



THE
WOLLOTUKA
INSTITUTE

Cultural Standards

Our Lands
Our Places
Our Cultures



Artwork Story

Under the watchful protection of Baiame, the artwork's central black circle represents community at the heart of the Cultural Standards. Songlines link symbols of Country, Kinship, Culture, and Identity, and express the interconnectedness of each Cultural Standard element. These overlapping narrative pathways embody movement, reflecting the interwoven nature of living culture, and representing relationality and reciprocity.

With a palette drawn from Country, the colours in the artwork acknowledge place – the lands, seas, rivers, skies, and seasons of surrounding Nations – and also honour the design of the original Cultural Standards artwork. Abstracted patterns and symbols connect to the lessons of each story and speak to song, language, art, craft, dance, tradition, technology, and knowledge expressed through stylised visual storytelling.

Cultural Standards 2026
digital painting, 85 x 85 cm
Caelli Jo Brooker

We acknowledge the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, Nambucca Heads, Gumbaynggirr Country, for their valuable language advice and guidance provided in the development of the original Cultural Standards document.

The Wollotuka Institute acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands within our footprint areas and the lands from which our staff and students are drawn.

We also pay respect to the wisdom of Elders past and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this publication contains images, and names of people who are now deceased.

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Baiame Creator Story

Baiame is one of the great ancestral beings of the Creation period. His presence is felt throughout many South-Eastern Aboriginal communities including the Awabakal, Darkinung, Birpai, Worimi and Wonnarua.

His journeys are recorded in song, dance, art, oral histories and Dreaming sites. During the Creation period he moved across the land, helping develop the landscape and giving life and law to people and other aspects of the environment. When his journey was complete Baiame returned to the sky but appears at different times to remind Aboriginal peoples of the law.

The Worimi people speak of Baiame or Baayama as the creator and one of the greatest supernatural beings. He was recognised as a sky God (spirit) meaning he came from the sky to create the world and had the greatest power of all the supernatural beings.

Baiame is reputed to take many forms when appearing to humans but was recognisable to the Worimi because he was said to be made entirely of crystal quartz.

The Wonnarua people also tell how Baiame created Kawal (Ka-wal), to watch over them. The spirit of Kawal is embodied in the wedge tailed eagle, found throughout the Hunter Valley. When the Wonnarua see the wedge tailed eagle, they know Kawal is looking over them, protecting them.

There is an art representation of Baiame in a cave on the lands of the Wonnarua, while Mt. Yengo, in Darkinung Country is one of the sites where Baiame descended from and ascended back into the sky.



Nguraki Wiyelliko

In the language of the Hunter River Lake Macquarie/Awabakal people meaning “wise person speak”

We, as the Nguraki Committee of The Wollotuka Institute, will ensure that our mentorship and guidance continue to sustain Wollotuka’s pathway in creating a learning environment in which our people can engage with the teachings of the Western world while remaining proud of, and grounded in, their cultural identity.

We endorse The Wollotuka Institute Cultural Standards, which speak to Country, Kinship, Culture and Identity. We are committed to working alongside The Wollotuka Institute and the University of Newcastle to ensure the principles within these Standards are understood, respected and embraced by all stakeholders.

We look forward to seeing the next generation of young leaders doing amazing work at The Wollotuka Institute.



Auntie Cheryl Newton

I am Bundjalung through my father, Donnelly and Little families.

I have held many professional roles at Wollotuka commencing in 1992 and leaving in 2018 to pursue other endeavours. I was honoured to return in 2025 as one of the Elders in Residence. In this space, I hope my strong kinship and community ties can provide mentorship and cultural guidance to uphold the values contained in these Standards.



Auntie Shirley Fernando

Yaama, I’m Shirley Fernando, a proud Aboriginal woman from the Gamilaroi Nation. I grew up on an Aboriginal mission in the 1950s–60s at Gulargambone, under the Aborigines Protection Act. My beloved father instilled in his children “that everyone is equal, no matter the colour of your skin, walk tall hold your heads high, but always remember that respect must be earned, and never forget where you come from”.



