Terminology in Aboriginal Studies

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| Glossary term | Definition | Syllabus topics |
| Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples | Aboriginal Peoples are the first peoples of Australia and are represented by over 250 language groups, each associated with a particular Country or territory. Torres Strait Islander Peoples are represented by five major island groups and are associated with island territories to the north of Australia’s Cape York which were annexed by Queensland in 1879.An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who:* is of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander descent
* identifies as an Aboriginal person and or Torres Strait Islander person, and
* is accepted as such by the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander community in which they live.
 | All |
| Aboriginal enterprise | An enterprise is an economically self-sustaining entity, such as a business or service. Aboriginal enterprises can be owned by individuals, communities, or as an extension of an Aboriginal organisation, and are usually staffed by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal enterprises can be social enterprises or based on certain protocols such as benefit sharing. | Option 1 Core 2 Option 4 Option 6 |
| Aboriginal organisation | An Aboriginal organisation is an entity with a particular purpose which is initiated, managed and maintained by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal organisations usually provide services for the direct or indirect benefit of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal organisations are usually not-for-profit, and may be reliant on Aboriginal community member volunteers. Aboriginal organisations include NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs), Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), and Language and culture centres. | Option 1 Core 2 Option 6 |
| autonomy | Acting independently, self-government. | Core 2 Option 1 Option 6 Option 9 |
| colonisation | A process by which a different system of government is established by a nation over another Peoples. It involves the colonial power asserting and enforcing its sovereignty, or right to govern, according to its own laws, rather than according to the laws of the colonised. | Core 2 Option 2 Option 3 Option 5 Option 7 |
| community | Community is about interrelatedness and belonging, and is central to Aboriginality. An Aboriginal person may belong to more than one language group and community. Important elements of a community are Country, family ties and shared experience. The use of ‘community(ies)’ in the syllabus indicates that any one location may in fact consist of several communities. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 4 Option 8 Option 9 |
| consultation | To seek and act upon advice from relevant Aboriginal Peoples, community members and or knowledge holders throughout a process. Further information about community consultation can be found in the background section of the syllabus. | All  |
| contemporary | Within the timeframe from the 1960s to the present or belonging to or occurring in the present. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 8 |
| copyright | The protection provided to the creators of original works that offers a legal framework for the control and reproduction or transmission of their creations. Copyright protects written works, computer programs and artistic works such as architecture, broadcasts, computer programs, drawings, films, music, paintings, photographs, sound recordings, and videos (see Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property). | Option 1 Option 2 |
| corroboree | An Aboriginal assembly of sacred, festive, or war-like character. Derived from Dharug, Garaabara. (Macquarie Dictionary) | Option 3 |
| Country | Used to describe a specific area of a nation or clan including physical, linguistic, and spiritual features. Aboriginal communities’ cultural associations with their Country may include or relate to languages, cultural practices, knowledge, songs, stories, art, paths, landforms, flora, fauna, and minerals. These cultural associations may include custodial relationships with particular landscapes such as land, sea, sky, rivers as well as the intangible places associated with the Dreaming(s). Custodial relationships are extremely important in determining who may have the capacity to authentically speak for their Country. | Core 1 Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 5 Option 7 Option 9 |
| criminal justice system | The people, processes, institutions, and laws associated with the defining, monitoring and enforcement of rules. | Option 4 Option 9 |
| cultural appropriation | Use of another’s knowledge, ideas, property, and material. Artistic appropriation draws on existing styles or elements and incorporates these into new contexts. While not necessarily unlawful, the appropriation of Aboriginal images, styles and themes is a concern of many Aboriginal artists since Dreaming figures, totems, symbols (for example; waterholes, tracks) or styles (for example; cross-hatching, x-ray, dotting) that are embedded with particular and sensitive cultural meaning have been taken and reused without permission, fair payment or acknowledgement. In these circumstances, the Aboriginal artists (and their communities) view appropriation as property theft. It is therefore potentially offensive and; at its worst, it is a practice that undermines Aboriginal cultures and trades on the cultural capital built up by others (see Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, copyright). | Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 |
