

My Future,
My Culture,
My Way.



NSW Department of Education

Case Study – Paris Mitchell

Who I am

I'm Paris. I'm a proud Darug woman who graduated from Plumpton High School in 2021.

I was always determined to complete my HSC because I have a love for learning. There's just so much to learn about the world. I found that the more I learned, the more I realised how connected everything is in some way or another. That concept was really interesting for me and it made me enjoy school.

But another determining factor in completing my HSC was that I wanted to break down stereotypes. It was always about proving to myself, and to everyone else, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are just as smart and capable as everyone else. I thought to myself, if I couldn't prove that then who else would?

How my school helped me prepare for the HSC

"I was determined to overcome obstacles."

Balancing work and study during the HSC made it hard for me to maintain friendships. By the time we got to the HSC, my cohort had thinned out quite significantly, which was a bit of a struggle

because study took up a fair bit of my time. There were also points where the stress got on top of me, and I felt like I couldn't really vent because a lot of my friends weren't sitting the HSC, so they couldn't really sympathise.

My teachers picked up on my lack of self-belief. They would constantly remind me that I was my own biggest barrier. They knew when I needed tough love, when I needed encouragement and support, or when I was really struggling. On the whole, they reminded me that I am capable, and how important it is to keep going.

I drew on these tips and tricks to stay motivated

Draw inspiration from those around you.

- My family have always had high expectations of me. And my mum, Colleen, who is a teacher, is one of my biggest sources of inspiration.

Focus in on what you enjoy.

- I focused on enjoying the content I was learning. I tried to remind myself that although I was getting graded, to enjoy the process. My choice in subjects – English and Society and Culture – gave me the opportunity to explore issues such as how Aboriginal people are affected by the police's exploitation of power, leading to overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system.



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Aboriginal artwork created by Felicity Adams who is a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi people, currently living and learning on Dharug Country.

- Being Aboriginal, I knew about injustice, but I wasn't as aware as I should have been. Researching and writing this project was confronting, but also really enlightening. I was proud to have people read it, and to see the hard work that I put in. In particular, I felt a lot of pride in my culture being acknowledged in my work.

Talk to your teachers and never be afraid to ask for help.

- My teachers were such a motivating factor. Emailing, calling, making sure I was alright. I never felt like I couldn't speak to my teachers, I knew I always had them on my side.

I had a clear destination

I'd known since I was 13 or 14 I wanted to be a lawyer – to make a difference in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Although I've always felt connected to my community, I couldn't deny or hide the fact that I look white, and that comes with privileges. Not utilising my privilege to help community would be wrong. And so, considering my strengths at school, law seemed like the best way for me to do something that helped other people.

When I first became aware of other pathways, it did feel more difficult to stay motivated for Year 12. But if I had left school and gone to TAFE, my course, which is already six and a half years, would have taken even longer. Not going down that long route then became a motivating factor to do the HSC.

I am now studying Law and Psychology. I was surprised by how easy it was to apply for university through Macquarie University's Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Entry Pathway.

If you don't have a clear destination in sight, think about what do you like to do in your free time. Pay attention to what you enjoy and what you feel passionate about, because that is where your motivation is going to come from. It's okay not to know what you want to do yet, don't rush into a career that you're not certain about for the sake of saying you've chosen a field to study in.

My advice for future Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students who are completing their HSC

It's about precedent. Knowing that there's people who have done it before, and will do it after you is comforting. The more kids that get an HSC, the more inspiration younger generations will have. It's going to be a lot less scary, they'll feel less alone and have more people to reach out to.

Studying for exams is always more daunting than actually sitting them. You spend 13 years thinking your HSC is really daunting, that it's going to be the hardest thing you'll ever do. It is challenging, it's meant to be, but it's not scary.

The HSC was my chance to prove to myself that I am smart. My biggest takeaway is that I am proud of how well I did in spite of everything, including COVID-19 interrupting my year. Walking away with an HSC result I was happy with was a real achievement.

Want to know more?

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