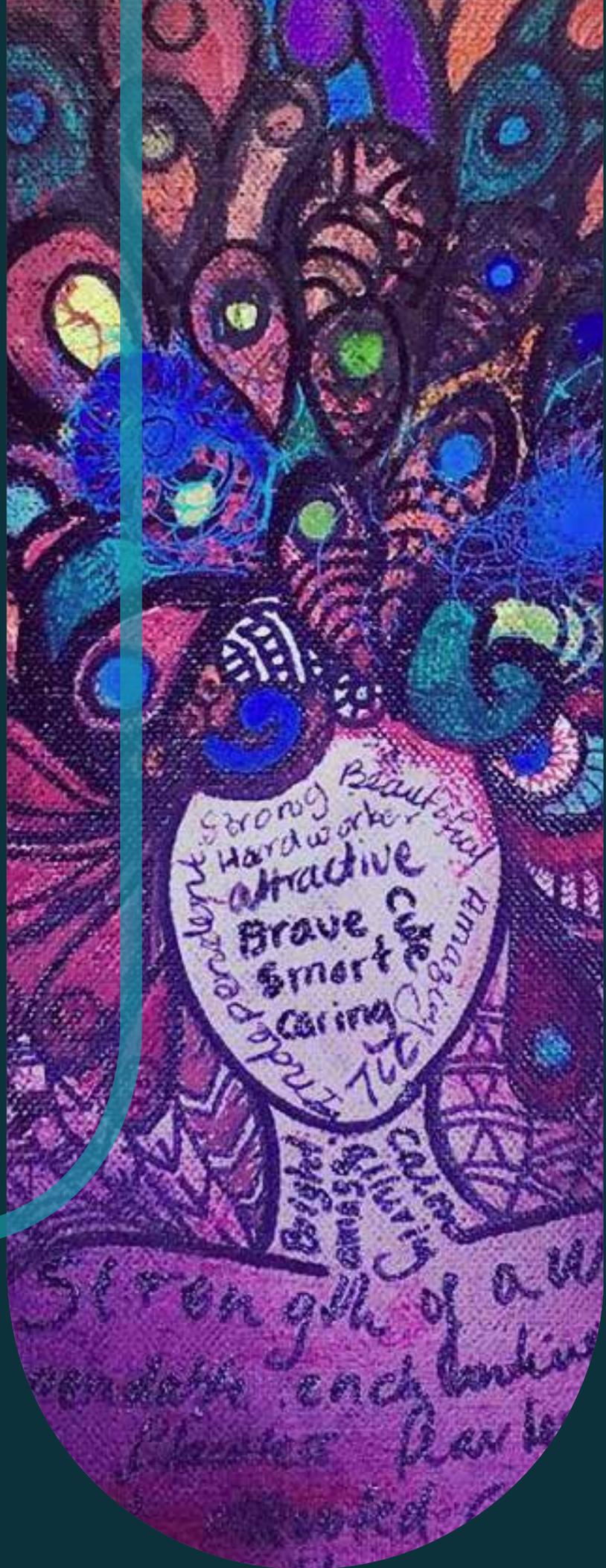




Issue 3 | March 2022

Women of USP

'Break the bias'



Shaping
Pacific
Futures

Editor's note.



Natasha Begum

Manager Public Relations and
Communications

Hello and welcome back!

According to the United Nations, no country on the planet has attained gender equality, a trend that will continue until 2030 if current growth rates continue. Part of the cause is due to discriminatory laws and societal practices, which, despite advancements in some nations, have slowed progress on gender equality.

On March 8, we commemorated International Women's Day with this year's theme, #BreakTheBias.

In this issue, we look at the women of USP – its students, staff and alumni across the region who are creating waves in their various fields, confronting biases and paving the way for a more equitable Pacific.