Auntie Mandy Kelly

My name is Amanda Kelly and I am a proud Worimi woman. I have the privilege of being one of the Elders in Residence at Wollotuka and I am honoured to be collaborating with staff, students, and community in this role. I acknowledge the guidance and commitment of our Elders and mentors for their work on the Cultural Standards from the very beginning.

The Cultural Standards are a living document that will continue to guide and define how we interact with each other. I look forward to working with our Nguraki Elders and all stakeholders to achieve this for future generations.



Uncle Phil Bligh

I was born in Bourke, NSW, and proudly carry Kalkadoon heritage on my mother’s side and Kullilli heritage on my father’s side. I am co-Founder and President of the 5 Lands Walk. I work promoting reconciliation through storytelling, cultural education, and connection to Country, building understanding across communities.



Uncle Kevin Fernando

My name is Kevin Fernando a proud Gomerioi man from Walgett and Coonamble. My early working life began when I was just fourteen years old in the 1960s. I worked on farms then eventually the State Rail for 35 years. I was determined that my children would get a better education than I had. I sent them to boarding school then on to university. They are both now very successful Medical Doctors. My grandchildren are now also attending university.



Auntie Deirdre Heitmeyer

As a Gomerioi woman removed from family and raised in a cultural wilderness, I felt rescued when an Aboriginal activist encouraged me to share my experiences and become an advocate for Aboriginal students across schools and university. The Wollotuka Institute’s Cultural Standards guide all aspects of life and learning, offering students clarity, respect, and a deep understanding of culture’s strength and resilience. The baton is passed—use this guidance to raise your voice and achieve great things for people and Country.



Auntie Yvonne Dunn

My Family are the Mills Family from Zenadth Kez & my mob are Kaurareg.

When Torres Strait Islander people are in culturally respectful and inclusive spaces we flourish.

We have very strong cultural values such as respect and inclusion and seeing our community appreciated in other spaces is important to building lasting engagement with our people.

Our languages and Island groups are connected deeply to The Wollotuka Institute, this plan will ensure the ongoing connection and relationship as we see ourselves in the space and the wider University.

Sources

The Wollotuka Institute would like to acknowledge those who contributed to the development of the original Cultural Standards document launched in 2013. We extend our deep appreciation to those whose foresight, dedication, and leadership guided its creation, helping to define the cultural essence of how our Institute operates.

For more than a decade, The Wollotuka Institute has upheld these standards, advancing a proud legacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational achievement. Recognising the evolving social and institutional landscape, a review process was undertaken to evaluate the continued relevance of the original document and to identify any necessary adjustments.

We acknowledge those who have contributed to the review process for their important role in shaping the updated Cultural Standards document which will continue to guide our collective practice. This includes the Nguraki Committee, the Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, and community members within our regions.



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IMAGES:

- Baiame Cave photograph (page 1) – courtesy of Muswellbrook Shire Council – workingwithindigenoustralian.info
- Archival Images (pages 4–7 and 20–21) – courtesy of The Wollotuka Institute Photographic Archives and The University of Newcastle
- Tittalik Rock photograph (page 10) – courtesy of Muswellbrook Shire Council – workingwithindigenoustralian.info
- Corroboree, or dance of the natives of New South Wales*, New Holland, 1820, by Walter Preston (1811–1820), copper engraving, hand coloured, 38.0 x 56.9 cm (page 12) – courtesy of Living Histories, The University Library Special Collections – livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au
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Preface

Since its establishment as a student support centre in 1983, Wollotuka has evolved to meet community and institutional expectations, obligations, and responsibilities.

