

Lewis O'Brien Citation

For - Fellow of the University

Deputy Chancellor, I am honoured to present Mr Lewis O'Brien to you for the title of 'Fellow of the University of South Australia' - in recognition of his substantial and continuous support to the University in Indigenous Education.

Known as Uncle Lewis to all - but particularly by our Indigenous community of South Australia and Australia, Lewis is an esteemed Aboriginal Elder. He was born in Narangga country on Yorke Peninsula in 1930 and brought up at Point Pearce.

Lewis O'Brien originally trained - and then worked as a Fitter and Machinist for thirty years - including some years seeing the world as a Ship's Engineer. He became involved in many of the early political actions of our Aboriginal community – most particularly the Aboriginal Advancement League from the 1960's onwards and our first Aboriginal Community Centre.

He continued to be involved in Aboriginal community interests, exerting influence on:

- South Australian Heritage committees,
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission,
- SA Jubilee 150 committees,
- The Aboriginal Council of South Australia, and,
- SA Aboriginal Sports and Recreation committees.

In 1977 he joined the South Australian Education Department as an Aboriginal Education Liaison Officer – thus starting his formal involvement in education and with this University.

From that time to today there is hardly a sector of Aboriginal Education and Training in this state that he has not been involved in developing.

I name some areas:

- South Australia's formal Aboriginal Education consultative arrangements with the Government,
- Aboriginal education in schooling,
- Aboriginal education in TAFE,
- Aboriginal education in each of our three Universities'.

Over the years Uncle Lewis O'Brien has brought his involvement and experience in Indigenous matters to the University of South Australia in many ways. His interest in Aboriginal languages, particularly Kurna has led to him be in big demand to open our events and speak.

He was instrumental in naming our Yungondi Building at City West and many other cultural places in Adelaide.

Whilst Lewis is called Uncle Lewis – he actually is my real Uncle, and he and I were brought up by Gladys Elphick.

I well remember his 'photo on the wall of the lounge in his full ship's engineer regalia - and looking forward to him coming home so I could catch up with him.

In our family we called him the 'Professor'- and we still do. As I got into education he was a major mentor to me, and still is. So I personally owe him a great debt of gratitude in so many ways.

Uncle – I take this chance to say publicly - thank you.

Lewis O'Brien has been for twenty years across our university - the first person we turn to for Indigenous cultural advice for operations and programs for Indigenous peoples. Academically he has been involved in our Research activities for many years and he is now widely published, thus bringing credit to himself and our university. He is currently finalising a book on his life through us at the Indigenous College of Education and Research which will be out soon, I hope – thus adding to his and our universities reputation for the support of Indigenous Elders and academics.

Uncle Lewis O'Brien is simply a Legend!

Deputy Chancellor – with great pleasure I present Lewis O'Brien for Honorary award of Fellow of the University.