These women are on their way to becoming or already are trailblazers and we feel lucky to have had a chance to feature their unique stories. It is my wish that you too will become inspired, influenced and even more determined to make a difference by fostering an inclusive, equitable and diverse environment where women are appreciated, valued and able to reach their full potential.

Until next time...



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Feature
article.

Komal Narayan receives the Simone Veil Prize

The 2022 Simone Veil Prize was awarded to Komal Narayan, a Fijian rights defender who specialises in the links between climate change, ethics, feminism, and politics.

The Simone Veil Prize of the French Republic for promoting gender equality is awarded every year to a person or group working for the rights and status of women or gender equality in the world.

The award was accompanied by a sum of EUR100,000 (approximately FJ231,000) to enable Ms Narayan to carry out a project or activity of her choice in Fiji/Pacific that focuses on climate change and women.

Ms Narayan is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Development Studies by Thesis, focusing on Climate-Induced Relocation in Fiji at The University of the South Pacific (USP). She has also worked at the University as the Programme Officer for the Development Unit.

The Fijian climate activist expressed her surprise and honour at receiving the Simone Veil award from the Embassy of France in Suva. She was nominated by the French Embassy for her efforts and commitment to the protection of the ocean in Fiji.



Inclusion of women in leadership roles has improved the outcomes of climate-related projects and policies in the Pacific.



“This year, with the focus on climate change, we have put forward the amazing work that women and young girls are doing at the forefront here in the Pacific in advancing climate action,” Ms Narayan said.

She shared that her goal was to be able to implement a series of activities in which young women and girls from rural and coastal areas could take part in climate leadership training and projects.

Ms Narayan explained, “This will allow us to reach out to remote communities in Fiji and raise awareness about climate change and the roles young women and girls play in advancing climate action within their communities and villages”.

While women, particularly indigenous women, and those from the global south, are at the forefront of climate action, they are frequently underrepresented in environmental decision-making at all levels.

“Inclusion of women in leadership roles has improved the outcomes of climate-related projects and policies in the Pacific. On the other hand, policies or projects that are implemented without meaningful participation from women can exacerbate inequalities and reduce effectiveness,” she added.

She stated the projects funded by this grant would provide a series of leadership and advocacy training for young girls and women from rural and maritime areas, allowing them better access to resources and training that they could apply in their daily lives.

Ms Narayan believes that gender should not be a factor in determining one’s success in today’s society.

She added that stereotypes existed in most communities when defining success and in which gender had the upper hand; however, this is changing, and what mattered most is one’s attitude, honesty, and dedication towards their work, studies, or cause.

As a student and a young woman, she believes that her time at USP shaped her into becoming more confident whether through presentation sessions, writing research papers assignments, or speaking up in class.

“Not only is the environment conducive to the programmes we are enrolled in, but it also provides you with the exposure and opportunities to participate in workshops, seminars, and lectures that mould and



guide you into being able to pursue your career path and passion”.

“As a climate activist, I became interested in the issue while studying for my Postgraduate Diploma in Development Studies and seeing the current state of the Pacific on a global scale”.

The 29-year-old also had the opportunity to attend many workshops and conferences as a USP student, which helped her better understand the Pacific’s developmental issues and develop her skills and knowledge.

She currently works as a Regional Fund Associate Polynesia and Fiji at the USAID Pacific American Fund - Social Solutions International.

Ms Narayan has been actively working with youth organisations such as the Sustainable Ocean Alliance, Alliance for Future Generations Fiji, and Active Citizens to advance climate action.



Feature
article.

Vasa aims to change stigma for women in the maritime industry



I feel that I have the duty of care towards the women in maritime and this motivation came together with my passion to make a difference.

“Women’s participation in international maritime law will bring about a different perspective and a balanced view when laws are being formed and represented,” says Tuvalu’s first woman graduate of the International Maritime Law Institute, Vasa Saitala.

Ms Saitala adds to the stats of only 12 Pacific women cohorts recorded to have graduated from the International Maritime Law Institute.

