals, manuscripts, etc.
- Invitations to participate and contribute to international seminars, conferences, policy papers and comparable initiatives
- Dual enrolment and examination with the World Indigenous Nations University (WINU)