Alumnus is an Environmental and Renewable Energy Veteran

The University of the South Pacific's (USP) 70’s alumnus, Dr Satish Choy, is the Chief Technical Advisor at Renewable Energy System Technologies (REST Energy) working on the development of one of Australia’s largest utility scale Solar Farm.

He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in 1978 and a Master of Science (MSc) in 1982 and was also a staff of USP by the time he completed his MSc. Following that, he was offered a Commonwealth Fellowship to do a PhD. Dr Choy went on study leave between 1983-1986 and completed his PhD at the University of Wales, UK - in record time of 2.5 years.

Although not bonded to the Fiji Government, Dr Choy joined the Fiji Government’s Public Works Department as a trainee Hydrologist. With this offer he had the opportunity to go and study for a Postgraduate qualification in Hydrology in the Netherlands. After six (6) months, he joined USP and went on to do his MSc and PhD.

Dr Choy has over 30 years of experience as a professional, and has developed expertise in several areas, including: marine and fisheries biology, crustacean systematics and taxonomy, water resource management, renewable energy and financial investment. He retired from full time employment in 2014 and is currently a hobbyist researcher and consultant to the developers of a large scale solar farm that is being constructed in Australia.

Dr Choy fondly remembers his time at USP, however his first few years were rather an unsettling whirlwind. He was meant to be overseas rather than at USP and so spent much of his time on extra-curricular activities rather than studying. Once he completed the courses, his interest re-kindled and he started focusing more on the subjects that he liked (like environmental physics, ecology and marine biology).

“I just loved the combination of field trips and laboratory work. As I had come from a multi-cultural background in the old capital of Fiji, I loved the mix of ethnic cultures on campus. Activities such as afternoon sports, dances at the “old Dining Hall” and Suva nightclubs, late night swimming, snacks and drinks in friends’ rooms and, trips into the city for cinemas there and at the Raiwaqa Theatre are all great memories that I cherish,” he recalls.

He went from being a “drifter” during much of his undergraduate years to completing an MSc with Distinction. His outlook on professional life changed for the better, and he completed his PhD and became a Lecturer in Biology at USP.

After a couple of years after graduation (in 1988), he took up a lecturing position at the newly established University of Brunei Darussalam in Brunei. After five years, he migrated with his family to Australia where he worked at Griffith University before joining the Queensland Government in 1994 as a research and policy-linkage scientist, until his retirement in 2014.

While in the Queensland Government, Dr Choy led teams of highly motivated scientists and technical staff. His team worked on providing...
USP provided me with the opportunity and foundation for the whole of my career. It allowed me to create a profession out of my hobby. When I was young, growing up in Levuka, I loved swimming, prawning, fishing and turning over rocks in tidal pools, just to see what was there (like coral fish, starfish, sea cucumbers, etc.).

As a Marine Biologist, he could still do that and be paid for it! He recalls that, when he returned home with his PhD, his sister told his mother that Dr Choy was now a “Doctor” and his mum said “oh good, now I won’t have to go to the hospital when I’m sick.” Both my sister and I had a hard time trying to explain to her that I was not “that kind of doctor.” All mum said was “I didn’t know that fish and crabs got sick.” Anyway, she was very proud to tell everyone that I was a “Doctor” and I was “being highly paid to catch fish and crabs.”

It was at USP that Dr Choy learned to work smart rather than hard and also learned that “knowledge is power.” That gave him the opportunity to continue to enjoy his work as a hobby, enjoy the finer things in life and still achieve his goals and aspirations. “This meant that I could also garner resources to help others achieve their goals and aspirations.”

While growing up Dr Choy was inspired by the likes of Mohamad Ali and Bruce Lee. He admired that they overcame discrimination and challenges. Later in life his inspiration came from Nelson Mandela and Stephan Hawking.

For Dr Choy, being non-indigenous meant institutionalised racial discrimination, inequality and injustices of the 1970s. “To me, this first became evident during the then Fiji Government’s selection and scholarship process,” he added.

Being at USP and, being part of student and then regional staff activism and becoming a martial artist, helped him build resilience to these and other issues of discrimination. Later on, as an immigrant in Australia, meant that he was dealing and often competing with mainly first world prejudices. The knowledge, perspective and ability to analyse situations helped him overcome some of these; he saw others as opportunities and to persevere to achieve his goals and aspirations.

