



BAKC – Barunga Aboriginal Knowledge Centre
Teaching and research is our business

INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY FIELD SCHOOL, BARUNGA, AUSTRALIA

Course ID: ARCH 395E
July 15 2026-July 29 2026
Online Session- TBD

Academic Credits: 6 Semester Credit Units

FIELD SCHOOL DIRECTOR(S)

Professor Claire Smith, Archaeology, Flinders University South Australia (Claire.smith@flinders.edu.au)

Mr. Gary Jackson, Archaeology, Flinders University South Australia (Gary.jackson@flinders.edu.au)



OVERVIEW

This field school is undertaken at the request of the Barunga Aboriginal Knowledge Center and under the guidance of Aboriginal Elders and community members from Barunga. The field school provides a unique opportunity for learning and personal growth while sharing daily life with Aboriginal Australians. Claire Smith and Gary Jackson have been working with the Barunga community every year since 1990. Claire is an anthropological archaeologist whose research focuses on how Indigenous knowledges can enrich archaeological theory, method and practice. Gary Jackson is an anthropologist who specializes in

Indigenous knowledge systems. The major Aboriginal teachers in the field school are Traditional Custodians/ Junggayi Guy Rankin and Nell Brown and community researchers Anita Painter, Jean Tiati, Jocelyn McCarthy, Mavis Jumbiri, Carol Pamkal, Richard Millier and Quentin Pamkal.

This fieldwork articulates with three major research projects. The first project, Indigenist archaeologies, is funded by the Australian Research Council. Led by Wirradjuri archaeology Dr Kellie Pollard and Professor Claire Smith, it aims to explore how Indigenous Australian worldviews can transform archaeological practice and understandings of the past. Archaeological research practice has typically relied on Western science, theories and interpretive frameworks. As an alternative approach, we are developing a new epistemological conceptualisation for how archaeology can be practiced. Using Indigenous theories and concepts, the project identifies and explores how Aboriginal ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology) and doing (axiology) can be integrated into a new model for archaeological research that we call "Indigenist Archaeology".

This project is part of the Australian hub for the National Science Foundation [Centre for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science](#). Braiding knowledges - the process of respectfully interweaving these distinct ways of knowing, learning, and being holds promise for addressing complex challenges through holistic and culturally grounded approaches that transcend the limitations of strictly Western scientific framings. Within a braided knowledge framework, Indigenous and Western epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies are given space to compliment and interrogate one another within a more equitable context (Atalay 2010; Kimmerer 2013).

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 6 semester credit units through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see assessment, below). Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

Transcripts: An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student's home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the [National Student Clearinghouse](#).

PREREQUISITES

None.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Under the guidance of Barunga community members and Aboriginal Elders, this field school provides a unique opportunity for learning and personal growth while sharing daily life with Aboriginal Australians. This topic will teach students how to undertake ethical and culturally responsive research in Aboriginal communities. In 2026, the themes for this topic are:

- Aboriginal art.
- Rock art.
- Cultural landscapes.
- The sophistication of Aboriginal social systems.
- Braiding Indigenous knowledge and Western science.
- Aboriginal people in the modern world.
- Cultural heritage, health and wellbeing.

The course objectives for this topic are:

- To provide students with practical experience in the ethics of working with Indigenous communities, through working with an Aboriginal community in a remote region of Australia.
- To help students to develop the personal skills necessary to undertake research or work with

Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote areas.

- To help students to develop skills used in Indigenous research, such as identifying cultural protocols, collecting oral histories, site recording, and creating field maps.
- To help students to gain an understanding of the links between culture, heritage, health and wellbeing.
- To help students to obtain a deep understanding of the complexity of Aboriginal social systems.

Students must adhere to the rules of conduct as set forth in the Codes of Ethics of the Australian Archaeological Association and the World Archaeological Congress.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the Field School, participants will be able to:

- Show an understanding of the complexity around the ethics of working with Indigenous communities, especially in remote parts of the world.
- Display some of the personal skills needed to undertake research with Indigenous communities, through the lived experience of conducting collaborative research in an Indigenous community in a remote region.
- Demonstrate a range of practical skills used in Indigenous research, such as an understanding of cultural protocols, the co-collection oral histories, archaeological and heritage site recording, and the creation of field maps.
- Provide evidence of the capacity to co-create a product that is useful to an Indigenous community, through the co-creation of the major assignment with Aboriginal teachers from the community.
- Demonstrate a deep understanding of the links between Indigenous culture, heritage, health and wellbeing, through being taught by Aboriginal teachers.