Across its various forms, The Wollotuka Institute has played a pivotal role in advancing self-determination, social and restorative justice, and advocating for academically enriching, culturally affirming education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people locally, nationally, and internationally. Drawing strength from cultural survival, community connections, and achievements despite past struggles, The Wollotuka Institute continues to provide strong advocacy and leadership within higher education and across our communities.

The Wollotuka Institute brings together all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities at the University of Newcastle into one operational and strategic body. This structure provides high level advice and cultural leadership to uphold the University’s commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and engagement.

To guide this work, The Wollotuka Institute has developed Cultural Standards that reflect its principles and goals to define how we operate. These standards shape relationships with students, communities, and the University, and provide a set of guidelines and principles against which the cultural integrity of our institution can be monitored, reviewed, and assessed.

Our Standards offer a culturally grounded framework that centres Country, Kinship, Culture, and Identity, and influence how the University engages respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, knowledges, and communities.

The Cultural Standards also recognise and honour the cultural diversity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In doing so, The Wollotuka Institute acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the Nations on whose lands the University and the Institute are situated.



The Wollotuka Story

For millennia

Aboriginal people have lived on and cared for the lands where the University of Newcastle campuses are located. The Pambalong clan of the Awabakal Nation belong to the lands of the Callaghan campus. In the 1960s Aboriginal people are displaced for campus construction to commence.



1983: Wollotuka's beginnings

A culturally safe space is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Wollotuka (meaning 'eating and meeting place') is housed in a small enclave beneath the Huxley Library in the then Newcastle College of Advanced Education supporting a small number of Aboriginal students.



1988: A new building for Wollotuka

Bicentenary funds are controversially used to build a new Wollotuka Aboriginal Education Centre, despite initial resistance from Aboriginal staff and community.



1990: First Aboriginal Doctors

Sandra Eades and Louis Peachey are the first Aboriginal graduates of the Faculty of Medicine. Over 100 people celebrate at the Wollotuka Aboriginal Education Centre.

1993: New entry policy introduced

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Entry Policy is introduced, recognising students' unique circumstances and community connections.



1996: Umulliko established

Wollotuka is successful in obtaining \$1.63m in federal funding to establish an Indigenous Australian Higher Education Research Centre, Umulliko (meaning 'to create, to make, to do').

1990s: Moving beyond student support

Wollotuka expands its academic offering. This begins with a bridging program, now known as Yapug, a new Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies and a mandatory Aboriginal Education course is added to teaching degrees, a first for a NSW university.



1996: Indigenous Nationals

Indigenous Nationals is founded as a Wollotuka class project. Today it is an annual multi-sport event bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student-athletes together from across Australia to compete and celebrate culture.



2002: Birabahn Building opens

The Awabakal totem Birabahn the eaglehawk is reflected in the design of the building, with the roof span representing the wings of the eaglehawk outstretched. The building incorporates important cultural aspects of the local area and is surrounded by bush tucker landscaped gardens.

THE WOLLOTUKA INSTITUTE

2012: The Wollotuka Institute

Wollotuka successfully advocates for a change of status, formally becoming an Institute.



2015: WINHEC Accreditation

The Wollotuka Institute becomes the first Australian organisation to gain accreditation from the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium.



NOW: Looking to the future

In 2019, the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership is established, securing a place on the University's Executive Leadership Team. In 2023, The Wollotuka Institute proudly celebrates its 40th anniversary and today supports the largest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students of any university in Australia.

The Wollotuka Institute Cultural Standards

The Creation Story of Baiame provides the context within which the Cultural Standards must be understood. Just as Baiame provides a vision for the Awabakal, Darkinung, Birpai, Worimi and Wonnarua peoples, the Cultural Standards serve as a contemporary expression of the cultural essence of how The Wollotuka Institute should operate.

The Cultural Standards shape how culture guides our practice, decision-making, and ethical engagement within higher education, ensuring that Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, and doing remain central. The renewed Wollotuka Institute Cultural Standards are an articulation of cultural continuity, shaped by the wisdom of ancestors, and the values of our communities.