He believes he was the chosen and blessed, to do what he did and to achieve what he has. This, he did much earlier than others and now he can sit back, relax, and help others. “I even completed my ‘bucket list’ and now might make up another one. It goes without saying that I have had the unwavering support of my family, friends, colleagues and mentors,” he added.
The USP Alumni Network congratulates two (2) of its alumni: Francis Carlos Domnick and Daisy Alik-Momotaro, who have been appointed to the board of governors for the Asia Pacific Association for Fiduciary Studies (APAFS).

Mr Domnick will be representing the Marshall Islands where he serves as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Office of Commerce, Investment, and Tourism (OCIT) in Marshall Islands. Prior to this, Mr Domnick served on the board of directors for Marshall Islands Social Security Administration. He was also the CEO of Anil Development Inc. and Chief Administrative Officer and Chief of Staff of the College of the Marshall Islands.

He obtained his bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Spring Hill College in the United States and graduated with a Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) from the University of South Pacific in 2017.

Ms Alik-Momotaro, who also represents the Marshall Islands where she serves as the Chairperson of the Judicial & Governmental Relations Committee and is also an elected member of Parliament of Jaluit Atoll. Prior to this, Alik-Momotaro served as the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Executive Director of Women United Together - Marshall Islands. She is a strong advocate for women and is actively involved in numerous programmes and associations for women.

Alik-Momotaro attained her Double degree in Communication Studies and Gender Studies from Portland State University, Oregon and graduated with her Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) from the University of South Pacific.

Farisha Nisha, an alumnus and continuing student of The University of the South Pacific’s (USP) School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (STHM) has been awarded the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme award to undertake Tourism and Hospitality Management postgraduate studies at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Ms Nisha obtained her Bachelor’s Degree in Commerce in Hotel Management in 2015 (also was awarded double gold medals in Tourism Studies & Outstanding Bachelor of Commerce Graduate) and her Postgraduate Diploma in Commerce, Tourism and Hospitality Management in 2016.

An elated Ms Nisha, who hails from Ba, will soon depart Fiji for Hong Kong to take up the three-year award. She commended the support of USP’s School of Tourism and Hospitality Management saying that she felt honoured.

Ms Nisha is looking forward to progressing her doctoral studies at this prestigious university. Her proposed PhD topic is titled “An exploration of mobilities, barriers and tourism experiences: A study on rural Fijian Indian female Muslims.” The award covers full tuition and a stipend.

Professor Stephen Pratt, Head of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management acknowledged the help of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in developing the academic capability of USP’s postgraduate students.
Alumnus and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), Ms Atenasi Ata, was one of the speakers at this event. She spoke about supporting businesses to thrive and create jobs aimed at the younger generation to reach their full potential, as they are our future workforce as well as business entrepreneurs.

The event took place on 29 May, 2019 at the Woodford International School grounds attracted organisations like USP as well as hundreds of students from schools in and around Honiara. The event was organised through the partnership between Woodford International School, SICCI, and the Solomon Islands Small Business Enterprise Centre (SISBEC). This is the third such event since the inaugural Careers Market in 2017.

“This year’s Careers Market was marked with the theme ‘Pathway to future Careers’, with the one-day event attracting hundreds of students from schools in and around Honiara,” said Ms Ata.

Alumnus recognised by Fiji Government

USP Alumnus, Nikhil Singh and 30 other youth were recognised as one of Fiji’s successful 30 under 30 during the 52nd ADB Annual Meeting on Thursday, 2 May at the Sheraton Fiji Resort, Denarau in Nadi.

The event unveiled the inaugural lineup of honorees that were chosen in a nationwide campaign. The event is aimed at recognising youth with extraordinary achievements under the age of 30 years who have contributed immensely to Fiji in their various fields of work and passion.

“One of the Faculty of Science, Technology & Environments’ (FSTE), a former Graduate Assistant, alumnus and current teaching Assistant, Nikhil Singh was awarded under “30 Under 30: The Faces of Fiji’s Future” during the Charity event on June 24 at the Grand Pacific Hotel (GPH), Nikhi alongside other honorees received certificates.

USP and the USP Alumni Network congratulates Mr Nikhil Singh for his achievement.

‘Pathway to future Careers’ - Careers Market event attracting hundreds of students from schools in and around Honiara. Source: SICCI

Mr. Nikhil Singh Awarded “30 Under 30: The Faces of Fiji’s Future” by the Fiji Government.
What memories do you have of your University student life and what inspired you during your studies at USP?

