

INDIGENOUS SUCCESS WITH MITCHELL ODEGAARD MASTER

Voiceover

Welcome to “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it” with Dr Katelyn Barney and Professor Tracey Bunda.

Dr Barney

Hi, I’m Katelyn, and welcome to our podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it”. We’d like to start the podcast by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land where we’re recording this today, and pay our respects to their ancestors and their descendants who continue to have strong spiritual and cultural connections to Country. We’d also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where you are listening from today and pay our respects to them.

The podcast series focuses on what works in outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students and this series is a part of a suite of resources developed from an Equity Fellowship I undertook in 2020 that was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. It focuses on success factors that are based on key findings from the Fellowship. Each episode is an interview with an Indigenous staff member or university student about aspects of effective outreach programs. I’m a non-Indigenous woman born and raised on Jagera and Turrbal Country and I’m joined by my co-host and colleague, Professor Tracey Bunda who is part of the Indigenous advisory group on the Fellowship.

Dr Bunda

Thanks Katelyn for that introduction. As Katelyn said, my name is Tracey Bunda. I am a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and, with Katelyn, I’d like to acknowledge traditional owners of Country for all of those people who are listening plus from where we’re podcasting today and pay my respects to Elders of Country, past, present, and emerging. One of the things that Katelyn also raised too was that the title of this podcast series we’re investigating “success” and I think we need to think about that in different sorts of ways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – what does that mean, what does it look like, where does it come from? And, in thinking about it, Katelyn prior to this podcast, I was thinking about, it’s our lived experience with leadership inclusive of our cultural experience – how does that look within our families, our Aboriginal families, Torres Strait Islander families, how does that look within our community, and then how does that influence us in the ways in which we want to be leaders now and into the future?

The other thing that I would add for listeners is that Katelyn and I are going to use “Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander”. It’s a very Queensland thing I know but I think we do need to be respectful of the other Indigenous group – we’ll use “Indigenous”, we’ll also use “First Nations” – we’ll use all of those terms for the ways in which we name ourselves.

Dr Barney

We hope that the podcast is useful for outreach practitioners working in universities, but also we hope it’s of interest to people working in higher education with an interest in student success and student equity more generally.

Today, our guest today is Mitchell Odegaard who is a current University of Adelaide student who attended multiple outreach programs while he was at school, and we're keen to hear about his experiences and the benefits of attending multiple programs. So, welcome Mitchell.

Mitchell Odegaard

Thank you. It's great to be a part of this.

Dr Barney

Can you just introduce yourself in the way you feel most comfortable?

Mitchell Odegaard

I'm a Saltwater man from Darwin, so I'm Larrakian from my dad's side. Larrakia is like the Darwin region down to the Adelaide River, in my second year at university. I'm studying Civil Engineering at the moment.

Dr Bunda

It's really nice to meet you, Mitch. The Larrakia connection is interesting because I also have that Larrakia connection as well; my niece married into the Cubillo family, really well-known, big-name family on Larrakia Country so, big shout out to Larrakia mob for this podcast.

Mitchell Odegaard

Yes.

Dr Bunda

Yeah, deadly. Tell us the story about you thinking about university, getting into university, how you got into university. You were saying that you are studying engineering – why engineering?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yes, my journey was very different. I always set high standard for myself but I knew uni was sort of the big jump. I didn't actually know what I wanted to study; I was a sports enthusiast so I loved my footy and I played netball for quite a while, cricket, everything but soccer essentially. But through school there was numerous camps and there was in particular one teacher who really motivated me in maths. I enjoyed maths but I wasn't always good at it either and she set me up with numerous opportunities to, I guess, explore different pathways and make network connections that can provide me with new interests that I didn't know I had. I started, yeah, probably Year 11, I didn't even know what engineering was. The word 'STEM' isn't... like not too many know actually what engineering is.

Dr Bunda

Before the podcast, we were talking about you were playing for Salisbury – was your high school inner city Adelaide, or were you studying outside of the city?

