

## PACIFIC STUDIES AND SAMOAN STUDIES MATĀ'UPU TAU SĀMOA

"You can't paint the Pacific with one brush stroke." Dr Teresia Teaiwa

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a Pacific nation and home to one of the largest populations of Pacific peoples in the world. By 2026, it is projected that Pacific peoples will make up 10% of the population, so those who recognise and understand Pacific issues are in demand in many areas of the workforce.

People from the Pacific are influential in local and national government, and a growing element in both the economy and the national profile of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Graduates become knowledgeable about the complexities of Pacific experience; they understand the legacies of both indigenous Pacific and colonial influence and they are perceptive about issues that can arise when different cultures live and work together. A Pacific perspective in the workplace is an advantage that graduates can use to market themselves. Through their work they will be able to make a contribution to the development of Pacific communities in New Zealand, within the Pacific region, and internationally.

Pacific Studies is an exciting interdisciplinary field that offers critical perspectives on the region's colonial history and explores the significant social changes Pacific people are facing today. There is a wealth of cultural, social and political diversity in the Pacific region that is still to be fully appreciated and understood. Students study many aspects of social, political and economic life in the Pacific, and in Pacific communities in New Zealand, the USA, and Australia.

Samoa Studies opens up opportunities to learn about the heritage and world of Samoan people, not only in the traditional sense, but also through the study of social and political factors that have shaped the changing lives and experiences of Samoans living in New Zealand society and elsewhere. Language is central to culture and cultural understanding. The third most spoken language in New Zealand, Samoan is studied by Samoans and non-Samoans alike at schools and universities and used in a number of government and community services. The practice of translating English to Samoan and vice versa



builds bridges of meaning, enhancing students' understanding of both cultures and their different world views.

### WHAT SKILLS DO PACIFIC STUDIES AND SAMOAN STUDIES STUDENTS DEVELOP?

**Critical thinking and research** are highly transferable skills sought by many employers. Pacific Studies students do extensive research using a range of approaches and methodologies. They learn to analyse and question assumptions made about the Pacific, to evaluate the quality and origin of sources of information on the Pacific region, and formulate and evaluate research questions. In writing an argument to support their views, students learn to critically evaluate and edit their own work.

Career View explores how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities and to life/work planning. It includes graduate destination information and current employment issues. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

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Students of Samoan Studies learn to appreciate and understand the relationship between the language and culture of **fa'asāmoa**. They use these skills to grow understanding of Samoan society and its place in the modern world, and to provide solutions to cross-cultural issues. They can also critique public attitudes and perceptions from a Samoan perspective.

**Creativity.** Pacific Studies challenges students to engage seriously with the creative arts and develops their confidence in synthesising and applying creative approaches themselves. Students of Samoan Studies learn to make creative connections between a Samoan identity and cultural realities within New Zealand social settings, and to appreciate the value of Samoan oral traditions such as poetry, music and oratory in modern applications.

Pacific Studies and Samoan Studies students learn to express themselves through competent and confident **communication**, presenting their work both academically and in ways that reflect the languages and cultures they are studying. Pacific Studies develops students' abilities to understand and communicate complex ideas and information, and to defend a well-considered point of view on Pacific issues through written work and oral presentations. Students of Samoan learn to use appropriate registers of spoken language for different social situations and to apply knowledge of fa'asāmoa in making responses from a Samoan point of view.

In a world that is increasingly interconnected through communications technology and travel, **cultural intelligence** is invaluable within the Pacific and throughout the world. Pacific peoples have different values, behaviours and approaches to life. Pacific Studies develops the attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary to navigate and research new and multi-cultural contexts. Through Samoan Studies students

gain awareness of and empathy with the issues that impact on Samoan peoples in the Pacific.

**Leadership.** Through Pacific Studies, students acquire a sense of responsibility towards the Pacific. They develop confidence and commitment in representing the region along with a commitment to life-long learning. Samoan Studies cultivates an ability to negotiate and mediate between family, community and the Samoan society both within New Zealand and the diaspora. Students also learn to take care of the relationships between Samoans and other New Zealanders –*teu le vāfealoa'i* (look after the relationships).

## WHERE DO PACIFIC STUDIES AND SAMOAN STUDIES GRADUATES WORK?

Graduates may consider roles wherever there is a need for in-depth and broad understanding of Pacific peoples, their strengths, their needs and the issues of living in post-colonial and multi-cultural societies. Combining Pacific Studies and/or Samoan Studies majors with another major or degree is advantageous, for example: law, development studies architecture, design, management, human resources, education, and social sciences such as anthropology or criminology can be excellent complementary subjects.