| cultural heritage | The continuity, from one generation to another, of a group’s culture, values, and attitudes, including knowledge, language, arts, rituals, performances, sites, and objects. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 |
| cultural ownership | The rights to self-determine the use of cultural heritages, knowledges and cultural properties created in the past, present and future. Cultural ownership apply but is not limited to objects, knowledge, performance works, literary works, art works, sacred sites, and documentation held in archives. Cultural ownership can also apply to individual ownership and collective ownership of these things (see Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, Indigenous research methodologies). | Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 |
| cultural safety | The measure of conditions in an environment that have an impact on a person/peoples’ feelings of safety and security regarding cultural identity. High levels of cultural safety promote the strengthening of culture, identity, and community for a person/Peoples. | Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 |
| culture | The accepted and traditionally patterned ways of behaving and a set of common understandings shared by members of a group or community. Includes land, language, ways of living and working and artistic expression, relationship, and identity. | All |
| customary | Relating to customs or practices associated with a particular culture, society, place or set of circumstances. Similar to the term ‘traditional’, ‘customary’ is used in reference to aspects of Aboriginal cultures in pre-invasion contexts (see traditional). | Core 1 Option 2 Option 9 |
| customary law | Aboriginal Peoples have a complex system of ‘laws’ that represent accepted practices, responsibilities and interactions. As there are no formal codified laws and formal courts under customary law, problems regarding the law are handled by Elders – the most knowledgeable people in the community (see lore). | Core 1 Option 9 |
| data | A general term for a set of observations and measurements collected during any type of systematic investigation. Primary data is data collected by the user. Secondary data is data collected by others. Sources of secondary data include web-based data sets, the media, books, scientific papers, etc. | Option 1 Option 8 Option 9 |
| disability | An umbrella term for any or all of the following components:* impairments: challenges in body function or structure
* activity limitations: difficulties in executing activities
* participation restrictions: challenges an individual may experience in involvement in life situations. (World Health Organisation)
 | Core 2 Option 4 |
| discrimination | The Australian Human Rights Commission defines discrimination as:‘Discrimination happens when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics. … It is also discrimination when an unreasonable rule or policy applies to everyone but has the effect of disadvantaging some people because of a personal characteristic they share.Discrimination can be against the law if it is based on a person’s:* age
* disability
* race and culture, including national or ethnic origin, immigrant status, or religion
* sex, pregnancy, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities or breastfeeding
* sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.’
 | Option 4 Option 8 Option 8 Option 9 |
| dislocation | In this syllabus, ‘dislocation’ refers to Aboriginal Peoples being taken away or forced from their land, their economic base, their way of life and cultures, often moved onto missions or reserves. | Core 1 Option 1 Option 5 Option 9 |
| dispossession | In this syllabus, ‘dispossession’ refers to Aboriginal Peoples being denied ownership and or access to their land. The term is used in both the legal sense, for example terra nullius, and the practical sense, for example dislocation (see terra nullius, dislocation). | Core 1 Option 1 Option 9 |
| diversity | Differences that exist within a group, for example; age, sex, gender, gender expression, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, ability, disability, body shape and composition, spirituality, religion, learning differences, socioeconomic background, values, and experience. | Core 1 Option 3 Option 5 Option 8 |
| Dreaming(s) | The Dreaming has different meanings for different Aboriginal groups. The Dreaming can be seen as the embodiment of Aboriginal creation which gives meaning to everything; the essence of Aboriginal beliefs about creation and spiritual and physical existence. It establishes the rules governing relationships between the people, the land and all things for Aboriginal Peoples. Certain cultural aspects are also associated with specific Dreamings. The Dreaming is linked to the past, the present and the future. For this reason, ‘Dreaming’ is preferred to ‘Dreamtime’, the latter suggesting an exclusively historic phenomenon. Where appropriate, refer to Aboriginal language names for the Dreaming. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 4 Option 5 Option 7 |
| Elders | Elders are custodians of knowledge. They are chosen and accepted by their own communities and are highly respected. They are not necessarily older members of the community; they often hold particular knowledges important for the wellbeing of their community. | Core 1 Option 7 Option 9 |
| environment | The surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates. An environment may also be natural, managed, constructed or digital. | Option 5 Option 7 |