A career stint working as an Officer-in-Charge for the Tuvalu Port encouraged Ms Saitala to expand her career in the maritime industry.

She hoped that her achievement would empower other women in the Pacific region to build a career in maritime-related work.

“Women can excel in a male-dominated maritime industry and more women should join the industry.

“It was until I started working at the Tuvalu port that I realised that women also play a significant role in the industry. Going into a male-dominated field is a way to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5. That is to - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” she added.

A report by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community estimated that there are 16,000 people employed in the maritime sector in the region. Less than 10% of them are women, employed predominately in support, administration and mid-level management roles.

Only 10 women (compared to 40 men) from the Pacific region have graduated from the World Maritime University since 1983. Similarly, only 12 Pacific women have graduated from the International Maritime Law Institute since 1988.



Ms Saitala highlighted that there were many challenges faced by Pacific women who worked in the maritime industry, which could be a barrier and reasons why some women do not see a career in the industry as a viable option for them.

“Women are viewed as new to the industry and may look odd to some, their abilities are underestimated, there’s cultural barriers and being discriminated against when working alongside men in a vessel.”

However, she believes that with more support, empowerment and gender training in workplaces, there is hope for women to break barriers in the maritime industry.

“I feel that I have the duty of care towards the women in maritime and this motivation came together with my passion to make a

difference. Also, in order to achieve a more diverse workforce, it is essential that women are visible in the maritime sector, and they should maintain the good work they are doing because this is crucial for recognition and removing the lingering stigma that working at sea is a man’s world,” she added.

Vasa Saitala is the first Tuvaluan woman to have graduated from the International Maritime Law Institute. Upon her return home in 2018, she immediately set about putting her knowledge and skills to work and drafted the Constitution of the Tuvalu Women in Maritime Association (WIMA). She is currently working as a Research Community Officer at USP’s Tuvalu Campus.





Feature
article.

Dr Hannah aims to save her language, history and culture from extinction

About Dr Hannah

Dr Hannah Vari-Bogiri is from Vanuatu and currently works as a language professor at The University of the South Pacific's Emalus Campus.

She is a descendent of Araki, an Island in the Northern part of Vanuatu where only five speakers speak the Araki language today.

Dr Hannah is a linguistic superwoman whose mission is to save her language, history and culture from extinction. She is playing a vital role in passing her ancestral language on to future generations.

As a Pacific Islander linguist, what inspires you?

As a linguist, two things inspire me and trigger my intellectual curiosity to do more research into language and culture.

Firstly, as a Pacific islander, I am aware that the Pacific has less than 1% of the world's population, yet it accommodates almost 25% of the world's languages. As a ni-Vanuatu, I can say that Vanuatu is a microcosm of this scenario because it has the highest linguistic density per capita in the world. This means that Vanuatu and the Pacific region are so rich and highly diversified linguistically and culturally and there is potential for research in the region.

Secondly, during my tenure as a language lecturer in the Pacific Language Unit at Emalus campus, I had the privilege to work alongside Dr Robert Early and the late Professor John Lynch, a Professor of Pacific Languages and Professor Emeritus of Oceanic languages. Their books inspired me and led me to continue to do more research so that I, too, can contribute in one way or another to the body of knowledge in this respect.



**The role of
women on the
preservation of
language and
culture is
pivotal.**



Can you highlight the status of the *Araki* and *Raga* languages that you had researched and how have the people preserved their languages?

The status of Vanuatu languages shows that over 100 languages, eight are already extinct, 17 are moribund and 81 are still actively spoken. Two languages that I researched in Vanuatu reflect two extreme scenarios – one in the category of dying languages and the other is actively spoken.

Araki is one of the dying languages in Vanuatu, with less than five speakers. It has been shifted to the Tangoa language, the status of which was elevated by the early missionaries as a lingua franca within the area through translation work to propagate Christianity.