**Public sector.** Government ministries have a range of roles in policy and research, administration, human resources, finance, communications, and other specialist areas. Contact centres can provide useful entry experience to an organisation. The Ministries of Education, Social Development, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Internal Affairs, Justice, and Business, Innovation and Employment are large organisations that need graduates with excellent analytical and people skills. Many of these ministries have developed or are developing Pacific strategies in order



to better carry out their mandated and legislative responsibilities to Pacific peoples. General as well as Pacific-related knowledge and research skills will be an advantage as research about Pacific issues is a potential growth area.

**Local government organisations**, such as local, regional and unitary councils manage a very wide range of services for the community such as housing, health, sport and recreation, emergency management, urban planning, community centres and youth programmes. Students with research, cultural, and language skills combined with other interests and qualifications find many different work options.

**Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)** perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to governments, advocate and monitor policies, and encourage political participation through provision of information. NGOs such as Red Cross, Council for International Development, Oxfam, Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) and community organisations carry out humanitarian and technical work in the Pacific. They do research around improving service provision and good practice in relation to their clientele in particular regions. They may also conduct surveys, do advocacy and fundraising, give policy advice to government

and devise programmes and events, manage communications, publicity and general administrative support. Doing voluntary work is a way to get to know the work of an NGO and may lead to paid work.

**Education.** Teaching in early childhood, primary and secondary schools is a rewarding career for graduates with the desire to work with young people. Samoan Studies graduates can teach the language in schools. A postgraduate teaching qualification is required.

Teaching at university level usually requires a PhD. Students can advance their research and teaching skills by undertaking a Master's or PhD degree. They may also tutor undergraduate students part time. Polytechnics and institutes of technology offer courses with a more practical, artistic or performance focus. Other roles in tertiary institutions include administration, advisory and learning support. Educational resource creation and learning design is an exciting growth area and may combine creative talent with skills in web design and multi-media, research, Pacific languages and writing.

Counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, doctors and other **social service and health** professionals need a broad knowledge of different ethnicities and their cultures to be able to



Photo credit: Matalena Leaupepe

Matalena Leaupepe being presented the Public Service Medal by Prime Minister Jacinda Adern and State Services Commissioner Peter Hughes



understand and work effectively with clients. Pacific Studies and Samoan Studies would assist professionals working with Pacific peoples and within Pacific contexts.

**Human resource** professionals work in large public or private sector organisations, with a consultancy or run their own HR business. A human resources (HR) adviser develops, advises on and implements policies concerning the effective use of people within an organisation. Pacific Studies and Samoan Studies graduates have skills and perspectives particularly useful where an organisation is seeking to increase or make the most of its cultural diversity. Human resource practitioners usually have additional qualifications in human resources, business management, organisational psychology and other related fields.

**Businesses** such as technology companies, insurance companies, banks, state owned enterprises, and companies from large multi-nationals to medium and small businesses employ graduates with a range of majors. Employers recognise that the ability to communicate well with all clients and customers cross-culturally is vital to success in business. A conjoint degree with subjects such as law, business, accountancy and economics opens the field even wider.

The **tourism** industry offers a wide range of career options across policy, research, management and marketing in large organisations as well as frontline work in airlines, travel agencies and tour companies.

Additional qualifications or experience may be required.

New Zealand's **creative industries** encompass fields such as screen production, television, theatre, music, design, fashion, publishing, textiles and digital content. Pacific content forms an important perspective within these industries. Some people make a living as actors, directors, producers, playwrights and scriptwriters for theatre, film, television and radio. As work in these industries is usually project-based, many do other paid work to maintain a steady income.

Some published authors make a living writing full time, however, many supplement their income by writing freelance. There is a strong interest in fiction and non-fiction writing from different Pacific perspectives and in Pacific languages for schools and a wider audience.

A growth area in **media** is online content development. With the focus on user-centred design, expertise and knowledge of Pasifika cultures is a key skill to deliver products, services and media to a growing demographic of the population. Graduates intending to work in the media (reporters, sub-editors, editors) usually require a qualification in journalism. Proficiency in Samoan is helpful to communicate to a contemporary audience.

Depending on their size, **museums and art galleries** employ staff in administration, education, exhibition design and display, research, publicity and communications. Some museums have a Pasifika



## GRADUATE PROFILES

section and require staff with specialist knowledge to curate exhibitions, do research, work with collections and provide written material for exhibitions. A background in Pacific Studies or Samoan Studies will be valuable when liaising with cultural groups that contribute artefacts and cultural knowledge to collections, and could be paired subjects such as Cultural Anthropology or History at undergraduate level. A postgraduate qualification in Museum and Cultural Studies would also be an advantage.

**Information management** has traditionally been the work of public libraries, specialist libraries and information centres. However data and information and knowledge management are core functions of any organisation and there has been a growth of consultancies and specialist organisations in this area. Additional qualifications in information management, library or archives will be required.