Mitchell Odegaard

I was studying outside of the city. I've lived in Salisbury pretty much my whole life. I went to Salisbury Junior Primary School, and then I went to Salisbury High School for studies; I did Years 8 to 12 at Salisbury High School.

Dr Bunda

There was real choices there in the subjects to help you get into university.

Mitchell Odegaard

Definitely through probably Year 10, a lot of conversations with, I guess, the school leadership as well as my mentor teacher to find the subjects that would help me and also electives that, you know, will provide me with motivation through those because obviously engineering is very heavy on the maths and that, but I still wanted to have some outlet subjects as well.

Dr Bunda

When you were going through high school, was there big mob going through with you or were you just one, or were there a handful of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander students going through to Grade 12?

Mitchell Odegaard

Through Year 10, I probably had quite a few boys and girls with me; we did a lot of the SAASTA, which is the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy - that's held in South Australia so we'd get a lot of their programs through Year 10 and Year 11 such as the football program, and they had netball, and they've included a lot more in recent years. But we also did the McLeod Program with the Adelaide Crows. Me, and a lot of the others, we did Certificate II and III in Business with Andrew McLeod through Year 10, but then as it got to Year 12 in my classes specifically in the maths and physics and that sort of thing, I was probably the only student, Aboriginal identity, but yeah, it definitely did sort of slope down as it got further and closer to Year 12, more so because I think most of them were doing trades or already off to apprenticeships.

Dr Barney

So, Mitchell, you participated in a number of outreach programs when you were at high school. Can you tell us a bit about all the different programs that you did? I think the first one was in Grade 9 was it?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yeah, in Year 9, I did the Smith Family camp which was just in Adelaide – it was at West Beach and we had conversations with, I think it was just different students from around the state, wanting to sort of learn about STEM. That was with TAFE SA and Flinders Uni, and maybe Uni SA as well, so we got a tour of the campuses and just got some information on the years ahead and what to think about. I also went on – which was my favourite camp – was the Townsville ASSETS camp with CSIRO. That camp was a 10 day-long camp in Townsville. They had one in Adelaide and Newcastle as well but the Townsville one was on topics I've never been able to study or look at before – it was marine science and I think their program really helped me steer into engineering.

Dr Barney

And then you did some other camps in Grade 11 and 12 as well?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yes. I did the Santos Engineering camp in I think it was Year 11 or Year 12 – I can't remember which one, but yeah that camp obviously was probably a perfect time of getting

me actually motivated to finish obviously Year 12 to come back to the uni where the camp was and study engineering.

Dr Barney

What were the best aspects of those programs? What did you enjoy the most out of them?

Mitchell Odegaard

They all were good in their own different ways. I think it was just the broad range of different people than me; not just students, but people they bring in as mentors or as people to speak, and, I guess, give you advice and tell you about their journey. I think they are really important in guiding you on your own journey. The Townsville one, being so far from home for the first time, and the duration of it, I think it brought comfort and actually I felt very comfortable after a couple of days being there because it was so open to conversations and they actually cared – you could see they cared about you and they would pretty much do everything for you essentially. So, if you weren't sure on what you were doing – because we were completing our Bronze Crest Award, we obviously had actual work to do, so they made sure we actually understood the tasks to complete those and get our actual award for that, but with the Santos one, they actually brought in people from engineering firms. They brought in Jonathon from GHD who actually helped me get an internship before I started uni, so conversations like that actually has helped my own journey and put me ahead probably in my classes as well.

Dr Bunda

Just listening to you talk, Mitch, about the camps, and particularly the Santos one which really influenced you to go on and do engineering, it sounds like there was follow-up with you after the camps. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yeah, there was. With the Townsville camp, I think it's every couple of months they will send an email just providing feedback and, I guess, seeing where you're tracking and if you need support – quite close with one of the mentors and we always just have a conversation every now and again, just seeing how each other are going. The Facebook group, they actually, almost it's probably daily they send opportunities in – there's actually one that I want to apply for before Friday but yeah, they keep you updated with opportunities and if you need internships, if you need support – that sort of group with all the other students that have been through the program, everyone can, I guess, access that and learn about it.