Central to the Cultural Standards are four foundational guiding elements, underpinned by the spirit of Baiame.

COUNTRY

KINSHIP

CULTURE

IDENTITY

The outer symbols are closely interconnected and represent the five domains of the Cultural Standards. The domains are not listed in any priority order, and each domain is underpinned by a set of defined strategies. Each of the five domains is accompanied by a story that exemplifies how the respective standard should be upheld.



Ngarralin Marrung (Respect and Honouring)
Tittalik Ngartun Kako-ai Toe Coquon Bugkulliko Kakilliko
(Tittalik and how the Hunter River came to be)



Ngiyang Nanggalidhi (Community Responsiveness)
Wargan the Wadhayigan (Crow)



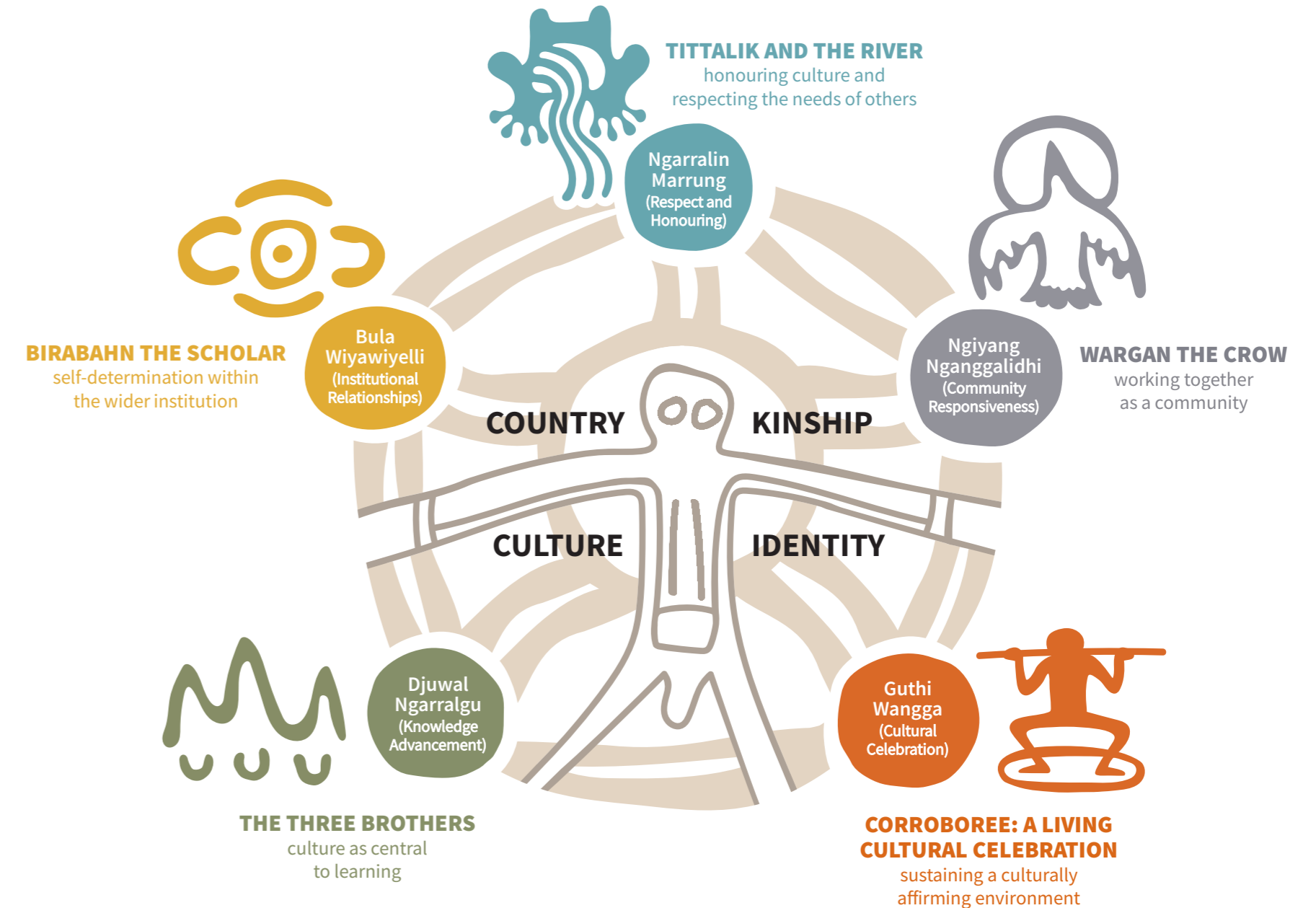
Guthi Wangga (Cultural Celebration)
Corroboree: A Living Cultural Celebration



