

# FNUNIKUA



## #Balanceforbetter

ISSUE NO. 03

MARCH 2019

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
STILL WORK TO BE DONE

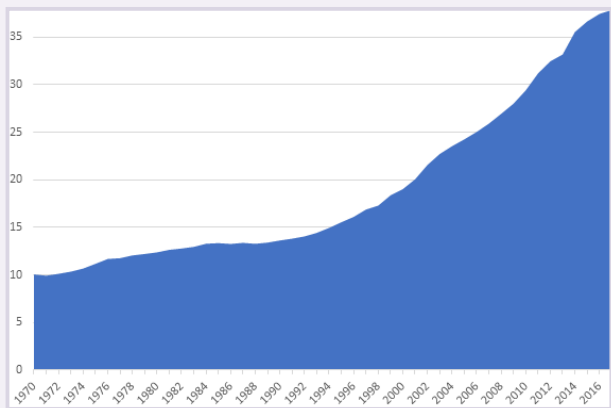
STRONG COMMITMENT AND  
DEDICATION ARE FOUNDATION OF  
BATIMOKO'S ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER

# Women in higher education: still work to be done



Governments everywhere have increased access to tertiary education, in the belief that education is the route to higher national economic productivity and reduced social inequality. The latest UNESCO data (for 2017) show that, worldwide, the gross tertiary enrolment ratio has risen to 37.9%. In other words, over one-third of all 18-year olds in the world presently enrol in college or university. Over the last 50 years, participation in tertiary education has grown steadily from 10% in 1970 to almost 40% today (see Figure 1).

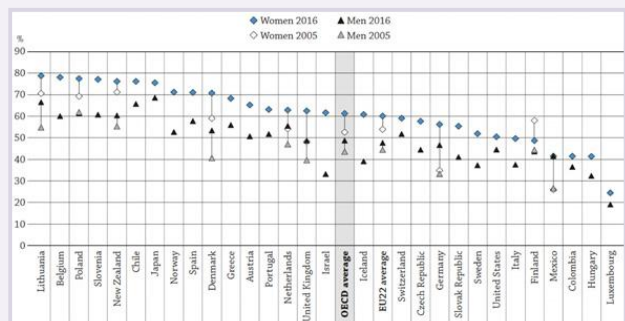
Figure 1: Gross tertiary enrolment ratio



Source: UNESCO

Women have disproportionately benefitted from this expansion in higher education. In almost every country, the majority of students in tertiary education are now women. Figure 2 shows the proportion of men and women who enrolled in tertiary education in 2006 and 2016 for the OECD countries. It shows that in every country, there were more women than men in 2016. Moreover, it also shows that in almost every country which has reported 2006 data, male enrolment in 2016 had not yet reached female enrolment rates a decade earlier in 2006. In other words, while the participation rates for both sexes are increasing in most countries, the lead enjoyed by women in 2006 is not being reduced over time.

Figure 2: Male and female gross tertiary enrolment rates

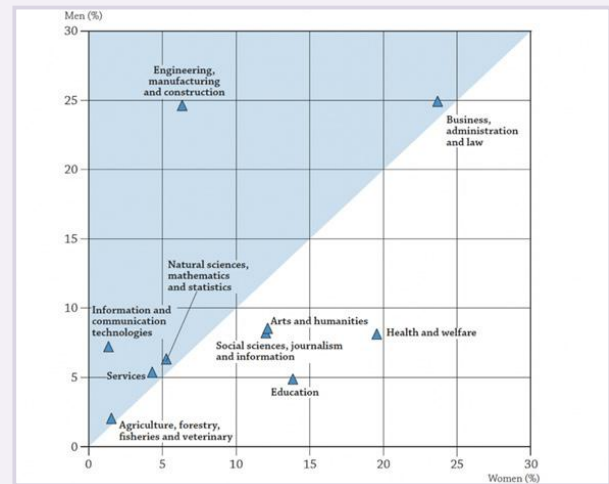


Source: UNESCO

The bad news is that there are sharp gender differences between enrolments in different subjects. Figure 3 shows the distribution of graduates by gender and discipline. Subjects along the 45-degree line boundary have the same the proportion of male and female graduates. For example, roughly 25% of both men and women graduates are from business, administration and law. Subjects in the north-west zone are those where the proportion of male graduates is higher than female graduates. 25% of male graduates are from engineering, manufacturing and construction, but only 7% of women graduate from these subjects. Conversely, the south-east zone shows the subjects dominated by women. 14% of women graduate from education, compared to only 5% of men. Almost 20% of women graduate from health and welfare, which accounts for only 8% of male graduates.

