



MEDIA RELEASE

**March 2017**

## **Ground breaking achievements as GUC launches into the 2017 academic year**

Local university student numbers continue to grow in the Mid West with near 100 new students beginning their studies at Geraldton Universities Centre. The 2017 intake sees the number of students studying at GUC breaking through the 300 mark for the first time.

GUC is also celebrating a record 2017 intake of Aboriginal students, with a cohort of 13 new students offered places across the spectrum of CQUniversity and University of Southern Queensland courses supported through GUC, bringing to a total of 26 the number of current Aboriginal students studying at GUC across the 12 university programs – again another record.

“Building aspiration and increasing the numbers of Aboriginal students at GUC to reflect the percentage of Aboriginal people in our wider population is a key aim at GUC. Each year we are getting closer and we hope to reach parity with the general community in the coming Terms,” GUC Chair Steve Douglas said.

“In 2017, along with a cohort of mature aged Aboriginal students there has been an exciting increase in the number of school leavers entering supported university education at GUC with five young Aboriginal students starting in courses,” said GUC Director Natalie Nelmes.

To date GUC has seen 14 Aboriginal graduates in programs including Nursing, Social Science, Indigenous Sector Management, Business Accounting, Early Childhood and Primary Education. Another 2 students will graduate in April at the annual GUC graduation ceremony, including Rianna Pension, who has recently completed a Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood Education).

“I cannot explain my excitement to graduate! I was so naughty and peeked at my testamur when it came in the mail before taking it to GUC. It brought a tear to my eye. To think after a hard 4 years it has all paid off and we will be formally receiving our certificates stating that we are qualified teachers for the future generations, it is so exciting,” Ms Pension said.

Having come through the CQUniversity STEPS-Bridging course, Rhianna is a shining example of the benefits of the pathways into university programs that GUC and its strategic and university partners have developed, allowing students not only to enter courses through ATAR but also by articulating via university preparation programs or TAFE qualifications.

Another student who has taken advantage of such local educational pathways is Malcolm Maloney, who is continuing into CQUniversity's Bachelor of Education (Primary) after successfully completing its STEPS Bridging course in 2016.

“Completing STEPS made me confident going into my degree because the support offered was amazing, GUC do so much to encourage and help you along your journey,” said Mr Maloney. “I have been working in education as an Aboriginal & Islander Education Officer for a few years and now I would like to be at the front of the classroom teaching.”



Central Regional TAFE Diploma graduate Heidi Rosenthal has articulated into the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours). Not only did completing her Diploma get her entrance into the CQUniversity course at GUC, it got her the equivalent of one-year credit, reducing the length she will need to take to complete the degree.

"Two years ago I walked into TAFE on enrolment day not knowing what I wanted to be or do. After completing my Cert IV in Community and Youth Services I went into the Diploma level and from there was determined and committed to go all the way," Ms Rosenthal explained. "It has given me the opportunity to follow my education journey, right here in my home town. If I had to move to the city to follow my dream, I probably would not have gone."

"The ability to study locally at home with family, friends and work is one of the biggest drawcards of GUC's mixed mode supported distance education model. This also rings true particularly with Aboriginal students," said Ms Nelmes.

1<sup>st</sup> year USQ Bachelor of Nursing student Kyah Henderson left home to study in Perth last year but this year has come home to continue her studies. "After a year of studying away I realised that I wanted to be closer to home and family and GUC made it easy for me to access the course I wanted." Ms Henderson said.

"As an Indigenous person I strongly believe in staying connected to country and culture and studying locally allows me to do this," fellow Bachelor of Nursing student Allison Morgan explained further. "I am studying Nursing because as an Indigenous person I have seen the effects of chronic illnesses that prevail among Aboriginal people, including in my own family. I wish to advocate for people and work towards making a change and closing the gap."

For further information regarding Aboriginal student support and university entry at GUC contact Tiambra Calvin on 9920 4409 or email [asso@guc.edu.au](mailto:asso@guc.edu.au)

## Ends ...

**Photo Credit:** Students from the 2017 intake of Aboriginal students with Rianna Pension and Tiambra Calvin (Aboriginal Student Support Officer – GUC) and Zoe Harrington (2<sup>nd</sup> year Bachelor of Nursing). From left to right – Lyric Papertalk, Brittney Councillor, Heidi Rosenthal, Rianna Pension, Peter Gray, Dana Pickett, Shakeesha Darcy, Tiambra Calvin and Zoe Harrington.