With the Santos one, that camp really helped with getting those networks at the university; meeting the team... yeah, getting a head start before you actually start at uni – you've already got the knowledge of those people, who to go to, and what supports are on offer.

Dr Bunda

It's really important isn't it to be able to have... it's like a kickstart isn't it, before you get there in knowing the support mechanisms.

Dr Barney

Yeah, and that post-camp follow-up was something that a lot of students noted is lacking in some outreach programs, so it's really great to hear about your experience in terms of that you did have some follow-up as well. What about the connections you made with other

students? Did you make some relationships with other students that you met on those programs?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yeah, I definitely think I did. Obviously I've got contacts with them; I don't really talk to many of them on a daily, like best-friend type thing, but they all come up on my newsfeed and then we ask how each other are going sort of thing. There is a plan to catch up with some of the friends I made in Townsville because some of them live in Melbourne, Perth, and around the country so I think we're planning a catch-up soon, provided Covid doesn't affect that, but yeah, definitely made a lot of friends and that. And essentially with the Santos camp, I've got a friend who's doing mechanical engineering at Flinders so we always just see how each other are going obviously on the engineering pathway.

Dr Bunda

One of the things that all of that camp experience has given you, and the mentoring that you've been able to have plus it sounds like you've got good support around you, Mitch, for your studies within engineering – what do you think “success” is all about for Indigenous people?

Mitchell Odegaard

I think it's about having somebody that motivates you and I guess, shows you why you should do something. For me, I was fortunate enough to have my Year 10, or my Year 8 to 10 maths teacher motivate me in maths, and show me why I should continue it - even if I wasn't getting A grades across the board, and getting the highest marks in the class, she proved to me that maths is still for me, and I think that's really important because she also sent me opportunities that allowed me to keep expanding I guess, my own knowledge and my networking and that sort of thing. I think that's really important is to have that one person, preferably in your schools because that's obviously the education path – I think that's really important.

Dr Bunda

I think that's really wonderful to hear. You know, I'm a little bit biased here, Mitch, because I'm a teacher – that's my training, and it's wonderful to hear that a teacher was so in turn inspired by their students just to go that extra mile to be able to motivate you into a space, Mitch, that maybe you weren't even thinking of for yourself.

Mitchell Odegaard

Yeah, definitely I didn't think I'd be doing maths methods in Year 11 or 12 either, especially I set myself high standards but doing physics as well in Year 11 and 12, I didn't think I would be doing those subjects.

Dr Barney

So, just a final question, Mitchell – you did a lot of outreach programs, quite a number of them – what role do you think that they had in your transition to uni and what impact they've had on you.

Mitchell Odegaard

I think it gave me better leadership skills and social skills – both of those are really important when you come to university. I remember, last year obviously is a bit different starting uni with Covid, but when I walked into my first lecture, I didn't know one person and it was

quite daunting when it's quite full, and you sort of just walk with your head down, find your seat, and wait for the lecture to start, but I think that is really important when you work in your classes and your tutes, to make sure you can, I guess, yeah, talk to people have the confidence, ask questions, and that sort of thing and I think that's what's helped me be successful to where I am now.

Dr Bunda

I think that's a really great image that you leave the podcast with, Mitch – the reality of there's a real need to walk into university feeling independent, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be isolated, so that was really great, the comment that you gave – it's not just your academic skills, but it's also your social skills as well. Thank you, Mitch, and Katelyn and I wish you the very best with your studies. You said you're in your second year now.

Mitchell Odegaard

Yes.

Dr Bunda

So, two more years after that?

Mitchell Odegaard

Yes.

Dr Bunda

And lots of industry experience as well, so, go well, my darling, go well.

Mitchell Odegaard

Thank you very much.

Dr Bunda

Katelyn and I both want to thank you for joining this podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, and being it”. If you've got any questions about this podcast or any of the other podcasts that you may have listened to, please contact Katelyn on her email address, “k.barney...” – that is B-A-R-N-E-Y – k.barney@uq.edu.au

Thank you very much, and we hope that you'll join us in the future.

[End of recording]