This matters for two reasons. First, it is unhealthy for some disciplines to have such a sharp gender imbalance, which can set up a vicious circle. Having so few women in engineering, manufacturing and construction deprives this sector of many of the best and brightest female minds. It also creates a male-orientated culture which deters women from trying to break into these areas.

Figure 3: Distribution of tertiary graduates by gender and discipline



Source: UNESCO

Secondly, gender imbalances across disciplines contribute to the continuing gender pay gap. In most countries, it is illegal to discriminate when hiring or promoting employees on the basis of gender. Yet despite such legislation, average female earnings continue to lag behind their male counterparts. To highlight this gap, on ‘Equal Pay Day’ (15 March) this year, the transport authority in Berlin charged women passengers 21% less than their male passengers. German women earn, on the average, 21% less than German men.

Table 1 shows the counter-intuitive effect of tertiary education

on the gender pay gap for 10 of the most advanced OECD countries. If someone leaves school without completing at least 12 years of formal education (ie, attains ‘below upper secondary’ level), their earning power is limited to the value of their manual labour. In jobs where strength and stamina are the key attributes required, a gender pay gap might be expected. And the OECD data show that for this group, women earn between 10% to 30% less than men. If someone completes a tertiary education, their productivity depends not on their manual attributes, but on their skills and knowledge. Why should a female doctor or teacher earn less than a male doctor or teacher?

Table 1: Female earnings as a percentage of male earnings by educational attainment

	Below upper secondary	Upper secondary	Tertiary
Australia	82	77	76
Canada	70	69	72
France	76	83	72
Germany	75	84	74
Italy	80	79	70
New Zealand	80	76	77
Norway	82	79	74
Sweden	90	85	82
United Kingdom	79	74	78
United States	74	73	70

Source: OECD

In fact, the data show that in many countries, having a tertiary education increases the gender pay gap. In Italy, the gap widens from 20% for women with below upper secondary education to 30% for those with tertiary education. In Sweden, often seen being very socially progressive, the 10% pay gap for those leaving school prematurely stretches to 18% for women with a tertiary education.

There are, of course, various reasons why the gender pay gap persists despite anti-discrimination legislation. There is covert sexual discrimination. Workplace practices have been constructed around men’s needs, not women’s. Women take career breaks to have children and still shoulder most of the burden of childcare, even when they have fulltime jobs. But the gender imbalance at the discipline level in tertiary education is clearly part of the problem. Engineers and ICT workers get paid more than teachers and nurses. The stark reality is that getting girls into university is not enough. We need to work harder to encourage more women into science, engineering and ICT to achieve greater gender equality in the workplace.

Professor Nigel Healey  
FNU Vice Chancellor





Elegantly dressed in a ‘Bula’ outfit, neatly trimmed hair, with well-manicured fingers busy typing away on her computer, Alisi Batimoko is interrupted by a phone call from the Dean of the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), Dr William May, seeking information regarding an ongoing project. Batimoko shuffles a few folders stacked neatly beside her table and within minutes provides Dr May the information he is seeking before returning to continue working on her computer.

“In this job you really have to ensure that you keep all the records properly filed so it’s easy to provide information to those who need it,” said Batimoko with a smile.

Being the senior secretary at CMNHS, Batimoko is the go to person for most administrative matters. This role requires her to ensure all information are kept updated, properly archived and available to her supervisors.

Having served at the College for 37 years, Batimoko is a meticulous worker and she loves having an eye for detail.

“This role comes with great responsibility. There is no room for error or mis-placing documents and everything we do has an impact on the College operations,” said Batimoko.

Born and bred in Tamavua Village, Suva, the challenges were plentiful ranging from personal to professional life.

She started her permanent position with the College as a typist at the age of 21 having to juggle her new job with the responsibilities of being a wife and a mother of one.

“Being a working mother things were difficult but I tried to stay on top of things by waking up early to complete most of my household chores before I left for work. My family was also quite supportive which was of great help to me.”

Despite her early mornings and late evenings for more than

three decades, Batimoko still walks into her office greeting the staff with a big Bula smile everyday like a breath of fresh air and feels a change is as good as a rest.

Batimoko has witnessed firsthand—the transformation of a budding (the then) Fiji School of Medicine into what is today, a state of art premier tertiary medical education institution in the region and believes it was important for everyone to embrace the inevitable changes.

