

Ms Marion Rose Scrymgour

The honorary degree of Doctor of Health Science was conferred upon Marion Rose Scrymgour by the Deputy Chancellor Mr Alan Cameron AO at the Faculty of Health Sciences graduation ceremony held in the Great Hall at 9.30am on 29 November 2013.

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As the citation is read out



The Deputy Chancellor conferring the honorary degree upon Ms Scrymgour.



Citation

The University of Sydney has a long history of honouring great Australians. The first woman to be honoured at Sydney was however not Australian. Dame Maria Ogilvie Gordon a British geologist stood in this place in 1938. In introducing Dame Maria the then Vice-Chancellor said 'In Australia we have a great appreciation of those that break records'.

Deputy Chancellor, seventy-five years later I have the very great privilege of presenting a great Australian woman whose achievements are not so much about breaking records but setting new ones.

Deputy Chancellor, may I present to you Marion Rose Scrymgeour for the award of Doctor of Health Science (Honoris Causa).

Marion Rose Scrymgeour was born in Darwin, her mother Claire Mollimini was a Tiwi Island woman, her father an Arrernte man from Central Australia.

Ms Scrymgeour attended primary and secondary school in Darwin and initially decided against tertiary education, working in several administrative positions. However she later undertook as a mature age student correspondence courses in bookkeeping, accounting, administration and health economics.

Marion's is perhaps best known in wider for her political life, a career in which she set more than one record.

Marion was elected to the NT parliament in 2001. In doing so Marion set a record, becoming the first Aboriginal woman elected to the Northern Territory Parliament.

She was promoted to the ministry in 2003 with the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Environment and Heritage. In doing so Marion set another record becoming Australia's first Aboriginal woman cabinet minister.

In 2007 Marion became the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Family and Community Services and in another achievement that set records become the first NT Minister for Child Protection.

She set another record when she became the Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the highest-ranked Aboriginal person in government in Australia's history. In January 2008 Marion continued her record setting run, becoming the first Aboriginal person to lead any Australian Government in our Commonwealth's history when she assumed the role of Acting Chief Minister.

Deputy Chancellor, a notable career in politics is worthy of praise but it was what Marion did during her time in Government that brought her honour worthy of recognition.

In her Ministerial and Parliamentary career Marion tackled the difficult issue; substance abuse, domestic violence and child protection in Aboriginal communities. She introduced key outcomes including the rollout of non-sniffable Opal fuel across remote Aboriginal communities, changes to heritage laws in the NT that created a heritage council charged with the protection of important heritage sites. She even grabbed the thorny issue of English proficiency among Aboriginal students in bush schools.

Deputy Chancellor, Marion never lost her willingness to speak out on important issues. She demanded that people think deeply about complex issues. In 2009 she challenged her own government on policies that undermined the importance of homelands or outstations in the lives of Aboriginal people. In this Great Hall, as the Charles Perkins Orator she challenged the Australian Government on Aboriginal child protection.

Deputy Chancellor, the second thread of Marion's career is perhaps less well known but demonstrates the same honour and passion as her political life.

Marion was central to the development of a new health service models in the NT, one where Aboriginal organisations care for entire populations – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. Her work in Katherine West is now recognised widely as a ground-breaking innovation in health service delivery. This sounds easy but think of the challenges Marion had to overcome.

She had to bring together community, government, pastoral and other industry interests to form a solid, accountable and effective service. She had to not only cross the political and social divide between these groups but also build a model that worked across 162,000 sq klm (that's about 70% the size of Victoria), across 8 health services, various communities, pastoral properties and outstations. She had to negotiate, convince and respond to communities that used 15 different Aboriginal languages and English. And she had to ensure a service that addressed both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal cultures alike.

Her achievements broken new ground elevating the practice of accountable partnership in Aboriginal affairs to new levels. It is being increasingly used across the NT and further afield in NSW and Queensland.

Deputy Chancellor, Marion's long service includes the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education, the Northern Land Council and the Nguu Community Government Council on the Tiwi Islands and the Wurlu Wurlinjang Aboriginal Corporation.

Marion's political career shows many points of deep personal and profession reflection. She has thought about how well she has served her constituents, the government, Territorians and our nation more broadly. She has shown herself to be a strong thoughtful and courageous person. She has not been scared making decisions about herself based on these points of deep thinking.

She has been the leader of industry, government, public service and community thinking and action. She has demonstrated the strength of traditional and western knowledges and has been able to navigate these spaces successfully. She is an outstanding Australian.

Deputy Chancellor, it is with immense pride I present to you presenting for admission to the degree of Doctor of Health Science (Honoris Causa) an outstanding, fearless, and honorable woman worth of wide recognition, Marion Rose Scrymgour.