Djuwal Ngarralgu (Knowledge Advancement)
The Three Brothers



Bula Wiyawiyelli (Institutional Relationships)
Birabahn the Scholar



Tittalik Ngartun Kako-Ai Toe Coquon Bugkulliko Kakilliko (Tittalik and how the Hunter River came to be)

This is a story passed down by the Awabakal people and surrounding nations as a firm lesson in highlighting the evil of greed and selfishness.

This was a time in the Dreaming when there were no rivers, lakes or rain. The water bubbled up from within the ground collecting in small pools and this was where all the animals came to drink. Tittalik through his greed decided to drink all the water in the pool. He began drinking and did not stop until the pool was completely dry, not caring for the needs of others. The result was that he was full to the point where his tummy was near bursting and he could only move a short way away from what had now become an empty, dry stream.

The other animals quickly became alarmed at the loss of water and realised that they would have to get Tittalik to bring some of the water back up. If he didn't they knew that all the living creatures would die. They got together and eventually made Tittalik laugh. The water he had drunk burst from his mouth in great torrents and cascaded down the hill. The power and torrent of the water gouged a deep furrow across the landscape and when the water finally came to a halt and subsided it had formed a deep gully filled with the running water which became known to the Awabakal people as Coquon, now known as the Hunter River. All the living creatures could now survive and enjoy life once more.

Tittalik was punished for his greed. He was turned into stone to remind all those that followed of his mistake. This photo shows where Tittalik still sits today – on top of a hill in Wonnarua Country.



Tittalik Rock on Awabakal and Wonnarua Country near Wollombi. Image courtesy of Muswellbrook Shire Council.

Remember that greed, and neglecting the needs of others, can lead us to suffer in the same way that Tittalik still does...

Ngarralin Marrung (Respect and Honouring)

In the language of the Hunter River Lake Macquarie/Awabakal people meaning “listening/learning well”

We respect and honour histories, contributions, traditions, and relationships – guided by humour, patience, and culturally responsive practices.

Knowing Our Histories

We will respect and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and peoples. The Nations upon whose traditional lands the University of Newcastle and The Wollotuka Institute are located will be respected and honoured, maintaining a pride in place and custodian responsibilities and obligations.

Honouring Contributions

We will respect and honour the wisdom and knowledge of Elders, Cultural Mentors, knowledge keepers, and those who have walked before us.

Respecting Traditions

We will respect and honour all languages, cultures, and artistic expressions of the world—including art, artefacts, dance, song, and storytelling. We are deeply respectful of our own and others’ cultural identities, beliefs, and values.

Valuing Culturally Responsive Practices

We will respect past cultural practices to guide our future journeys. We will work with the wider University to embed culturally responsive practices.

Humour and Patience

We value humour, patience and calm, especially in times of stress. Relationships always come first, guiding how we use time and respond to challenges.

TITTALIK AND THE RIVER
honouring culture and respecting the needs of others



Corroboree: A Living Cultural Celebration

Corroborees are an important part of cultural celebration where food, story, song, and dance bring people together. Corroborees ensure knowledge is shared across generations, relationships are strengthened, and connection to Country and community is affirmed.