“When I joined in November of 1982, we did not have any computers or photocopying machines. I was among a pool of four typists and we used manual typewriters for every piece of written work,” a proud Batimoko said.

“We typed student’s exam papers on typewriters and photocopied it using duplicating machines. I was based at Tamavua Campus and at the time, that was the main administrative building.”

According to her, student numbers were relatively small and she remembered majority of the students by name and face.

Such is the extent of her memory with the medical institution that she also remembers Dr William May, now the Dean of CMNHS, as a student.

“I remember Dr May when he was a student very clearly. He hasn’t changed much at all and he was one of those students who never had any disciplinary issues.”

So many seasons have passed by for Batimoko that it is difficult, for her to pick out her most memorable experience, however, the usage of cadavers by students seemed quite interesting.

A cadaver is a dead human body that is used by medical students as a part of their education.

“At the time, students practiced on cadavers brought in from

overseas and I clearly remember that the last three were given a full funeral service because we always respected them.”

After spending a few years at Tamavua Campus, Batimoko and her team were moved to Hoodless House.

She said that is when the technological changes took off.

“When we moved here (Hoodless House), we had computers brought in and four of us shared two computers and an electronic typewriter.”

“We also underwent a restructure and many other administrative units were added to the support services of the College.”

She said, the current buildings of the College such as the Kivi residential house and Pasifika Campus were built right in front of her eyes.

Being one of the oldest staff at the College, Batimoko has truly lived through changes not only at her workplace but also in her personal life and she has gone on to be a mother of three and a grandmother to a 13-year-old.

For someone who has worked so reliably year in and year out, she has a different plan now.

“I think I have contributed as much as I could to the College and I have helped so many people over the years. Now, I am thinking about retiring and spending quality time with my family.”

Nonetheless, she also shared her words of wisdom to all the women.

“For all the women striving to become something, I would like to say that you should be proud and be faithful to your career, and that is something that will take you a long way in life,” Batimoko highlighted.



Regina Singh receives a CAFF Academic staff award from Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching, Prof James Pounder.

## Love of the sea leads Singh to teach Fisheries Science

Growing up on an island with the ocean playing a crucial role in her daily survival heavily influenced Regina Singh’s love for the marine environment.

The bubbly 24-year-old from Rabi Island, off Vanua Levu said she can easily recall the days as a youngster when she would accompany her father to sea for fishing trips or boat rides.

Singh, who has three brothers and a sister, is the second youngest child of her Fijian of Indian descent father and Rabian mother.

“I left Suva when I was just a three-year-old and went to live in my mum’s village on Rabi called Tabwewa,” she shared.

“At four, I can remember that I was fascinated with the ocean. I saw how important it was to the village because it provided us with food for our survival and also assisted us financially.”

“This is when I developed a passion for the marine species and environment.”

Twenty years later, Singh has turned her childhood experiences and passion into a career and is now an Assistant Lecturer in Fisheries Science at the Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF).

“I knew that I wanted to work and make a difference in the field of Fisheries because I know how important this sector is,” Singh commented.

“The Fisheries industry deals with our marine resources, most of which brings in money hence it is very important to study how to conserve and manage these resources.”

“I knew this industry was mostly a male-dominated environment, from the fishermen to the sea captains and crew

workers and the packaging and processing plants but this has never deterred me from my passion.”

“My parents have been my biggest role models and they have always motivated me and reminded me that nothing should stop me from achieving anything.”

Despite her youth, Singh has shown maturity beyond her years when reflecting on her role as a person of influence through her teaching.

“I do realise that my students may be at different stages of their lives personally but academically, I owe it to them to be a role model and deliver the highest level of education which they rightfully deserve.”

“These students will be with me during their university studies so I am mindful of how I present myself.”

Singh believes gender balance and empowerment is a crucial factor in Fiji’s progress as a nation and said that “everyone is the same and no one is better than anyone else.”

“One of the challenges I face at work is when I take the students out for industry visits, it is only the male students asking questions whilst my female students are quiet.”

“I remind the girls that they have the same playing field as the boys – they are taught the same things and have access to the same resources and support so when they go out into the industry, they should realise that they have as much right to be in this field as the males do.”

Singh has plans to further her qualifications, with hopes to complete her Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental Conservation and Climate Change this semester before embarking on her Masters in Fisheries Policy.

During the CAFF inaugural Staff Awards Nite last month, Singh received a CAFF Academic Staff Award.