**Translation and interpreting.** First language speakers of Pacific languages with a high level of written English may contract to translation services following a competency test, or set up their own business. Interpreting requires fluency in at least two languages, the ability to listen and analyse information quickly, and to remain impartial. When recruiting, interpreting services will require a recognised qualification or give in-house training. Further information is available through the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters. Translation and interpreting work is likely to be part time or casual.

### JOB TITLES

Following is a sample of job titles reported in graduate employment destination surveys. Some roles may require additional qualifications and training.

Administrator • adviser • arts administrator • business analyst • communications officer/advisor • community development coordinator • curriculum developer • customer services adviser • curator • development adviser • education officer/advisor • event manager • facilitator/trainer • foreign policy officer • health promoter • human resources adviser • information officer • interpreter • learning adviser • lecturer • library assistant • market researcher • marketing coordinator • media developer • media presenter/producer • ministerial writer • Pacific learning adviser • Pacific programmes coordinator • liaison officer • police officer • policy analyst • presenter/producer • probation officer • programme advisor • research assistant • research analyst • social worker • teacher • teaching fellow • tutor • writer

### Linda John

Careers Administrator  
Porirua College



Although I did not leave school with university entrance, I was encouraged by one of the university Liaison officers, who had previously taught me at my school, Porirua College, to apply for what is known as “discretionary entrance”. I was successful and started a BA majoring in English Literature in the second trimester. A student in one of my Education classes recommended I sign up for Pacific Studies over the summer. In the first lecture Dr Teresia Teaiwa welcomed us in familiar and unfamiliar Pacific greetings. It made me feel loved, welcomed and at last excited to undertake my degree, now with Education and Pacific Studies majors.

Mid-degree I took a break from studies and started a government administration job, where I worked my way up the corporate ladder, managing, coaching and mentoring a team of twelve people. I needed to give back and work with people on a deeper level, so I volunteered at my old school as a netball coach and was then elected to the Board of Trustees, where I was struck how biased and disempowering the experience of disciplinary processes was for Māori and Pasifika students. It made me realise I needed to go back to University and finish my degree so that I could stand up for and support the young people in my community throughout their learning journey.

I eventually moved to a Careers and Transition role at my old school. To have meaningful discussions with our young people and provide them with the information, tools and resources to help them navigate what their purpose might be in life makes this the most rewarding job I’ve ever had.

University in a coconut shell for me was about getting comfortable with being uncomfortable and this is something I say to our young people daily. My studies helped me to take risks, be game, give things a go without knowing too much about it. Most important has been learning about the impact and power of words. I have been able to organise events, facilitate workshops, present on issues I’m passionate about and write powerful statements. I used to dread public speaking, but don’t give me a mic now, I won’t shut up!

Pacific Studies for Pacific people is more than a study discipline: it’s a life course. We are introduced to

Pacific academic scholars who dedicate their lives to challenging stereotypes that have hindered our peoples' growth. It has also allowed me to take my family on my university journey with me. They had the knowledge and experience that I was able to draw on and they were connecting with readings they had never seen or heard of before. I have been taught to see the Pacific for all its worth and appreciate that I descend from a people who explored, navigated and discovered new lands. My existence is because of their intelligence and my abilities to continue raising thriving societies is inherent, it's in me.

### Faaaliga Leota

Student Liaison Officer  
Victoria University of Wellington

To be quite honest, university was not part of the plan when I finished high school. But when I did enter tertiary education and was accepted into university, I really had a passion about learning and discovering more of who I am, my culture and where I come from. This was the main drive and reason for taking Pacific Studies and Samoan Studies.



What I enjoyed most was the relationships I built not only with staff members but also those who were studying as well. I have always heard that sometimes it's not what you know but who you know and with my journey at university I have really appreciated getting to know others from their respective study subjects, cultural groups and communities.

My studies definitely allowed me to develop my presentation skills. From someone who was not really into standing in front of crowds and speaking, I now as a Student Liaison Officer draw on those skills constantly.

Through my undergraduate years, the idea of doing postgraduate study or having a career with my university did not occur to me. Now that I'm in my final year of a Master of Education degree as well as working within the Student Recruitment team here at the university, I can reflect that my undergraduate years really did help me achieve where I am currently.

I really encourage students who are contemplating studying Samoan Studies and Pacific Studies to not be ashamed of who you are. Taking these two subject areas allows you to discover more about yourself as an individual and also as a community alongside others. Continue to strive for greatness, as both Samoan Studies and Pacific Studies can help you achieve your goals.

### Conor Lui

Cinematographer and editor  
Wrestler

I chose Pacific Studies because I wanted to learn more about my Pacific heritage. My older brother and sister both took Pacific Studies and spoke very highly of it. Being half Niuean I was drawn to Pacific Studies for both the rich knowledge I would gain and also the family environment of working with fellow Pacific students and staff. My lecturers Dr April Henderson and the late Dr Teresia Teaiwa along with the many other PASI staff were huge inspirations for me and they always challenged me throughout my studies. I am also passionate about filmmaking and really enjoyed English at high school, so I also majored in Film Studies and English Literature.