On Awabakal Country, the Wickham Corroboree Ground is remembered as a significant place of cultural celebration. Local stories describe gatherings there in the 1800s, where communities came together in a wide clearing ringed by bushland - ochre-painted bodies danced by blazing fires, and great feasts shared afterwards. Even as buildings rose around the site, ceremony continued, showing strength and connection irrespective of colonialism.

Colonial artists Joseph Lycett and Walter Preston sought to capture these moments, their moonlit corroboree paintings among the earliest European records of Newcastle's cultural celebrations.

Further south, on Darkinung Country, surveyor John Mann living in the Tuggerah region in the 1840s describes the abundance of food, the generosity of the local Aboriginal people, and the gatherings that followed. After days of hunting, fishing, and feasting, he wrote: "about twelve men from Wollombi arrived and joined in with the feasting, and a corroboree was held that night. We were not privileged to witness the proceedings" revealing both the pivotal role of corroborees, and the boundaries placed on outsiders.

Honouring places like Wickham and Tuggerah recognise the significance of corroborees in the continuation of our cultural practices, carrying our knowledges and stories into the present and future.



Corroboree, or dance of the natives of New South Wales, New Holland, 1820, by Walter Preston. Image courtesy of The University of Newcastle Library Special Collections.



A corroboree in the Wollotuka Building, 1990s.

Guthi Wangga (Cultural Celebration)

In the Gathang language of the Worimi, Gringai, and Birpai people meaning "dance a song"

Culture is celebrated through a culturally affirming and responsive environment. Recognition and celebration of past and present achievements and contributions shapes both our current and future environments.

Culturally Affirming and Responsive Environments

We will create a culturally responsive and welcoming environment for students, staff and community to share and celebrate knowledge of their language, history, culture, values and goals.

Cultural Guidance

We will seek guidance and direction from Elders and Cultural Mentors to embed cultural celebration and knowledge into all that we do.

Celebration Through Practice

We will design and implement cultural activities and events that foster a sense of belonging to Country and community, while providing meaningful opportunities to practise culture and actively participate in local community celebrations.

Language and Identity

We will ensure language revitalisation is accessible and celebrated, strengthening a sense of identity, self-esteem, and connection to Country.

Worldviews

We will develop strong cultural worldviews to enable the celebration of cultures within other cultural contexts.

CORROBOREE: A LIVING CULTURAL CELEBRATION

sustaining a culturally affirming environment



Wargan the Wadhayigan (Crow)

Our Dreaming stories have been with us for thousands of years, passed down from generation to generation by our people, and they continue to be shared today. This is a Darkinung Dreaming story, told in the language of the Darkinung people.

Wargan was a beautiful and brightly coloured bird. When Wargan would fly through the air, his tail and brightly coloured feathers could be seen by all the other birds. Wargan would continually show off and tell the other birds how beautiful he was and that he was better than them. When night came and it was time for all of the birds to settle in the trees, they wanted to find a solution to stop Wargan the wadhayigan from doing this.

They thought that they needed to talk to the wise “gunwangung” to give them guidance on how to go about this. Gunwangung was very wise and thoughtful, and decided to talk to “maliyan,” the brave eaglehawk, about his idea.

Maliyan found Wargan and put a challenge to him. Wargan was taken aback to think that someone would challenge him. Wargan was angry and said to him, “I am the most beautiful bird.” Maliyan said, “You might have the brightest coloured feathers, but I fly higher than you.”

All of the other birds watched with excitement as they both flew high into the sky. As they flew higher and higher Wargan called to Maliyan and said, “I can go higher than you and I can fly to ‘banal,’ the sun, before you.”

Baiami the creator had cautioned all of the birds not to go close to banal. Maliyan was worried and called out to Wargan. Wargan ignored Maliyan and he flew higher and higher, showing off and flapping his colourful wings. Maliyan began to feel the heat off banal and turned away from her. He yelled to Wargan and warned him again of the danger of the heat.