On the other extreme, *Raga* is one of the biggest and most actively spoken languages in Vanuatu, with over 6,500 speakers. Based on research, *Raga* continues to preserve and maintain its language in the following ways:

- Language is spoken in every context - at home, in meetings, during traditional ceremonies like weddings, funerals, grade-taking ceremonies and in church and used in the formal education sector, particularly in the early primary level.
- Language is preserved and maintained simply because the rich traditional systems are preserved and practiced. For example, even the diaspora living in Port Vila or Santo continue to observe traditional practices such as funerary rites, traditional wedding ceremonies, and grade-taking ceremonies. Once these traditions and systems are observed and practiced, their language continues to thrive.

What would be your comment on the evolution of most languages and cultures in the Pacific and what would you say are the reasons for the changes?

Language continues to evolve and change over time. To illustrate this, most Pacific languages belong to the Proto Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian family. Although they have developed, evolved, and changed over time, etymological studies have pointed out their historical development and common origins.



The Pacific Island languages will continue to evolve and change from generation to generation. When traditional systems are no longer practiced, words associated with these practices will become obsolete. In addition, when new ideas are developed, words will be borrowed or invented to accommodate these new societal changes. Nothing stands still and likewise; language continues to evolve. As Pacific Islanders, we are the custodians of the resources around us, including our rich linguistic and cultural diversity. We must manage them well and safeguard them so that the next generation can also appreciate this rich diversity.



Is it possible for Pacific Islanders to preserve their languages and cultures and what can role can women in particular play in the preservation of this?

The role of women on the preservation of language and culture is pivotal. In the traditional context where husbands go out to work as breadwinners, women are the first educators of their children as they are responsible for the upbringing and the education of children via oral tradition at home. Women play a critical role in the inter-generational transmission of language and cultural values as well as family practices to the children. In doing so, they ensure that these very important values and skills are preserved, valued, promoted, and are transmitted into the next generation and into the future. When women do not play this critical role, it can have negative consequences in the next generation and in the language itself.

To illustrate this, a survey entitled: A sociolinguistic Survey of Araki, a Dying Language of Vanuatu which I did in 2005, published in the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, discovered that because most people in the island of Araki were related, they had to marry women outside of Araki. All these women could not speak the language of Araki. Consequently, the children growing up also could not speak the language, thus contributing to its demise. Today, Araki is a dying language of Vanuatu because the language associated with the cultural values and family practices has not been transmitted to the younger generations.



Celebrating our 32,000+ women graduates

Feature
article.

PhD and parenting: Navigating multiple roles at work and home

Contributed by: [Dr Sera Vada](#)

It is common knowledge that women, and especially mothers wear multiple hats when it comes to balancing a professional career with a family. As a full-time researcher, I was fortunate that both my son and daughter were born and raised in Fiji where there is never a shortage of helping hands with incredible support networks. Since moving to Brisbane, Australia in 2017 to pursue my PhD at Griffith University, I had to adapt from being an Associate Lecturer at USP with a nanny at home to a PhD student and full-time mother.

My life took a 360-degree turn and I had to navigate this new season in a new country, which of course was extremely challenging both mentally and physically. I truly believe that true strength and courage rise at our weakest point and despite all its challenges, balancing a full-time job as a tourism researcher with a family is the most satisfying and rewarding journey.

For a woman or mother who is planning to pursue a PhD whilst balancing a family, here are some tips that I hope may help in your journey:

- Celebrate the small wins. The PhD journey can be a lonely one so celebrating the small wins is important, whether it be the completion of a chapter or the submission of a manuscript.
- Always communicate with your partner and family, especially during the stressful stages of the journey when milestones are due. It is important to delegate household responsibilities during this time.
- Learn to work at odd hours in the day. I was the most productive very early in the morning or late at night when the whole family were asleep.



