

Exploring the impact of community archaeological theory in the tertiary classroom

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Aims of the project

This Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project aimed to investigate the effectiveness of applying community archaeological theory to the classroom to actively contribute to decolonising the teaching of Indigenous Australian archaeology.

Course Overview

- ARC3AIA/ARC4001: *Australian Indigenous Archaeology*
- A third-year core capstone subject in the Bachelor of Archaeology; a core unit in the Master of Archaeology
- Importantly, the course is a hurdle for registration as a Heritage Advisor here in Victoria – a hurdle to practice as a professional archaeologist

Methods

Stage 1 (2020) was to redesign the **lectures** and supporting learning resources to recentre Indigenous voices and perspectives and to diversify opportunities for student learning through a range of media formats (Fig 1).

Stage 2 (2021) involved redesigning **tutorials** to focus on reflective discussions of archaeological investigations at key Australian sites, explored through scenario-based learning.

Stage 3 (2022) was to redesigned **assessment tasks**. The major essay was retained with a shift in the types of questions. A new assessment task – a series of four reflective pieces in Weeks 1, 4, 8 and 12 – was added. This submission can be made in any format (e.g., written, video, artwork) (Fig 2).

Context

An overview of the literature on the reframing of Indigenous archaeological pedagogy at a global level identified three major themes: (1) the colonial nature of archaeology and the Western worldview inherent in most archaeological examinations and interpretations; (2) collaborative archaeological theory; and (3) the recentring of Indigenous voices in archaeological teaching, learning and practice.

In 2020, Dr Kisha Supernant, a First Nations archaeologist from Canada, presented a case study of her approaches to teaching Indigenous archaeology at the University of Alberta. In considering how I might approach recentring Indigenous voices within my own course, I sought to apply Supernant's model (reframing lectures, tutorials and assessments), supported by Australian literature and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and Community Elders.

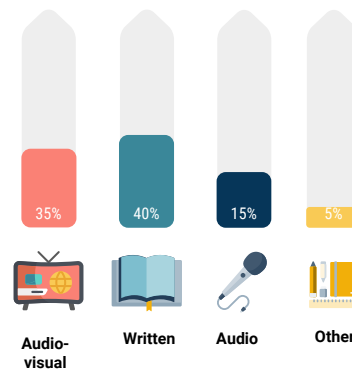


Fig 1: Proportion of teaching resources now utilised within the subject.



Fig 2: Proportions of submission types for the reflective assessments, 2022-2023.

Outcomes

Student-centred

- Student Feedback Scores improved across 2020 – 2023
- Track student engagement through the Week 1 and Week 12 reflections

Student comments:

"I really like being able to submit the reflections in a non-standard matter".
 "Reflections as an assessment create less pressure than other written tasks and allowed us to think about the real-world applications of what we were learning".
 "Good combination of learning styles".
 "Best parts of this subject was the workshops. They were stimulating and had good resources/props to aid the information".

Teacher-centred

- Positive in-class observations: increased student engagement, both in-class and through the reflections.
- Online cohort remains a bit of a battle – reflective of broader trends.
- Enjoyment (!!) of assessment tasks!

Student comments:

"[the subject] was taught in a way that challenged but still respected all of our views."
 "I found many of the readings to be excellent resources in helping me further understand the subject... the reflection tasks were a great way to feel more open and honest in regards to my knowledge of the subject and I really enjoyed doing them."

References

Supernant, K. 2020. Grand Challenge No. 1: Truth and Reconciliation - Archaeological Pedagogy, Indigenous Histories, and Reconciliation in Canada. *Journal of Archaeology and Education* 4(3):2.