This story demonstrates how working together as a community, not always seeking self promotion, is vital to the survival of our culture.



Torresian Crow (Corvus orru). Image courtesy of *gailhampshire* under a CC BY 2.0 license.

Wargan still did not listen and flew higher again. He got closer and closer to banal, and it became so hot that Wargan’s feathers began to scorch. Wargan became worried and looked down at his feathers. They were no longer brightly coloured but were becoming “minig” black from the heat of banal. Wargan descended back down to the earth, but it was too late. By the time he came back down to the ground, his lovely feathers had blackened. All of the birds looked in horror at Wargan, and Gunwangung tried to assist Wargan to the deerubbin (the river) to put his feathers out.

Baiami came to visit Wargan. “This is what happens when you do not listen and disobey me. You will always now be minig (black) as a message to all other animals. Banal is hot and you will get burnt.”

Ngiyang Nganggalidhi (Community Responsiveness)

In the language of the Darkinung people meaning “we are talking”

Community responsiveness is valued and respected and is based on the principles of self-determination, reciprocity, social and restorative justice, equity and mutual respect. Fostering strong links with community reinforces cultural values and beliefs as strong culture makes strong communities.

Community-Led Direction

We will support our community to participate in setting The Wollotuka Institute’s priorities and directions, with their time, expertise, and lived experience respected and valued. Community members are considered integral to, and welcomed at, cultural, academic, and ceremonial events.

Strong Culture, Strong Communities

We will support our staff and students to be strong in their own cultural knowledge, heritage and identity to be positive contributing members of the community. We acknowledge the cultural diversity within local communities and honour the richness of spirit it brings to place.

Respect for Protocols and Shared Responsibility

We will uphold cultural protocols and will work alongside community to nurture pride, connection, and the principles of self-determination for future generations.

Responsive Languages

We will support that teaching and practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures are a fundamental requirement for nurturing culturally healthy and responsive individuals who can contribute positively to the growth and harmony of the community.

WARGAN THE CROW
working together
as a community



Story of the Three Brothers

The Three Brothers Mountains (pictured) in Birpai Country is a significant place for the local Aboriginal people of that area and acts as an important reference point in the local landscape. It is a place where they feel a connection to their Country and their ancestors.

The Three Brothers Dreaming story explains the creation of the Three Brothers Mountains and has been passed down through many generations of Aboriginal people. The telling of the story is a creative act so no two tellings are the same, but the general storyline remains unchanged.

There were three brothers who lived near the Camden Haven River near the sea. As part of their initiation, they were required to live alone in the bush for several months before they would be recognised as fully initiated men. After being in the bush for several months they began to worry about their mother and father, so the youngest brother, Dooragan, volunteered to go and check up on them.

Just as Dooragan left the camp he saw an old witch but paid her no attention. He told his parents about her when he reached them, and his father gave him a special boomerang, and told him to quickly return to his brother's camp to warn them that the witch would try to kill them. The youngest brother headed back to his brother's camp but did not make it there by night fall. At first light he continued his journey but the witch was at the camp when he arrived. He asked the witch what she had done to his two brothers, and she replied that she had eaten them and would eat him too. Before the witch had a chance to do anything, the youngest brother hit her on the head with the boomerang and split her in half. He buried half her body in the river and half in the sea.



Middle Brother National Park. Image courtesy State of New South Wales and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) under a CC BY 4.0 license.

Dooragan returned to his brother's camp and gathered up their bones. He buried their bones where the North and Middle Brother mountains now stand, then went to where the South Brother mountain now stands and died. That night a mountain rose up where each body lay to mark the tragedy. The mountains were then named after the Three Brothers with the National Park surrounding the mountains named after the youngest brother – Dooragan.

As initiation is an important part of Aboriginal culture where certain people are expected to attain various stages of knowledge, University students are also expected to progress through various stages during their academic and research journeys.

