

Indigenous Health Scholars attend the MAI Conference

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The recent *Māori and Indigenous Doctoral (MAI) Conference* hosted by Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi (Indigenous University), Whakatāne, New Zealand, addressed the contribution of Indigenous doctoral research to advancements of Māori.

The Conference held from 4-6th November 2011 was attended by a Queensland University of Technology (QUT) delegation comprised of both Indigenous PhD students and graduates, mostly from the Faculty of Health. Associate Professor Bronwyn Fredericks was invited as a keynote speaker to the event due in part to the relationship she formed, as part of her Australian Endeavour Award. The accompanying group comprised Dr. Mick Adams, Ms. Odette Best, Ms. Deb Duthie, Ms. Christine Peacock and Ms. Melissa Walker. Each delegate was required to offer a presentation which highlighted their PhD studies.

The group attend a Māori Cross Cultural Awareness session prior to the journey. This session was organised through the Indigenous Studies Research Network (ISRN) and provided delegates with a foundation for their forthcoming interaction with Māori at such an event.

Upon arrival to New Zealand and before the commencement of the *MAI Conference*, the delegates had the privilege to be guided through Whakatane, visiting cultural sites whilst being provided with detailed information of cultural practices. On the

same day, delegates were invited to participate in Powhiri (Welcome ceremony) at Wairaka Marae. Odette Best asserted that this “external cultural context was provided in an intimate way, creating a trusting environment” and underpinning the significance of the conference to follow.

The conference allowed the delegates to consider their research in a broader context, beyond academia and extending into community and health and cultural policy. Further, it proved elemental in developing an international network between Māori and Indigenous Australian PhD researchers. PhD Candidate Melissa Walker emphasised this; “I had the pleasure of speaking with numerous PhD students which allowed us to share our experiences and more importantly discuss each other’s research and approaches in length”.

Upon their return, each delegate expressed the need for a similar conference bringing together Indigenous PhD students from across Australia to discuss their research within a negotiated space. Considering this, it is hoped the delegates may have the opportunity to reciprocate the profound generosity of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi (Indigenous University) at a time in the near future.

Photo:

Melissa Walker and Odette Best