



Pasifika in Tertiary Education.



Who are they?

Pasifika students originate from one or more islands in the Pacific Ocean. There are three main areas: Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

Some of the values that are commonly shared in the Pacific are:

- Wantok: family/connectedness
- Ako: reciprocal learning
- 'Akamana'anga: empowerment
- Vakarau: preparedness
- Feveitoka'i'aki: mutual respect

Common barriers Pasifika students encounter transitioning from high school to University.

First in Family:



Pasifika students are commonly first in their family to come to university. This is a barrier as it can be hard for students to explain to their family the different things that university encompasses.

- **Subject areas:** Subjects such as Geophysics and chemical engineer are very foreign to Pasifika. This is especially the case for students are first generation New Zealanders. This can sometimes lead to the student's family not being supportive of what the student is wanting to study.
- **University timetable:** University is very different to high school. In High School you have set classes from 9-3.30pm. At university you don't have classes all the time and they can occur anytime between 8am and 7pm. Using your time wisely and planning out you week is hard for new students. It can be hard for them to adjust and become use to being independent and responsible for how they use their time. First year students commonly struggle to balance freedom and their studies.
- **Family commitments:** Family is very important to Pasifika students. Pasifika students generally have a lot of commitments outside of their studies. Students who have younger siblings most likely had to take care of them after school until their family came home from work. While at university some families still expect their child to continue looking after their siblings. Balancing home life and university life is hard for some students.
- **Pressure to succeed:** Students who are first in family commonly arrive at university with the pressure to succeed and do well. This is not only for themselves but for their wider family and community. Getting into university is not easy. Those who do get into university are "smart" and because of this you "should do well". Knowing that those around you are watching you and are expecting you to succeed and put a lot of pressure on a student.

Identity:

Students who are not strongly connected to their Pasifika roots can arrive at university struggling to find their identity. Prior to coming to university some students may not have had much to do with their Pasifika heritage. From the time they enroll at university they are identified as being Pasifika and because of this they are included in Pasifika mailing lists. Students who are not connect to their Pasifika heritage can feel overwhelmed as they feel they are not "Pasifika enough". This is commonly seen in students of mixed race and students who cannot speak a Pasifika language. It can take a lot of time for a student get to a place where they feel comfortable about who they are and where they come from.

Finance:

University is not cheap. Pasifika student's commonly come from low socioeconomic households. When applying a lot of students are put off by the cost of university. Not only this but some students are also needed to work while they study to support their family.

It is okay to ask for help:

Pasifika students struggle to reach out for help. It is commonly perceived that asking for help is a sign of weakness. It can take a lot for a student to build up the courage to ask for help.

Class size:

The size of a first-year class at university can be a lot bigger than the class size at high school. In STEM subjects there are very low numbers of pasifika students. Pasifika students feel lost and feel like they do not belong in their classes. On average pasifika students occupy 4.5% of the cohort.

Some ways that you as a high school teacher can help Pasifika students overcome these barriers:



- Start conversations about university early with your students. This can help you identify the areas that your students find difficult or are struggling with.
- Help your students explain to their family what their intended field of study is along with what university involves. If you do not feel comfortable to do this yourself. Connect your student and their family with someone who can. Most universities have Pasifika Liaison Officers who can help with this. At VUW we have Tapu Ve'a who is more than happy to meet with students and their families and help with anything university related.
- Reminding your students that it is okay to not know the answers to everything and that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. The sooner the student understands this, the easier it will be for them to reach out in the future.

Further information:

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