



# Student Spotlight: Sarah Little

## Who's your Mob?

My ancestors are Wurundjeri from country, however until I moved to Melbourne to study I had never lived on Wurundjeri country before. I strongly connect to the Wodjbaluk mob and in particular to Aunty Jo Clarke, who connected me to her country and my culture.

## What are you Studying?

I am currently in my third year of a Bachelor of Science (Nanotechnology) / Bachelor of Science (Applied Sciences) majoring in Chemistry.

## Tell us about yourself (Your background/your journey)?

I grew up in Stawell, a small town in North West Victoria. This is in the heart of Djab Wurrung / Jardwarjali country at the foot of Gariwerd (Grampians). Bunjil has a resting place less than ten minutes from my home. **I went to a small country primary school of only 25 students and then another small Catholic Secondary School in Ararat. This was great but living and learning in small communities does limit your exposure to what is out there.**

I started university at the beginning of 2020, the height of COVID-19. This meant very few weeks on campus followed by seemingly countless weeks online. A frequent question I get is "Why did I pick Nanotechnology?" and its rather silly really... I took a huge gamble and it paid off. After finishing secondary school I became really disillusioned with the VCE system and decided I wanted to take a completely new direction. In my chemistry course we were required to take an independent study topic for a report,

while most of my class picked nanotech, I went a different direction with astrochemistry. As I hadn't studied nanotech during my VCE, I decided to take it at university and it was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

## What was it like transitioning to university?

I transitioned to university during the beginning of COVID-19 in 2020. To say it was difficult would be an understatement. Moving out of home and into lockdown, there were a lot of long hours alone in my apartment. I think what made it easier is that everyone was in the same position. We - student, staff and family, were all figuring it out together. My friends and I from back home spent a lot of time on Zoom with almost weekly games and theme nights. This broke up the long hours and gave me something to look forward each week.

**Leading up to starting University I attended chemistry and mathematics bridging courses offered by RMIT to make sure I had the skills required for my courses. This gave me the opportunity to see the campus, meet people and build a couple of good friendships across multiple degrees all before starting my degree.** This was also a huge part of my transition to university as I meant that I could slowly get used to my new normal before lockdown. I also took part in both Science and Ngarara Willim Orientation days which helped me to see both the academic and non-academic

sides to university.

### **What do you enjoy most about engaging with Ngarara Willim?**

My favourite thing about Ngarara Willim is the community. Leaving to study at university meant moving away from the support systems and people that I had grown up with. Especially during COVID, it was a huge source of strength knowing that if I needed anything I had a group of amazing people that I could reach out to. It makes it a lot easier to reach for your dreams when you know that if you do fall there will be people to help you get back up.

### **What's your proudest moment/achievement while studying at RMIT?**

Academically I was pretty proud to finally achieve a GPA of 4.0 after 5 semesters of trying, **but truthfully my proudest achievement was when I realised that I had made a group of really close friends.** Growing up I wasn't the most outgoing and found making friends and talking to people really difficult, so to get to university and be a part of a group of people whom I could turn to when I needed help and who then turned to me for the same made me really proud. This was one of my main goals coming to university and in that moment of realising that I had done it, it was incredible.

### **What is your message to community members considering studying at RMIT?**

I would like to encourage anyone who is considering studying at RMIT to go for it and really reach for their dreams. RMIT and Ngarara Willim have so many great services and supports in place that are there to help you get the most out of university and I personally can guarantee that in taking that leap into tertiary education can be the greatest next step on your journey both as an individual and as an academic. **RMIT is so much more than the schools you grew up with and can help you grow in ways you didn't think were possible.**

### **You recently won an award, can you tell us a bit about what the award is and what it means to you?**

I won the Roy and Iris Simmons award. This award was established in 1982 through the generosity of the family of the late Dr. Roy T. Simmons and is awarded to a full-time student who has successfully completed studies in Chemistry equivalent to a second-year level in a degree with Chemistry as a major field of study and has demonstrated the highest standard of academic achievement combined with qualities of leadership and involvement in community affairs. During his career, Dr Simmons made outstanding contributions to the fields of biochemistry, bacteriology, microbiology and to the understanding of blood groupings, transfusion safety and genetics. This award has continued for 40 years and is one of the longest standing awards at RMIT.

**Growing up I didn't know anyone else like me. As a young female Indigenous person, it was hard to find a role model within the field of STEM and as such, I had to create my own path to get where I am. I am proud to say that this award is one step closer to becoming the role model I had wanted when I was growing up.** Winning this award goes to show that anyone can have a great future in STEM and that it is possible to be successful even if the way forward isn't clear or smooth sailing. I am proud of this award because it shows how far I've come and what I can continue to achieve.

The best thing about STEM is that it is so much more than just academics, I have found that most of us within the field have a background within sports, performing arts or community services. **This award reflects this in one of the most beautiful ways possible, while academic achievement is an important part to success within STEM, being well rounded and able to connect with people and community is just as, if not more important.** Winning this award isn't just recognition of my own work but the work of everyone who has been there for me along the way and recognition of all the people who will come after me.