Maureen Sangeeta with her four children

# Maureen, an inspiration to her four children

students with her soft smile but only those who know her too well would know the hurdles she had overcome in life.

Born and bred in the outskirts of Nausori in a rural community in Baulevu, Sangeeta got married at the age of 19 and became a mother to two sons and twin daughters.

Life took an ugly twist when Sangeeta parted ways from her husband in 2002 when her youngest child was just merely a year old.

“I had no clue what I needed to do next. I was shattered. I used to think I won’t be able to meet the needs of my four children, there was little which I could do for them,” said teary-eyed Sangeeta.

“Honestly I was devastated but there was no time to grieve as my mind was consumed with the worry that I have four mouths to feed with no resources at all,” she said.

“This is when my family members came as a blessing. My siblings supported me emotionally and financially and took care of my children till I was able to secure a job for myself,” she added.

When life was dark and gloomy, she found the light at the end of a tunnel - always pushing through the trials and tribulations life would throw at her.

“I started working as a house girl, I did baby sitting and I also worked as a shop assistant.”

Years went by and Sangeeta kept working to meet the needs of her children.

“I sold roti parcels as well so that I could give pocket money to my children for school,” she said.

“In 2009, I saw a vacancy of a house keeping assistant at the Fiji College of Advanced Education. I applied and I count myself lucky that I was selected. Since then I have had a full-time job.”

“The good part about working at a higher education institution is that I was able to meet students from different background and ethnicity who all had a common goal of attaining a tertiary qualification. They had their own stories to tell and I was able to go back home and share their stories to encourage my children to do well academically,” she said.

“Sometimes I used to think whether I will see my children studying here one day or will I see them graduate, and become teachers in future.”

Today, three of her children are primary and high school teachers. For Sangeeta, she has never been prouder than this.

“I would say being a mother is itself a hard job, but being a single mother is twice the work, twice the stress, twice the tears and also twice the pride.”

“My elder son Nishaal Prasad is a History and Geography teacher. My twin daughters Darshika Prasad and Shiwani Prasad are teachers at Rara District School and Ahmadiya Muslim Primary School. My youngest son is still in high school,” Sangeeta said proudly.

“Being a single mother is tough, it is painful. You will cry, but never give up and never stop believing in yourself,” advised Sangeeta.

22-year-old Shiwani Prasad described her mother as “selfless and kind woman”.

“If ever I needed something for my studies, my mother will find ways to make it happen so basically she is my super mom because she deserves every bit of our success which we have achieved uptil now,” said Prasad.

Similar sentiments were shared by her twin sister Darshika Prasad.

“We have faced a lot of challenges in life especially financial needs and my mother has always made an effort to ensure that these needs were met,” she said.

Sangeeta hopes to continue to be a role model to her four children and expecting to see them succeed further in life.

“I would say being a mother is itself a hard job, but being a single mother is twice the work, twice the stress, twice the tears and also twice the pride.”

Tough times never last but tough people do - a quote from the late Robert Harold Schuller, an American Christian televangelist, pastor, motivational speaker, and author can best describe the life journey of Maureen Sangeeta who works as a housekeeper at the Fiji National University’s (FNU) Nasinu Campus.

The 44-year-old is a fighter and didn’t give up on life especially when her life hit rock bottom, with only a few dollars in her hand and having to raise four children.

Determined not to let her broken marital status get into the way, she focused on striving towards changing her life around for the betterment of her children.

Fast forward 17 years, Sangeeta not only has a steady employment but has also been able to send her children to school and live a happy and content life.

“It hasn’t been an easy journey. There were many challenges and many points in my life where I felt that I would not make it. But I kept trying as I wanted to ensure my children live a happy and wonderful life,” said an emotional Sangeeta.

Sangeeta’s dedication and sacrifice is a hallmark of what women can achieve no matter what the odds are.

She starts each day at around 4am preparing breakfast and packing lunch for her children before catching a bus at 5am to work.

Sangeeta, who resides in Baulevu Nausori reaches Nasinu Campus an hour later, heads straight to the office, collects the necessary equipment and sets out with her work.

“Overall I am in-charge of the H Block at the Campus. There are ten classrooms, three lecture rooms, five tutorial rooms and one laboratory which I have to look after. Some may say I am a sweeper at FNU, I don’t care. I love my job and I will fulfill my duties with diligence,” said Sangeeta.