TECHNICAL AND FIELD SKILLS

Dependent on the options they choose as part of their learnings, students who undertake this topic will achieve some or all of the following technical and field skills:

- Record rock art sites.
- Record cemetery sites.
- Use a GPS machine within the context of a cemetery.
- Interview for oral histories.
- Design a research project.
- Design, plan and budget for fieldwork projects.
- Co-produce a major product with an Indigenous community researcher.

DURABLE/TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Students who undertake this topic will leave the program being able to:

- Work responsively and ethically with Indigenous communities.
- Listen deeply and understand Indigenous community protocols.
- Demonstrate teamwork skills.
- Demonstrate communication skills.
- Co-design a research product with a community researcher.
- Budget and prepare for fieldwork in a remote area.
-

ASSESSMENT

This topic is assessed largely through formative methods, with the purpose of providing on-going feedback on progress, which can be used as an aid to further learning.

Major Assignment - Community product	50%
Minor Assignment - Field Journal	10%
Field Assignment - Field Test	10%
Digital Assignment - Blog Posts	10%
Participation and Teamwork	20%

COMMUNITY PRODUCT/REPORT

The nature of the community product will be determined during the field school. Possibilities include a brief history of a person, family or place, a site report, a grant application or a conference style poster. Work on the community product/report will principally be undertaken during the later stages of the field school due to the fact that the requisite data will have to be gathered in the field prior to the writing of the reports or posters. All reports are required to be submitted on or before 29th July, the last day of the field school. After assessment, the products requested by Jawoyn Elders will be given to the Jawoyn group although copies of each report minus location (GPS) information and photos of artefacts and sites may be retained by the students who wrote them.

Criterion	Percentage
Clear Evidence of Collaboration	20
Integration of Learnings	20
Value to Community Member	20
Design and Production Values	20
Clarity of Writing	20
	100

Marking Rubric for Community Product/Report

FIELD JOURNAL

A field journal is designed to be a permanent record of your observations and activities whilst on fieldwork. In future years your field journal will become part of the archaeological record, and may be used by other researchers (a good example of this are the journals and field notes of anthropologist Norman Tindale, which are housed at the South Australian Museum and are a valuable source of information about Aboriginal archaeological sites in Australia) so it is important that you keep detailed, comprehensive notes. As summarized by Burke and Smith (2004:70), your field journal:

...is essentially a diary in which you record the day-to-day details of your fieldwork, from the sites you record or the features you excavate, right down to the weather and light conditions (which...can affect your ability to locate sites or identify artefacts, particularly stone artefacts), the names of the people who participate each day and any problems you encounter. It is also the place where you can record any impressions or interpretations of sites and features as they occur to you.

The rule of thumb when it comes to deciding how much and what information to record is that the more information the better! "The more information you record in your field journal, the easier it will be for you

or someone else to write up your results in the end. Don't trust your memory – write everything down. A good field journal will contain enough information for you to make some basic interpretations of what you are seeing, which can be expanded upon later when you come to write up your report" (Burke and Smith 2004:70-71).

Criterion	Percentage
Accurate	20
Sufficient Detail	20
Ethical Reflection	20
Analytical Insights	20
Clarity of Writing	20
	100

Marking Rubric for Field Journal

BLOGS

You will need to produce three blog posts:

1. Before the field school (your expectations);
2. During the field school (what you're learning, the challenges you are facing, etc.); and
3. At the end of the field school (what you've taken away from this experience).

Your posts must be typed and should be checked for grammar and spelling errors. You may attach your submission as a word document or include it as part of the main body of an email. As a rough estimate, each post should be 200-300 words long. This a reflective exercise with no right or wrong answers. However, we do ask that you write meaningfully of your expectations and experiences. These blogs will be posted and published on the Barunga field school's dedicated website as part of sharing your journeys as individuals and as a group.

Criterion	Percentage
Self-awareness	20
Integration of Learnings	20
Depth of Reflection	20
Clarity of Writing	20
Development over Time	20
	100

Marking Rubric for Blogs

FIELD TEST

There are some very specific things that we want to be sure that you know when you have completed this field school. Accordingly, a field test will be undertaken on the final day of your fieldwork at Barunga. Information that you can be certain will be tested includes:

- The levels of permission needed to do research in this region.
- Your understanding of the kinship system (who is your mother, father, grandfather, auntie, cousin etc., your obligations, and the rules governing your behaviour).
- Social rules concerning access to land.

- Aboriginal land management strategies.
- Spiritual associations with the land.
- The notion of a living heritage.
- Aboriginal concerns about control over archaeological research.