| ethical research | Ethical research practices are central to the research process. They have been established to ensure that research is undertaken in appropriate ways so that both the researched and users of research have confidence in how the research was undertaken, and the trustworthiness of its reported outcomes. When working with Aboriginal Peoples, these would include using appropriate protocols and being knowledgeable of the particular concerns that these communities may have when people are being researched (see Indigenous research methodology). | All |
| family | Family is often more broadly defined within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture than non-Aboriginal culture. Those involved in children’s lives, and helping to raise them, commonly include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, and members of the community who are considered to be family. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 8 Option 9 |
| health | ‘A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (World Health Organization 1948). | Core 2 Option 8 |
| human rights | The United Nations defines human rights as:‘Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination.’ Human rights are those possessed by individuals. They are universal (possessed by all human beings) and are inalienable (they cannot be overridden by the public interest). | Core 1 Core 2 Option 9 |
| identity | The belief in, and acceptance of, who you are as determined by your personal and cultural experiences and affiliations. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 8  |
| Indigenous | Internationally recognised term that refers to the first people of a land. In New South Wales the term ‘Aboriginal person or Peoples’ is preferred (see Indigenous Peoples). | All |
| Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) | Includes, but is not limited to, objects, sites, cultural knowledge, cultural expression, and the arts, that have been transmitted or continue to be transmitted through generations as belonging to a particular Indigenous group or Indigenous people as a whole or their territory (see intellectual property). | All |
| Indigenous Peoples | This term is used when referring collectively to the first peoples of the land in international communities. The term ‘Indigenous Australian’ is used by the Commonwealth when referring to both Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within Australia. The term ‘Aboriginal’ is preferred by the NSW AECG Inc. when referring to Aboriginal people within NSW. In the context of this course, ‘Aboriginal’ is the term used. | All |
| Indigenous research methodology | Indigenous research methodology is centred on Indigenous ethics, which are incorporated into all stages of research from the initiation of a research project to knowledge production and dissemination of the research outcomes. Research undertaken through this research methodology is undertaken in partnership with Indigenous people on projects that represent issues or concerns that have been collaboratively decided and developed (see ethical research). | All |
| intellectual property (IP) | Non-material assets such as forms of cultural expression that belong to a particular individual or community. Intellectual property rights are the bundle of rights that the law grants to individuals for the protection of creative intellectual, scientific, and industrial activity, such as inventions. Such rights are for the protection of economic interest in novel, inventive and/or creative effort (see Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, cultural ownership, copyright). | Option 1 Option 2 Option 5 |
| invasion | The act of forcibly taking over the land (lands and waterways). For Aboriginal Peoples this also includes the dispossession of the owners/custodians. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 5 Option 7 Option 8 Option 9 |
| kinship | A key aspect of Aboriginal cultures and values. It includes the importance of all relationships, and of being related to and belonging to Country (land). | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 5 Option 7 |
| knowledges | The collective intelligence, developed over generations, of multiple facts, information, awareness, familiarity, experiences, skills, and understandings. | Option 1 Option 2 Option 5 Option 7 Option 9 |
| land | The term ‘land’ is used predominantly by non-Aboriginal peoples to describe an area. Aboriginal Peoples use Country as the term to describe land, but is inclusive of their spirituality, ecosystems, Dreaming, all living things, including totems, and all physical factors such as sacred sites, water, air and geographical factors. | Core 1 Core 2 |
| land management | A process of developing land and monitoring its use in a sustainable way, usually for purposes of producing food and providing fibre for clothing and housing. Includes providing protection for flora and fauna, and preventing and controlling weeds (see water management). | Option 5 Option 7 |
| land rights | The evolving struggle of Aboriginal Peoples, Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and international Indigenous Peoples for the absolute legal and moral acknowledgement of prior ownership of their land and recognition of all accompanying rights and obligations which flow from this association. Land Rights (capitalised) refers to the legislation. | Core 2 |