The motherly-natured Sangeeta warmly greets staff and







**Chef Tawanakoro secures overseas training attachment**

**D**reaming big and setting goals towards achieving them is exactly what Fiji National University student and Chef Olympiad Ana Tawanakoro did and now the 23-year-old is surprised with what she has managed to attain in the past year.

Tawanakoro, a final year Trade Diploma in Culinary Arts student with the College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS) recently ‘cooked-off’ with the best chefs from around the world when she participated at the 5th International Young Chef Olympiad in India.

Originally from Sasa village in Ba, Tawanakoro said it was a tough decision to leave her family and move to Suva to pursue her tertiary education.

“There are many other obstacles and struggles which I had to overcome here but I had to cope with life here and trust me it was worth the experience,” she said.

“In all these circumstances, my mother has been an inspiration to me. I have always seen her cooking and the love for food and culinary came from her,” added Tawanakoro.

Tawanakoro, who has a friendly and outgoing personality, was the first Fijian student to participate at Chef Olympiad held in India.

After the completion of the Olympiad, Tawanakoro was approached by a leading hotel in Culcutta, India to undertake a six-month practical attachment.

“Right now, it’s a bit early to disclose all the information but I can confirm that I will be going to India for my practical early next year,” said an excited Tawanakoro.

The Young Chef said she was over-whelmed with the good news and was looking forward

to further enhance her knowledge and skills in the culinary sector.

“I am thrilled to be given this this opportunity. It feels great to know that they (hotel reps) saw my work during the competition and selected me to be part of their team,” she said.

“This same hotel provides attachment opportunities to students from all over the world and I am excited to represent Fiji,” added Tawanakoro.

She described her trip to India last month as a “life-changing experience”.

“I have learnt a lot during the Young Chef Olympiad competition. Actually when I was going to India I thought Fiji is already known but after reaching India I realized that hardly anyone knows where Fiji is,” said the budding chef.

“The people in India really liked our culture and tradition. They were impressed with my outfit and also they liked my traditional thanks-giving to them following the competition,” she said.

“The competition was tough. I learnt a lot. There was a time limit of two hours to prepare our dishes and luckily I managed to complete it on time,” she said.

Following her stint in India, the aspiring chef is back at the University working towards completing her programme. The young aspiring chef’s message to women is “Never look back in life”.

“I believe we should not dwell in the past and not be discouraged by other people’s opinion. You just need to strive for your best.”

“I’m so grateful to my lecturer Anish Lal for his encouragement and guidance and to the outstanding Food and Beverage department at FNU” she said.

## Moroca and Singh scoop top award at CAFF staff awards ceremony

**I**t was history in the making as two women claimed the top prize at the Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s (CAFF) inaugural CAFF Staff Awards event held earlier this month.

The event was organised by the College to acknowledge the staff for their commitment and dedication in their respective fields of work. The event also served as an opportunity to motivate staff to achieve more by giving them recognition and praising good work.

CAFF staff were requested to vote for someone other than themselves. The two categories comprised of Academic Awards and Support Staff Awards. The staff who got the highest number of nominations was declared the winner.

### Academic Award



**A**sinete Moroca, who has been in the field of agriculture for more than 29 years, scooped the Academic Award of 2018.

Moroca dedicated the award to her family, especially to her husband.

“My husband has always stood beside me and supported my decisions. It is difficult for a full-time working woman to manage home and work but I always had the support of my husband and my family and also the CAFF family,” said Moroca.

The senior academic was the first woman appointed as the Principal of Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA) in 2009.

With the establishment of FNU in 2010, Moroca was part of the transitioning team that came under the national university’s umbrella.

Moroca highlighted that women’s contribution in the agricultural sector needed to be celebrated prominently.

“I believe we don’t usually talk about the contribution women make in the agricultural sector but when you visit villagers or go past sugarcane farms you will see that women are working on the farms and selling their produce on the roadside or in the markets.”

“This is a very positive sign and we need to continue to encourage our younger women more into taking up agriculture,” Moroca added.

### Support Staff Award



**I**t was a pleasantly surprising moment for Angelina Singh to be announced as the winner of the Support Staff of the Year Award.

Singh said she felt appreciated by the colleagues who recognised her dedication to work and nominated her for this award.

CAFF Dean, Professor Paul Iji read out some of the citations from the staff about Singh as to why they were nominating her for the award.

The female colleagues at the College acknowledged her for being their pillar of inspiration.