Criterion	Percentage
Understanding of Critical Concepts	40
Integration of Learnings	30
Practical Application of Concepts	30
	100

Marking Rubric for Field Test

TEAMWORK

Working as a member of a team is a necessary skill for all archaeologists, but especially when doing fieldwork. However, this is a skill that needs to be learnt and practiced. The educational benefits of students working on team projects are well recognized and include the following:

- Teamwork allows teams to access a greater level of information than individuals working alone would be capable of, enabling the collaborative end product to have greater depth and breadth than an individual project.
- There is less chance of important issues / information being missed.
- Teamwork enables the development of generic skills such as organization, negotiation, delegation, teamwork, cooperation, time management, conflict resolution, flexibility, leadership and following; these skills are all highly sought after by employers.
- Teamwork engenders increased levels of social interaction and interpersonal skills. Studies have demonstrated that the most successful university students are usually those who have developed strong social/learning networks with other students.
- Teamwork promotes a sense of belonging to a topic/discipline/ profession.
- Teamwork provides opportunities to acknowledge and use an individual's strengths and expertise.
- Team members can check each other's work and help to reduce mistakes.
- Teamwork promotes the development of a sense of responsibility through commitment to others in the team.

Most people don't automatically know how to work effectively in a team. After years of working independently and sometimes competitively, some students find it difficult to cooperate and collaborate with colleagues. For a team to function effectively, team members need to be committed to the goals of the team and to understanding and cooperating with each other. An effective team is one where:

- Team members share a clearly articulated common goal, display a commitment to achieving it and are prepared to work collaboratively to achieve it.
- Team members develop their own set of guidelines (or 'rules') about how the team will operate, monitor how the rules are being adhered to during the course of the project and endeavour to stick to them.
- Team members listen to each other, help each other and respect each other's ideas.
- Teams make decisions collectively after careful analysis, reflection and input from all members.
- The team focuses on the project at hand, problem solving and creative development of ideas and approaches.
- Teams identify the resources available to them, as well as the skills and expertise among team members. They allow individual members some freedom to use their skills for the benefit of the

team, without exploiting individuals unfairly.

- Teams have a proactive strategy for dealing with conflict or disagreement when it arises and resolve or manage the situation in a way that does not isolate or persecute individual team members. The team should be the first line of resolving team problems (and the lecturer should be the last resort). Problems should be raised in consultation by the team as a whole.
- The workload is shared in a balanced way between team members.
- Members value each other's contribution, consciously learning from each other and the tasks undertaken, and support each other.

Many of the fieldwork exercises in this topic will involve you working with a team with other students and, of course, we will all be living together as a team. Our assessment of your teamwork will not be confined to how to tackle field exercises but will also take into account your contribution to living together harmoniously as a field team.

Your teamwork mark will be assessed rigorously against each of the criteria in the following table. The mark is assessed collaboratively by all teaching staff and Barunga Elders.

NAME: _____			
He/She has contributed to the fieldwork in the following ways			
	Percentages		
	Major	Some	Little
Doing their share of the fieldwork	10	5	0
Providing ideas and support	10	5	0
Contributing to efficient data management (photo uploads etc)	10	5	0
Getting along with team members	10	5	0
Being flexible (about time, changes in plans etc)	10	5	0
Doing their share of the chores	10	5	0
Thoughtful, ethical behavior, respecting community values	10	5	0
Caring for departmental equipment responsibly	10	5	0
Following instructions from Aboriginal elders and field school instructors	10	5	0
Extra effort (or not!)	10	5	0
TOTAL	100	50	0

Marking Rubric for Participation and Teamwork

SUBMISSION DATES

All assessed work for this topic will be completed during the field school.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All IFR field schools begin with an orientation that addresses local and program protocols concerning student behavior, appropriate attire, local practices and sensibilities that may be unfamiliar, potential fauna and flora hazards, IFR harassment and discrimination policies, and the student Code of Conduct.

Please note that the schedule outlined in this syllabus can be disrupted by unforeseen circumstances, including weather, revisions by local permitting agencies, or conditions onsite. While this schedule represents the intentions of the program, adaptability is an intrinsic part of all field research, and necessary alterations to the schedule may happen at any time.

Week 1 - Prior to Fieldwork

- 1st Zoom General orientation and discussion of appropriate attire, local practices and sensibilities, potential fauna and flora hazards, IFR harassment and discrimination policies, and the student Code of Conduct. Introduction to readings that must be read prior to fieldwork.
- 2nd Zoom Introduction to indigenous archaeology. Discussion of students' queries and compulsory readings.
- 3rd Zoom Discussion of students' queries and compulsory readings.