Djuwal Ngarralgu (Knowledge Advancement)

In the Gathang language of the Worimi, Gringai, and Birpai people meaning “search for knowledge”

Meaningful and respectful relationships with community are essential to the design and implementation of academic and research protocols. Honouring Country and embedding the unique and innovative knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people creates learning environments where culture and education thrive together.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, Learning and Research

We will share knowledge through culturally grounded processes, guided by ethical research and a commitment to reciprocity and transparency, ensuring practices that respect Country, and reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges.

Elders, Mentors, and Community in Curriculum

We will place Elders, Cultural Mentors, and community at the heart of curriculum, sharing local histories and lived experiences.

Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges

We will centre and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges by honouring Country, and embracing language, culture and diverse worldviews.

Inclusive and Diverse Teaching Practices

We will embrace diverse learning styles within our epistemological and pedagogical approaches. We will recognise all staff as custodians and creators of knowledge, to ensure culturally responsive and academically rigorous learning environments.

Staff Development and Academic Excellence

We will provide ongoing professional development opportunities to support staff in maintaining the highest levels of teaching and research excellence.

THE THREE BROTHERS
culture as central
to learning



Birabahn – Awabakal Leader and Scholar

Birabahn was a highly respected leader, linguist, and knowledge holder living on Awabakal Country in the early 19th century. Importantly, Birabahn is also the name of the eaglehawk, a powerful and respected totem for the Awabakal people. Birabahn’s relationship with Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld would prove pivotal in the preservation of the Awabakal language and culture.

Birabahn was the intellectual and cultural authority in his collaboration with Threlkeld. He led Threlkeld through the complex and sacred systems of Awabakal language, kinship, cosmology, and law. He translated Biblical stories into Awabakal not because of Christian belief, but as a strategic act to ensure the endurance of his language in written form. His insight and decisions shaped the entire body of linguistic work that emerged from their partnership.

Threlkeld openly acknowledged that he could not have done this work without Birabahn. In his writings, he referred to Birabahn as his teacher in the language, which flips the usual power dynamic in colonial records. It was Birabahn who held and shared the knowledge, and who chose to pass it on.

The legacy of their work is strongly felt today. Today, Birabahn’s contributions underpin language revival across Awabakal Country. Birabahn was a scholar by any definition, and the impact of his teachings reminds us of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in education, research, and engagement.



Bi-ra-bán. M'Gill., c.1839, by Alfred T. Agate. Image courtesy of The University of Newcastle Library Special Collections.



Magil, Corroboree Dance, c. 1819–1820, attributed to Richard Browne. Image courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Bula Wiyawiyelli (Institutional Relationships)

In the language of the Hunter River Lake Macquarie/Awabakal people meaning “you two converse”

Our relationship with the University is based on the principles of reciprocity, accountability and respect. The Wollotuka Institute and the broader University will work together to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, cultural responsiveness, and meaningful partnerships across all areas.

Honouring Identity and Upholding Rights

The University will honour and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, with self-determination upheld through governance relationships, and a strong commitment to improving educational opportunities and outcomes.

Respecting Culture and Worldviews

The University will recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as integral to all University operations, with their cultures, knowledges and worldviews respected and valued as essential alongside Western ideologies.

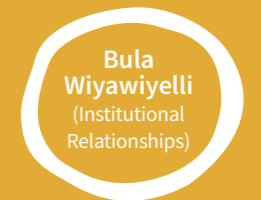
Embedding Knowledges in Learning

The University will commit to providing students with a diverse academic learning environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges are embedded in education, research and engagement.

Anti-Racism and Cultural Capability

The University will commit to fostering a culturally responsive, and inclusive environment free from racism by supporting all staff and students to become culturally responsive.

BIRABAHN THE SCHOLAR
self-determination within
the wider institution





THE
WOLLO**TUKA**
INSTITUTE