- Don't be too hard on yourself and take time out for self-care. This could be as simple as having a coffee by yourself or with friends.
- There is no such thing as a perfect parent or perfect PhD. Do your best but embrace the mess at home when time is limited. Commit to writing 300 words a day – it will help you in the final lap of your PhD submission.
- Remember that it's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize. Always prioritise your health and well-being.

Dr Sera Vada is a Postdoctorate Research Fellow at the Griffith Institute for Tourism, Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Born and raised in Fiji, she is proud to be one of the few PhD graduates in tourism from Fiji and is very passionate about evidence-based research which influences policies and contributes to enhancing individual well-being and improves the livelihood of communities in the Pacific.

Feature
article.

Failure a stepping stone to success

For Elisapeti Langi, one failure was not the end of the journey; rather, it was the start of the road to success.

Ms Langi is currently employed by the Tongan Judiciary as a Judicial Officer. She first came into contact with The University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1992, when she enrolled in Foundation studies. She was offered a chance to study Information Technology in Sydney, Australia, before completing the Foundation level, so she left USP to chase 'greener pastures.'

The newfound freedom without her support system (her family) to keep her in line and the temptations and distractions of living in a foreign country soon caught up with her, and she found herself in a dire situation not long after she arrived.



**we can also
make a
significant
contribution
to the quality
of decision
making.**



She had a child who relied on her, and she could not continue her studies. She returned home three years later, without completing her degree in Information Technology.

Despite her predicament, her family did not abandon her, and she returned to USP to complete the Foundation course where she had left off.

“I then decided to study law, and in 2004, I was accepted as a private student at the Emalus School of Law in Port Vila, Vanuatu. This time around, having matured and experienced the disappointment of failure, I vowed to make my parents proud and completed my programme,” Ms Langi said.

“In early 2007, I completed my Professional Diploma in Legal Practice in Suva before returning home and being admitted to the bar later that year”.

Her first paid job was as a legal assistant at the Community Legal Center, which was established to help low-income earners involved in the Tonga riots in 2006.

She became a Legal Officer at the Attorney-General’s Office in 2008, where she stayed for ten years before joining the Judiciary.

Her primary position at the Attorney-General’s Office was that of Crown Prosecutor. When she joined the Magistrate Court in 2018, she became the Tongan Judiciary’s only female Judicial Officer.

Ms Langi was appointed as an Acting Supreme Court Judge for six months in 2020 to help with the wave of drug-related cases that had flooded the Supreme Court.

This was a historic appointment for her as it was the first time a female was appointed to the Supreme Court of Tonga. It was celebrated not only by all women in the legal profession but also by the entire country.

The appointment of the first female justice to the Supreme Court, which had previously only been occupied by male judges, was a positive step toward the Judiciary being perceived as more transparent, inclusive, and representative of the people.

“By our mere presence, women judges increase the court’s legitimacy, sending a powerful



message that they are open and accessible to those seeking recourse to justice,” she said.

“However, women judges, in my opinion, contribute far more to justice than simply improving its appearance; we can also make a significant contribution to the quality of decision making, and thus to the quality of justice itself”.

Ms Langi added that “Aside from having relevant academic credentials required for selection to the Judicial Office, we live our lives as women, with all the social and cultural implications, such as complex family relationships and obligations”.

“We bring those lived experiences to our judicial actions,” she explained, “experiences that tend towards a more comprehensive and empathetic perspective - one that encompasses the legal basis for judicial action and awareness of the consequences on the people affected”.

She hopes that her story will encourage other young women to persevere, no matter what life threw at them.



Feature
article.

'Ofa-Ki-Levuka works tirelessly to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, and children



I refer to women as *Fefine To'a* because that is what we are: strong and resilient

The Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) in Tonga is a non-governmental organisation that Director Ms 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Louise Guttenbeil-Likiliki co-founded in October 2009 with other amazing women.