| local Aboriginal community | The local Aboriginal community is constituted by those people who acknowledge themselves as Aboriginal and who reside in the near locality. Aboriginal communities will have a rich and diverse history that has been seriously affected by dispossession and relations, which sees families with spiritual connection to Country residing beside those who have been forced to move from other locations. The notion of locality is complex and multilayered: schools should seek advice from a range of people and/or organisations representing local interests.For the purpose of this course, the local Aboriginal community case study is to be the Aboriginal community(ies) in which the school is located. The use of ‘community(ies)’ in the syllabus indicates that any one location may in fact consist of several communities (see community). | Core 2 Option 1 Option 8 |
| lore | The learning and transmission of cultural heritage by observing customs, ceremonies, and song cycles. Lore is connected to the Dreaming and provides protocols and practices for how people interact with Country, kinship and community.The term ‘lore’ must be used with care. Some individuals and groups could find this term offensive, and may prefer to use Aboriginal language terms or ‘law’ (see customary law). The term ‘folklore’ is not appropriate. | Core 1 Option 2 |
| Mabo case | The Mabo case overthrew the legal fiction of terra nullius – that the land of Australia had belonged to no-one when the British arrived in 1788. The judgement found that a native title to land existed in 1788 and may continue to exist, provided that it has not been extinguished by subsequent acts of government and provided that Indigenous groups continue to observe their laws and customs. | Core 2 |
| missions | Living areas established initially by churches and later by the Aboriginal Welfare Board, and ruled under the provisions of the Aboriginal Protection Act. | Core 2 |
| nation | People having common descent, language, and history. It is a preferable term to ‘tribe’, which implies negative stereotypes. | Core 1 |
| Native Title | ‘Native Title’ is the name given by the High Court to Indigenous property rights recognised by the court in the Mabo judgment, 3 June 1992. The High Court’s Wik judgment, December 1996, decided an issue left unresolved by the Mabo judgment when it determined that native title could coexist with other rights on land held under a pastoral lease. Increasingly, the definition is governed by the terms of the Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth), amended in 1998. Native Title as recognised by Australian law does not cover the full scope of Aboriginal Peoples’ and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ relationship to Country or Place under their laws and has been characterised as ‘recognition space’ between customary law and Australian law.‘Native Title’ (capitalised) refers to the legislation, whereas ‘native title’ (lower case) refers to the concept (see Mabo case, Country, Place, customary law). | Core 2 Option 9 |
| off-Country | Taking place away from Aboriginal land or Country of origin for an Aboriginal person or community. For example, Wiradjuri person working or living on Gadigal land | Core 1 |
| on-Country | Taking place on Aboriginal land or Country of origin for an Aboriginal person or community. For example, Yuin person working or living on Yuin land. | Core 1 Option 2 Option 7 |
| online content | Text or media published on the internet or via the cloud, for example video, articles, audio, interactive media. | Option 2 Option 3 Option 4 Option 5 |
| Peoples | The term ‘Peoples’ acknowledges the plurality and diversity of Aboriginal cultures, Torres Strait Islander cultures, and international Indigenous cultures. | Core 1 Option 3 Option 4 Option 8 |
| Place | A space mapped out by physical or intangible boundaries that individuals or groups of Torres Strait Islander Peoples occupy and regard as their own. It is a space with varying degrees of spirituality. | Core 1 Option 3 |
| protocols | ‘Protocols’ refers to appropriate ways of behaving, communicating, and showing respect for diversity of history and culture. They involve appreciation of the knowledge, standing and status of people within both the local Aboriginal community and the school community. Protocols inevitably vary between communities, and between people within communities. In establishing a partnership between schools and Aboriginal communities it is especially important that protocols are acknowledged and respected. Further information can be found in the Background section of the syllabus. | All |
| racism | Prejudice, discrimination, or unconscious bias on the basis of colour, culture, or national origin. Racism takes on many forms, including attitudinal, systemic, institutional, and cultural. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission:‘Racism is more than just words, beliefs and actions. It includes all the barriers that prevent people from enjoying dignity and equality because of their race.’ | Core 2 Option 4 Option 6 Option 8 Option 9 |
| reclamation | Used to describe a language program that typically occurs in locations where historical language loss is extreme and few tangible records have survived. | Option 5 |
| reconciliation | A Commonwealth initiative to promote positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the wider community, and to address the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. A capitalised ‘Reconciliation’ is used to refer specifically to the process as it applies to government policy. | Option 4 Option 8 |
| reserves | Areas of land reserved by the Crown for Aboriginal Peoples, established in the 19th century, often administered and controlled by governments. In NSW the main regulatory bodies were the Aborigines Protection Board and the Aborigines Welfare Board. | Core 2 |