Studying at USP is a dream for all Pacific Island students as it is a recognised institution; USP was my home for four (4) years, from the Halls of residence to Lecture Halls. My journey began with students waiting to grab chairs in the IT Labs, the smell of fries at the Food Court and the long queues at The University of the South Pacific student Association (USPSA) for printing of assignments.

Why did you choose USP and your field of study?

I chose my field of study to become an engineer as I was always passionate to be in this field. The reason I chose USP’s Bachelor of Engineering degree is because it is an internationally recognised qualification under the International Engineering Alliance.

I was initially unsure about studying at USP and spoke to the School Dean about my concerns. She was very encouraging, and her words motivated me. She told me “Aakash, if you graduate with a Bachelor of Engineering (BE) qualification from USP, you will fly in the sky.” This inspired me to study at USP and to become an engineer in the aeronautics industry. My name, “Aakash” means “sky” in the hindi language.

How did USP prepare you in your career?

Studying Bachelor of Engineering at USP prepares you well to have a career as a Professional Engineer, which I believe is on par with my international counterparts.

Personally, while working as an engineer for an airline, I learnt that there is a significant difference in being an engineer and being a mechanic. The work I am involved in spans further than working with just the mechanical aspects of engines. I use my learning from USP to interact with the various systems that interface with the engines for analysing and monitoring engine performance.

Describe your present job and what you enjoy about it.

I currently work as an Aircraft Power Plant Engineer, which is quite exciting as it involves the management and monitoring of Jet Turbo Fan Engines. While this sounds like I physically work with the engine and its components, I actually interface with the engines by the use of other technologies. These technologies allow me to monitor how the engines (which we fondly call “Beasts” because of the sheer amount of power they generate) is performing, and if there is a need to perform any adjustments and or modifications.

I find being a Power Plant Engineer to be very fulfilling. I look after the engines of the aircraft, and it is thrilling to note that it is the power that is generated by these engines that powers and keeps the aircraft in the air. We consider these engines to be the “heart” of an aircraft.

What literature or subscriptions would you recommend for graduates (books/blogs/magazines)?

While I loved the USP Library and resources it had to offer; my recommendation is knowledge learnt from various sources and is a continuous process. Seek and research from wherever you are able to get information from.

It is my philosophy to respect anything and everyone who provides knowledge.

Where do you see yourself in five (5) years (career and or personal goals)?

In five (5) years time, I see myself in a Management level position at Fiji Airways. I hope to work towards this goal.

Please share three tips that you think would be important for current students and recent graduates that will help them start out on their career paths.

1. While you are studying, learn to the best of your ability, without thinking about where the knowledge will be used. Rest assured that whatever you learn at USP, will be useful in your Career.
2. Respect everyone. Even something as insignificant as an ant can teach you a lot about life.
3. Always speak the truth.

What has your involvement been with the University since you graduated? (Or how would you like to be involved?)

I have been working with USP, by contributing towards the Professional Engineers New Zealand (IP-ENZ) accreditation.

However, I’m always available to assist USP in any way they need in future.

Any other information you would like to share e.g. community work you are involved in (Include other relevant information and photographs that you would like to share)

I am one of the 6 panelists that was selected from Fiji’s 30 Under 30 to represent Fiji in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Conference.
What memories do you have of your University student life and what inspired you during your studies at USP?

I have a lot of positive memories of my time at USP as an undergrad student. I did my undergraduate at the Alafua Campus School of Agriculture in Samoa with a lot of friends from the Cooks, Niue, Tokelau, Samoa, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, FSM and the Solomon Islands. It was a small campus unlike Laucala, so we were a very close knit community. There were field tours to a lot of agriculture farms and stays in the villages with Samoan families as part of our undergraduate training. We had lecturers from England, African countries, Canada, India and some of our Pacific Island Countries (PIC). The vast experiences not only professionally but also personally, that they brought with them and imparted on us through their lectures are some of the things that inspired me to actually perform well in my academic career.

Why did you choose USP and your field of study?

USP has always been the premium university revered by kids in the Solomon Islands, and I am no exception to that. Growing up in the rural villages and hearing from my relatives who came home for the holidays after studying in USP, I made it my goal that one day I shall end up at USP myself. My field of study was not necessarily what I wanted to do. I initially wanted to be a veterinarian but there was no scholarship for that during that time, so I chose agriculture as the closest field to veterinarian, with the aim of applying for veterinary studies in the future, at that time.

