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## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA'S *INDIGENOUS STRATEGY FIRST ANNUAL REPORT*

The Union of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students is deeply concerned following the release of Universities Australia's *Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report*. The report states that our students are less likely than our non-Indigenous counterparts to complete their studies, with nine-year completion rates for our students sitting at around 47%. This is in stark contrast to the 74% completion rates of non-Indigenous students.

What remains unclear from reading this report are the complex reasons why Indigenous students are not completing their studies. Financial stress, family and community commitments and unsafe environments are all reasons why Indigenous students are completing their studies at lower rates than non-Indigenous students. UATSIS hopes that through our Indigenous student survey we can tell these stories, and help get more of our mob to graduation day.

Despite this, there are many reasons to celebrate Indigenous students in the tertiary education sector. When our mob graduate from university, we are more likely to be in full-time employment within four months and on average, earn a higher salary than our non-Indigenous counterparts.

The UATSIS President, Braedyn Edwards, stated that this report can help tell a story, but that it isn't the whole story.

"Our mob are strong and resilient, passionate and hard-working. This is clear from our history on this continent. Statistics like these can oftentimes paint a poor picture of Indigenous students, but I believe it instead reflects poorly on institutions. People get caught up in the importance of getting our mob enrolled in university, but what are universities doing to help keep them there?"

"The role that Indigenous student support centres play is central to the success of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who walk through their doors. I know some of the women and men (Aunties and Uncles) who run these centres and can speak to the dedication they have for our mob. Their support for our students shouldn't be questioned," he said.

Braedyn instead points the finger at institutions. "Broadly speaking, Indigenous peoples, histories and cultures are still not respected within universities; Indigenous knowledges and perspectives should be seen as equal to, or better than, western tradition. We constantly hear stories of racism and ignorance in the classroom. Is this another reason why students aren't completing their studies?"

UATSIS will be conducting a national survey of undergraduate Indigenous students this year to better understand their experiences at university.

*For further comment:*

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