Ms 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka is an alumna of The University of the South Pacific (USP). In 2014, she graduated with a Bachelor of Laws (Advanced) and in 2019, she completed her Master of Law (Thesis). She has also completed undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Auckland University while also undertaking a postgraduate Diploma with the Thomson Foundation accredited to Cardiff University.

Ms 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka serves on several regional and international boards and steering committees with the overarching goal of advancing women's human rights, gender equality, and equity. She is also an award-winning filmmaker.

She highlighted that the WCCC worked tirelessly to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, and children in all their complexities.

"We believe in equal access to opportunities and outcomes for women, men, girls, and boys in all their diversities," she said.

"We work flexibly and fluidly to ensure co-design, co-creation, and co-responsibility with our women, youth, children, and men".

Ms 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka mentioned that it was pointless to design and implement programmes based on what they believe would work.



“Our greatest challenge is changing attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against and justify the use of violence against women, girls, and children, so ensuring that our programmes and activities are grounded in the stories and lived experiences of women and girls is central to how we work”.

Her philosophy has always been to help women and girls be their best selves.

She went on to say that being there for women and girls has always been and will continue to be a huge part of her ethos, pathos, and logos, whether it was to help a woman seek help from a violent relationship or to encourage a young girl to follow her dream despite the odds.

Her inspiration comes from the lived experiences and stories of her life’s most powerful women or *Fefine To’a*: her mother, grand-aunt Lou, her eldest sister Yvette, nieces, her close friends, survivors of violence, discrimination, and abuse and her 3 daughters ‘Alamita, Louise and Seini.

“I pass on my inspiration through my own story. I share my story and life experiences in the rawest form because I believe that it is through the most difficult times and adversity that you can inspire other women and girls to keep on keeping on by listening to how resilient you were to carry on against all odds,” Ms ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka added.

She considers the term “successful” women problematic because it is frequently measured against a western concept of success. “I refer to women as *Fefine To’a* because that is what we are: strong and resilient”.

Ms ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka stated USP had shaped her by decolonising how she learned, unpacked, and understood political, economic, social, and cultural issues, which contrasted with her learning and thinking when she was a student at the University of Auckland.

She said that USP enabled Oceanic people to think indigenously and on their terms as Oceanians.

“USP has produced many brilliant minds and has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping the many visionary leaders we have today, leading government, non-government, and private sector organisations across the Oceanic Pacific and indeed the world,” Ms ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka added.



She has recently received a recommendation to consider undertaking a PhD in Law with the School of Law and Social Sciences at USP.

She explained that comparing USP to other western universities was no longer an option because there was so much rich and valuable Oceanic knowledge, learning, practice, and talanoa that could not be found anywhere else in the world.

There is an old Hawaiian proverb that Teresia Teaiwa refers to in her article *L(o)osing the Edge*:

***‘A ‘ohe o kahi nana o luna o ka pali;
iho mai a lalo nei; ‘ike I ke
au nui ke au iki,
he alo a he alo.***

***The top of the cliff isn’t the place to
look at us;
come down here learn of the
big and little currents, face to face.***



Our Alumni.

Asheelta fights the odds to pursue engineering

Being told she was too timid for the Engineering sector did not prevent Asheelta Chand from pursuing a career as an engineer.

She is now a Graduate Network Security Engineer with Telecom Fiji Limited where her job entails overseeing cybersecurity, troubleshooting customer email issues, and assisting with operational work in her department.

The USP alumna shared that her highlight moment during her undergraduate studies was being a member of the Women in Engineering Team for the Engineering Student Association (ENSA).

As a member, she was given the chance to encourage and motivate other women in a male-dominated field.

Ms Chand recently graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical/Electronics) and also completed her Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) certification whilst working full-time.

In high school, she had been a Tech-Science student so the transition to engineering and studying in a male-dominated environment was not difficult for her.

“However, studying engineering was a bit difficult because it required a lot of time to study and sometimes, I had to make some sacrifices to achieve my set of goals,” Ms Chand said.

