

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Systemic Barriers to Indigenous Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Australia

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9796p914>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

Author

Chen, Yingxiang

Publication Date

2025

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Systemic Barriers to Indigenous Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Australia

Yingxiang Chen

University of Bath, Bath, United Kingdom

Abstract

Access to higher education (HE) is heralded as a pathway to social mobility and equity but remains elusive for Indigenous populations in high-income countries like the United States and Australia. Systemic racial inequities, deeply rooted in colonial histories, perpetuate barriers to HE access and attainment for Native American and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This essay employs a comparative analysis based on statistics and Indigenous policy frameworks, using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and marketisation as analytical lenses to interrogate these challenges. It examines how “Whiteness” shapes educational discourses and institutional practices, reinforcing exclusion and inequality. Key disparities are analyzed, including lower enrollment, geographic isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, and financial barriers. Contrasting outcomes—declining Native American enrollment in the U.S. versus rising Indigenous completion rates in Australia—underscore the importance of community-led, equity-focused policies. The essay advocates for transformative reforms that prioritize Indigenous voices, dismantle systemic barriers, and address colonial and neoliberal legacies.