Describe your present job and what you enjoy about it.

I currently work as a research fellow at the Institute of Applied Sciences (IAS) and in my line of duties, I am responsible for overseeing our microbial sourced natural product research. I also supervise graduate students in their research relating to microbial sourced natural products and train our staff on microbial laboratory techniques. I enjoyed all of my work from the laboratory to the field where we go out diving to collect marine organisms for our natural product discovery work. We also visited communities and educated them on the importance of sustainably and managing our ecosystem for future generations. You enjoy your work a lot when you see that you have positively impacted the lives of those that are directly working with you and the wider community.

Where do you see yourself in five (5) years (career and or personal goals)?

I have spent the last 16 years in the academic field both as a student and a professional staff and most of it were away from my home country of the Solomon Islands. After I graduated from USP in 2002, I worked for two years with the government of Solomon Islands then left for further studies in Japan and lived there for 10 years before returning to USP as a professional staff in late 2016. So I am craving for a life back in the Solomon Islands to be with my people and assist wherever possible to improve their livelihood. The potential of our pacific island countries is huge and that we only need to provide the basic assistance to realise these potentials. This is what I intend to do in the next five years from now.

Please share three tips that you think would be important for current students and recent graduates that will help them start out on their career paths.

Respect yourself, your education and others. Set goals in life and in your career. Discipline yourself in everything you do and never cease to want to learn new things. So my three tips would be respect, goals and discipline. These three characters have brought me this far and I am sure it will do the same for everyone.

What has your involvement been with the University since you graduated? (Or how would you like to be involved?)

I am happy that I returned to the university as a research fellow which gave me the opportunity to transfer the knowledge and skills that I have acquired in my field of expertise to the current students of the university. Any other information you would like to share e.g. community work you are involved in (include other relevant information and photographs that you would like to share)

Do not limit yourself to your field of expertise but strive to learn from other different fields and studies. Venture out of your comfort zone because only then, you will know your full potential. I have been involved a lot with the global indigenous peoples movement which enabled me to participate in a lot of international conferences including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) where, I vouched for the protection and promotion of the livelihood of our indigenous peoples across the globe and in the pacific. This culminated in the successful establishment of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) at the UNFCCC secretariat in the COP23 decisions and recently its operationalisation in the COP24 decisions. It shows the unlimited potential that we have.
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

1970 | Dr Melenaite Taumoefolau
Education: Masters in Professional Studies and PhD from The University of Auckland, a Masters from The University of Wales and a Bachelor of Arts and a Graduate Certificate in Education from USP in 1976
Currently: Senior Lecturer in Pacific Studies
Previously: Principal of Tonga College and Senior Education Officer (Curriculum) in the Tongan Ministry of Education
Country: Tonga

1980 | Jacqueline Evans
Education: Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies (Emphasis in Biology)
Currently: Marae Moana Director at the Office of the Prime Minister
Previously: Marine Park Project Manager at the Te Ipukarea Society
Country: Cook Islands

1990 | Tara Chetty
Education: Foundation Science from USP in 1996, a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Sociology from USP in 2007, and a Master of Arts in Women’s & Gender Studies from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey-New Brunswick in 2011
Currently: Gender Adviser at Pacific Women Support Unit
Previously: Executive Director at the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
Country: Fiji

2000 | Seona Smiles
Education: Postgraduate Diploma in Pacific Media Studies from USP in 2004
Currently employed as: Columnist and consulting editor
Previously employed as: Journalist, author, information officer at USP, communications consultant for the Fiji National University, and communications officer at DAWN Secretariat
Country: Fiji

2010 | Christina Joy Kafukese
Education: School Based Foundation Social Science from USP in 2015 and a Bachelor of Commerce in Tourism and Hospitality from USP in 2018
Currently: Front Desk and Administrative Assistant at Pasifiki HR
Previously: Waitress at the Haydens Restaurant
Country: Solomon Islands
STORIES IN PICTURES

The national winning USP ROBOCON team - July 2019

Honourable Rosy Akbar Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts delivering her keynote address at USP Open Day - July 2019

Winner for Seedstar Challenge, TraSeable Solutions. (Image Supplied) - August 2019

Audience at the inaugural Pacific dialogue series at USP - July 2019

Participants of 2019 Conference on Chinese Language Education in the South Pacific - August 2019

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