“I come across as a timid person and I’ve been told that I should have taken another programme, but I did not let that affect my mindset”.

“My family has always been very supportive, particularly my older brother, who insisted that I pursue a career in engineering. Having a solid support system has always motivated me to persevere in the face of adversity”.



She advised all women to stay true to themselves, and that it was okay to make mistakes but more importantly to learn from them.

Ms Chand added, “You will meet people who will judge you and label you as incapable at times, but you must always follow your passion and have a desire to learn and grow”.

“We will face challenges to achieve anything significant in life,” she emphasised.

She shared that coming from a small community school and joining USP was a dream come true for her.

“Because of the diverse culture of USP, the great study environment and facilities, I was able to grow as an individual, and it has moulded me into the woman I am today,” Ms Chand added.

Humans of USP.

Our Student.

Breaking barriers in a male- dominated field

Despite being in a field dominated by men, Jessica Fong, a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical and Electronics at The University of the South Pacific (USP), said she was undeterred and more motivated.

The School of Information Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Physics (STEMP) is a good choice for those who want to become leaders in innovation and knowledge production.

“As a woman in a male-dominated field, this was a motivating factor for me, and it made me more determined,” Ms Fong said.

“I believe that my braveness in battling discrimination and societal stereotypes to pursue true life passion can be a motivating factor for other girls and women”.

She is pleased that USP encouraged more women to pursue careers in engineering.

“I believe we need more women. We require their input. We need their perspectives and opinions on the issues that surround us. I love the idea that we’re growing regarding the number of women in our field,” Ms Fong said.

Ms Fong added that constantly being under a microscope was one of her challenges.

She explained that because she was one of the three females from the class, her performance was always highlighted because she stood out.

“I believe that if I do well, men will have a positive impression of female engineering students, but if I fail, they will project my failure onto female engineering students as a whole. I overcame this by working extra hard,” she said.

Ms Fong sometimes interacts with men who have never worked with a female before, which puts added pressure on her to make a good impression.



However she said that, “USP had prepared me for my professional career in technical skills during my study programme”.

“At the same time, the institution taught me how to be a change agent, succeed in a male-dominated field, and lead by example,” Ms Fong continued.

Her advice to women is, “If you’re interested in STEMP, don’t be scared”.

“Anything worthwhile will be worth the fight. Don’t doubt yourself, your skillset, or your ability. You can learn all skills, so bring yourself to the table”.

Recap.

Refurbished USP Book Centre and Café Frangipani opens

The refurbished USP Book Centre and Café Frangipani (formerly Coffee Central) officially opened on March 18 by Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Regional Campuses and Global Engagement), Dr. Giulio Masasso Tu'ikolongahau Pāunga.

Collaboration to boost market monitoring capacities for food security

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and The University of the South Pacific (USP) collaborated to strengthen local market monitoring capacities in Fiji and Samoa. For a region that is extremely susceptible to climate shocks and natural disasters, monitoring the impacts of these calamities is critical.

Joint Research Project on Climate and Disaster Risk Insurance

The University of the South Pacific (USP), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), The University of West Indies (UWI), and the UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) launched a joint research project to improve climate and disaster risk insurance products in the Pacific and Caribbean regions.

Look back in history

Part of the first cohort that graduated in 1971, Dr Marjorie Crocombe was the first female Cook Islander to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts from USP.

Rarotongan born Marjorie is a champion of oral poetry and literature, and outspoken about encouraging Pacific writers to analyse contemporary life through poetry, art and stories. She has also worked as a lecturer at USP.

In 2011, Marjorie was the first woman from the Cook Islands to receive a Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) from USP in recognition of her published and research work. She is still a keen writer and researcher.

Mark the date.

APRIL 2022

- 19 USP Entrepreneurial Fair
- 26 USP Market Week
- 29 SPACE Seminar Series: Hey Scholar! Know Thyself

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