| resources | Materials, data, systems, components, tools, and equipment used to create solutions for identified needs and opportunities, and the knowledge, understanding and skills used by people involved in the selection and use of these. Resources can also include energy, finance, and time. | Option 7 |
| revitalisation | The range of strategies for increasing knowledge and use of a language that is no longer spoken fluently across all generations. Also referred to as language revival. | Option 5 |
| sacred sites | Places that hold special significance to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, their cultures, and traditions.  | Option 5 |
| self-determination | Self-determination involves the effective participation of Aboriginal Peoples in all decision-making that affects them. | Core 2 Option 1 Option 6 Option 7 Option 9 |
| social justice | A principle that favours measures aimed at addressing inequities. It includes the rights of people to economic and social independence, and empowerment to determine the direction of their own futures. The processes and systems which shape the interaction between people, communities and governments and determine the degree of social justice achieved. | Option 1 Option 6 Option 9 |
| Songlines | Songlines are paths made by ancestors in the Dreaming and recorded in the songs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Songlines that traverse the Australian landscape, waterways, and sky, hold the unique knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They explain the law, history, and culture of diverse groups across the country and have been created, maintained, and practised for thousands of years. | Option 2 Option 5 |
| sovereignty | The legal recognition of ownership of land and territory. Implicit in the concept is the right of self-government. Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have never ceded their sovereignty. | Core 2 |
| spirituality | In general, the term ‘spirituality’ refers to personal beliefs and associated practices, while the term ‘religion’ relates to a belief system and practices shared by a group. An individual may identify with both spirituality and religious affiliation.In this syllabus, the terms ‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritualities’ refer to both the individual and collective aspects of Aboriginal Peoples’ interconnectedness with the world. Spirituality is deeply linked to Country, Dreaming, kinship and identity, and often incorporates concepts associated with ‘law’ and or ‘lore’, such as responsibilities and obligations. Spirituality is also related to a person’s intrinsic journey, including learning and reflection (see Country, Dreaming, kinship, customary law, lore). | Core 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 5 |
| Stolen Generations | Term used to describe people, especially children, who were taken from their families as a result of specific government policies in Australia. | Core 2 Option 9 |
| sustainable | Supporting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. | Option 1 Option 7 |
| technologies | Materials, data, systems, components, tools, and equipment used to create solutions for identified needs and opportunities, and the knowledge, understanding and skills used by people involved in the selection and use of these. | Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 6 Option 7  |
| terra nullius | A concept in international law meaning ‘a territory belonging to no-one’ or ‘over which no-one claims ownership’. The concept has been used to justify the invasion and colonisation of Australia. | Core 2 Option 9 |
| Torres Strait Islander Peoples | People from the Torres Strait Islands are the traditional owners of the islands that lie between Cape York in northern Queensland and Papua New Guinea. Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the Indigenous people from these islands. Some Torres Strait Islander People live on the mainland. Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ histories and cultures are distinct from Aboriginal Peoples’ histories and cultures, and are generally referred to separately. | Core 2 |
| Torres Strait Islander customary adoption | Customary adoption in Torres Strait Islander cultures involves the selection of adoptive parents from within the extended family of the birth parents. The child becomes a permanent full member of the adoptive family, who assume all care responsibilities and raise the child as their own. Usually, the child is not informed of their biological parents until adulthood, and there are certain cultural protocols that guide this decision. | Core 1 Core 2 |
| totem | Totems are symbols taken from nature which Aboriginal people see as part of their identity. Totems play an important part in everyday life, informing what individuals can hunt or eat, relationships, marriage partners, ceremonies and connections with ancestors. | Option 7 |
| traditional | A term widely used to refer to pre-invasion Aboriginal life, culture and social organisation, or the continuation of aspects of Aboriginal cultures. The term ‘traditional’ must be used with care, as individuals and groups may find this term offensive. The word ‘customary’ is often used to convey a similar message (see customary). | Core 1 Option 1 Option 2 |
| yarning | Yunkaporta (2009) defines yarning as a dialogue, meeting or discussion. | Core 1 |
| yarning circle | A yarning circle is the practice of speaking and listening from the heart. The use of a ‘talking piece’ helps to make it clear who is talking and who are listening. The person who holds the ‘talking piece’ speaks spontaneously from their own experience, is concise and to the point while the others listen with an open heart, without judgement or preconceived ideas. (Reconciliation NSW) | Core 1 |