My studies sharpened my analytical skills, broadened my perspectives and taught me to think critically. I was able to hone my research and writing skills, and to express my thoughts clearly. I also gained a huge amount of people skills, was forced to come out of my shell and gained a new confidence through group work, presentations and performances.

Initially I worked at Victoria as a liaison officer for Pacific and Māori first-year students, a role I was persuaded to go for by another great academic mentor of mine. Since then I've worked in a variety of jobs, almost all leaning towards filmmaking and video. I helped manage the Light House Cinema Cuba, worked at Weta Workshop and for two years in Germany at a film website on the social media team and as a video editor. I've been a freelance videographer and I am now currently working at Wrestler, a creative storytelling agency in Wellington as a video editor and Director of Photography/ camera operator. We create commercials, brand videos and unique stories through documentaries, online videos and virtual reality.

My Pacific Studies background enables me to bring Pacific connections into my workplace and into the film and video industry. My aim is to work with more Pacific creatives in this space and also to grow the number of Pacific youth in the industry. The reading, research and writing across all subjects helped develop my story telling, which I use in my current filmmaking and video work today. Studying is hard but rewarding, often we are too embarrassed or shy to ask for help. Sometimes we need help paddling our vaka in the right direction.

## Emily Fatu

Policy Analyst  
Ministry of Education



My majors were Cultural Anthropology and Pacific Studies and then I carried on with Pacific Studies through to postgraduate level. These two subjects started out as interest courses I was taking for points. However, the first-year course was so eye-opening for me and my passion for the subject grew from there.

Pacific Studies wasn't just a subject at university for me. It taught me about my own history and helped me understand the nuances of Pacific culture and why certain 'traditions' are what they are today. I also really enjoyed the variety in learning, and the opportunity to express our ideas creatively. We did a lot of group work and presentations, and we had the opportunity to lead class discussions based on the teachings and assigned readings. This style of learning also meant working closer with my peers and I've made lifelong friends!

I've always struggled with public speaking and one of the great things with Pacific studies is we had oral presentations every year. This was a way to sharpen my communication skills but also helped with being able to share my ideas to a group of people. This is a critical skill in the jobs that I've had so far. We also had to constructively critique groups who were leading class discussions to tell them what was great and what could be improved. This really helped with my critical analysis in the work I do when providing feedback and advice to my colleagues, other organisations and our Minister.

My first full-time job after my Master's degree was a Policy Analyst role at the Ministry of Health in the Pacific Health Policy team. It has been useful to bring my lived and learnt experience to giving advice in the health and education sectors, to help our Pacific people.

Even if Pacific or Samoan Studies isn't your major, I recommend doing some courses because it provides a richer insight into a population who are a huge part of New Zealand's culture. The Pacific population is growing, and our presence is becoming more and more prominent. Pacific studies can develop your knowledge of the cultures, history and experiences of Pacific people. Cultural understanding is something employers seek.

## Emelihter Kihleng

Curatorial Research Fellow  
MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum



At the time that I applied to Va'aomanu Pasifika in 2009 I believe there were very few Pacific Studies Programs where you could do a PhD. I chose to apply to Victoria University of Wellington because I knew of the late Dr. Teresia Teaiwa, a fellow Micronesian and a poet, and I wanted to study with her. The main reason I was able to do a PhD was that I received a Victoria PhD Scholarship. I am so grateful to have received that kind of support towards my studies. I enjoyed the sense of community, especially amongst the Pasifika staff and students. There is a lot of support for Pasifika students, and you are made to feel special and at home even if you are very far away from home as I was, having come from Guam.

My studies sharpened my critical thinking skills. I took Theory and Methods in Pacific Studies with Teresia and wow! I learned so much. There is a question format called "KCQs", Key Concepts and Questions, based on the course readings and you have to condense your thoughts into cohesive answers. Teresia was a tough grader and I would spend hours answering my KCQs. This really helped my writing. In Pacific Studies we are encouraged to be interdisciplinary and comparative in thinking about Oceania which forces students to think outside the Pacific Island boxes we often create for ourselves or are put into (eg Polynesia/Micronesia or Melanesia).

I know that I would not be in my present position here in Hamburg, Germany if I had not completed a PhD. The interdisciplinary nature and academic rigour of Pacific Studies gave me the creative and scholarly base I needed to write my thesis, which was a poetic ethnography that explored the social life of urohs, Pohnpeian skirts, sewn, worn, gifted and loved on Pohnpei Island in Micronesia where I am from. I was able to combine my love of poetry and material culture, which has led to museum work as well as other positions I have held.

I would advise students interested in Pacific Studies to find what they are truly passionate about in Oceania and follow that.