Week 2 - Fieldwork

- Day 1 Meet in Darwin. Orientation lectures on Occupational Health and Safety and community protocols. Meeting with teachers and Aboriginal Cultural Guides. Drive to Kakadu National Park. Overnight KNP.
- Day 2 Lectures on topic overview, history of the region, cultural protocols and kinship system. Visit Ubirr and Nourlangie rock art sites, Kakadu National Park. Overnight KNP.
- Day 3 Drive to Katherine and Barunga. Set up camp. Overnight Barunga.
- Day 4 Meetings with Traditional Owners, Custodians and community researchers at Barunga. Guided tour of the community. Initial discussions of possible fieldwork projects.
- Day 5 Cultural workshop on Indigenous plants and medicine. Determining fieldwork projects at Barunga.
- Day 6 Lectures on the theory and method of specific aspects of the topic – rock art recording, GIS and cemetery recording, conducting interviews for oral histories. Fieldwork at Barunga.
- Day 7 Fieldwork at Barunga, including visit to Top Didj Art Centre, Katherine and guided cruise of Nitmiluk National Park.

Week 3 - Fieldwork

- Day 1 Drive to Mataranka Hot Springs. Visit Never-Never Museum at Mataranka. Overnight Mataranka Homestead.
- Day 2 Work on major project with community researchers. Overnight Mataranka Homestead.
- Day 3 Work on major project with community researchers. Overnight Mataranka Homestead.
- Day 4 Drive to Barunga. Fieldwork at Barunga.
- Day 5 Fieldwork and work on major project at Barunga.
- Day 6 Field test and finalise major project at Barunga.
- Day 7 Drive to Darwin. Overnight Darwin.

REQUIRED READINGS

Burke, Heather, Mick Morrison and Claire Smith 2017 *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook*. 2nd edition. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.

Cummings, Eileen with Jana Anvari and Claire Smith 2025 *I am the Daughter they Stole*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.

Smith, Claire 2020 *Country, Kin and Culture: Survival of an Australian Aboriginal Community*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.

Smith, Claire and Heather Burke 2007 *Digging in up Down Under*. New York: Springer.

Smith, Linda Tuhawai 1999 *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*.
Third edition. London: Zed Books.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Atalay, Sonya (ed.) 2006 Decolonizing Archaeology. *American Indian Quarterly* 30 (3). Full issue.
- Clifford, J. and G. E. Marcus (eds) 1986 *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.
California: University of California Press.
- Elkin, A.P. 1952 Cave paintings in southern Arnhem Land. *Oceania* 22:245-55. Elkin, A.P. 1961
Art and meaning: a review article. *Oceania* 32:54-9.
- Gunn, B. and R. L. Whear 2007 Tangtanjil Cave Revisited. *The Artefact* 30: 16-28.
- Layton, R. 1992 *Australian Rock Art: A New Synthesis*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Macintosh, N.W.G. 1951 Archaeology at Tandandjal Cave, south-west Arnhem Land. *Oceania*
21:178-204.
- Macintosh, N.G.W. 1952 Paintings at Beswick Creek Cave, Northern Territory. *Oceania* 22:256- 74.
- Macintosh, N.G.W. 1977 Beswick Creek Cave two decades later: a reappraisal. In P.J. Ucko (ed.)
Form in Indigenous Art, pp. 191-7. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Langford, R. 1983 Our heritage – your playground. *Australian Archaeology* 16:1-6.
- Layton, R. 1989 (ed.) *Who Needs the Past? Indigenous Values in Archaeology*. London: Unwin
Hyman.
- Layton, R. 1989b (ed.) *Conflict in the Archaeology of Living Traditions*, London: Unwin Hyman.
- Lewis, D. and Rose, D. (1985) 'Some ethical issues in archaeology; a methodology of
consultation in northern Australia', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1:37-44.
- McBryde, I. (ed.) 1986 *Who Owns the Past?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meehan, B. and R. Jones 1988 *Archaeology with Ethnography*. Department of Prehistory, Research
School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- Nicholas, G.P. and Andrews, T.D. (eds) 1997 *At a Crossroads. Archaeology and First Peoples in
Canada*, Burnaby, BC: Archaeology Press, Simon Fraser University.
- Smith, C. 1992 *Junggayi. Caring for Country*. Video recording.
- Smith, C. and H.M. Wobst (eds) 2005 *Indigenous Archaeologies. Decolonising Theory and Practice*. New
York and London: Routledge.
- Watkins, J. 2000 *Indigenous Archaeologies*, Walnut Creek CA: Altamira.