

Wuyagiba study hub offers pathway to university

A two-way learning program founded through a collaboration between South East Arnhem Land communities and Macquarie University is proving to be a stepping stone to a tertiary education, reports Madeleine Stenmark.

THE Wuyagiba Study Hub, known as the Bush Uni, is located at Wuyagiba outstation in South-East Arnhem Land, between the communities of Numbulwar and Ngukurr. To reach the Hub you head along the Numbulwar Road and follow a rough and sandy track across floodplains, creek beds and stone country, past the buffalo and through grevillea and banksia scrub until you see the secluded coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Hub is part of the Australian Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment 'Regional Study Hub Program'.

This year the Hub is delivering a Certificate 1 in Mechanics (in partnership with Charles Darwin University) and two 10-week 'pre-university' courses of first year university level subjects (with Macquarie University).

The learning is two-way,

with students taught courses based on both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal information.

During their study, all students and staff live at the Hub.

Accommodation and classrooms are beachside tents, which have been installed by the Hub's staff and students.

The Bush Uni started in 2018 following years of planning by Elders, including the late Cherry Wulumirr Daniels OAM and former Ngukurr school principal Kevin Rogers and his wife Helen, with Emilie Ens from Macquarie University.

That year, the Federal Government's Department of Education released a Regional Study Hub funding package, with Wuyagiba being one of 23 hubs across Australia that was initially funded. The Study Hub funding is administered locally by the Wuyagiba Bush Hub Aboriginal Corporation that was set up to run the Hub, in partnership with



Students Mickesia Daniels, Tonia Roy and Basil Wurrarama study in the evening hours.

Macquarie University.

Throughout the locally designed two-way pathway courses, students work from an evenly-split timetable. They engage in on Country learning with Elders, and learn academic skills, such as different writing styles, referencing, using Excel, mapping and online research, from Macquarie staff.

Ms Ens, Wuyagiba Co-Leader and Macquarie University Senior Lecturer, said students thrive in the two-way learning system.

"We are trying to mimic university education in a culturally supportive context, so we do all the courses through the Macquarie University's online system," she told *Land Rights News*.

"The students are exposed to that digital interface...

it's so foreign when they start out, but by the end they're all over it."

Cultural units are taught by Mr and Mrs Rogers, Heather Ponto, Annette Daniels, Dean-Austin Bara and Cynthia Turner, as well as other local experts.

The cultural units focus on traditional aspects of Aboriginal culture and Indigenous science.

"It seems old fashioned but it's very important that we maintain our cultural aspects," said Mr Rogers.

"We teach them about bush medicine, bush tucker, fire, seasons, tribal relationships and all that. It's pretty exciting, we're doing a language revitalisation thing too."

Two new cultural units taught by the Wuyagiba team have been accredited

through Macquarie University: South East Arnhem Land Caring for Country and Culture, and Indigenous Science. Both have full credit points that count towards a university degree once students graduate from the Bush Uni, just like the academic units taught at Wuyagiba, which are Academic Communication in the Social Sciences and Humanities, and Environment Skills.

"That's what this is all about - building both-ways skills and qualifications of local Aboriginal students so they can confidently run their communities," said Ms Ens.

"Students can study and get certificates at Wuyagiba, and we support them if they want to continue with further study at University



Students at the Wuyagiba Study Hub can study a 10-week course of first year university-level subjects or a Certificate 1 in Mechanics.

for a Bachelor degree so they can take on the big jobs in town. We want to do as many units of study that we can at Wuyagiba so students spend more time on Country learning with Elders. But some specialist studies will

near Maningrida.

"I'm trying to get some of the ideas from here to take back to Maningrida so I can help the young people there to start learning both ways - whitefella way and blackfella way. That's my

'We teach them about bush medicine, bush tucker, fire, seasons, tribal relationships and all that. It's pretty exciting,' Kevin Rogers

need to be done on campus." At 18, Ritney Manggura is one of the youngest students at Wuyagiba. She wants to study law.

"I want to help families when they get stuck having problems with police," said Ms Manggura, who comes from the nearby community of Numbulwar.

Meanwhile, Russell Brian said he signed up to the 10-week course in the hope of gaining entry to Macquarie University's business course.

In the future, he'd like to start his own education hub at his family outstation at Bulukarduru,

hope - to be a community leader," he said.

Wuyagiba's second 10-week course began in September.

For the Bush Hub to grow, Mr Rogers said the facility needs new water tanks and an all-weather road into the community.

He is optimistic that continued support from communities and Government funding will get them there.

"I encourage all young Aboriginal people to come in, do their studies, get academic qualifications then come back and help the community," he said.



Students Russell Brian, Basil Wurrarama and Tonia Roy.



Student and staff live in self-installed tents at Wuyagiba outstation.



Wuyagiba Study Hub co-ordinators Kevin and Helen Rogers.