“I never realised that so many of the female colleagues at the College had such a high regard of me and my values. It is always a pleasure to assist staff whenever they need help and I believe because of this virtue I have been nominated by staff for the Support Staff of the Year award.”

The 37-year-old has climbed ranks from being a Personal Assistant to Executive Officer.

“I started my journey with the procurement department in 2010 after the merger of Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji to form FNU.”

Singh dedicated her professional life success to her mother.

“My mother has inspired me a lot. Her vision of having daughters living an independent life has made me who I am today. Even after my marriage she carried on to encourage me to further my studies, which has resulted for me to complete my Bachelors, Post Graduate studies and now pursuing Masters.”

Strong-willed Singh advised women not to feel restricted just because you are a woman, instead strive to break the barriers and the stereotypes to achieve what gives you peace and makes you happy.

“There is no limit to what you can do. All you need is a leap. Marriage and children doesn’t mean that your life has ended, it is in your hands to create your own path,” Singh added.

## MY SAY



**Paulini Maramaniquali**  
Director of Communications and Public Relations.  
FNUSA

**I**nternational Women’s Day is celebrated on 8th of March every year all around the world. This year, for the first time, the Fiji National University Students’ Association (FNUSA) hosted an event at the VaLeLeVu Lecture Theatre to join the global community in celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. Divisional Police Commander Southern, Bereta Naisua was the chief guest at this event. Senior Police officer Naisua spoke about the history of how women were instrumental in fighting for justice, freedom and their rights. IWD continues to be a powerful platform globally that unifies tenacity and drives action for gender parity, while celebrating the social, cultural, economic and political achievements of women. In my opinion, this year’s theme #BalanceforBetter not only highlights the gap between men and women in leadership roles but it also celebrates the barriers women have broken to work alongside males in fields perceived to be male-dominated. Women have proven that they can excel in any field of work, education, social and domestic life. It is encouraging to note the changes over the years where many women strive to do more than just staying at home. Much progress has been made to protect and promote women’s rights in recent times. However, according to the United Nations, nowhere in the world can women claim to have all the same rights and opportunities as men. The majority of the world’s 1.3 billion absolute poor are women and on average, women receive between 30 and 40 percent less pay than men earn for the same work, according to the UN. It is also evident that women continue to be victims of violence, rape and domestic violence which has been listed as significant causes of disability and death among women worldwide. Therefore, I believe that this day should be celebrated every day. Women deserve to be given this honour and respect every day and not only on International Women’s Day. We need to honour the countless sacrifices they make in order to fulfill the needs of everyone around them.





## Gaundan relishes role as Head Technician

Being the guardian of all laboratories and technicians at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) Campus in Koronivia is a challenging task but one which Sharon Shivanjali Gaundan (*pictured left*) has grown to love.

The Head Technician spends her day supervising the operations of the seven laboratories, one vet clinic, 19 technicians, as well as providing specialist technical support and ensuring the safe upkeep of all lab facilities.

Gaundan enjoys her role of inspecting the labs and ensuring all equipment are available and in proper conditions for use. She also emphasizes daily, the need for staff and students to comply with occupational health and safety (OHS) procedures to produce a safe learning environment.

The 29-year-old joined the Fiji National University (FNU) in December last year and is a Bachelor in Medical Laboratory Science graduate from the (then) Fiji School of Medicine. Gaundan spent the previous six years working for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services as a Technical Officer Class II and briefly at

the Daulako Mycobacterium Research Laboratory at PJ Twomey Hospital.

“Laboratory science professionals are essentially detectives who uncover and provide laboratory analysis in assistance while also playing a key role in disease prevention,” she said.

“Laboratory scientists have a more extensive theoretical knowledge base, meaning they not only perform laboratory procedures but also evaluate and interpret results, utilise data and consult and conduct research to develop new test methods.”

“As a young girl growing up, I was more of an indoor person and spent most of my time reading whilst others my age were playing outside or with their toys and dolls.”

“I read so many mysteries and forensic novels that I knew I had to work in a laboratory setting.”

Originally from Vunivau in Labasa, Gaundan said her approach as a female leader is a positive attitude, soft-hearted but strong minded and creating a goal-oriented working environment.

“I believe this is an advantage to having women work cohesively with men in any workplace,” she commented.

“We cannot force gender equality or empowerment on anyone. Each individual needs to be empowered and confident enough to work autonomously and with a team, complementing each other’s skills and experience.”

The soft-spoken Gaundan said her personal upbringing with two sisters and a single mother largely contributed to her work ethics.

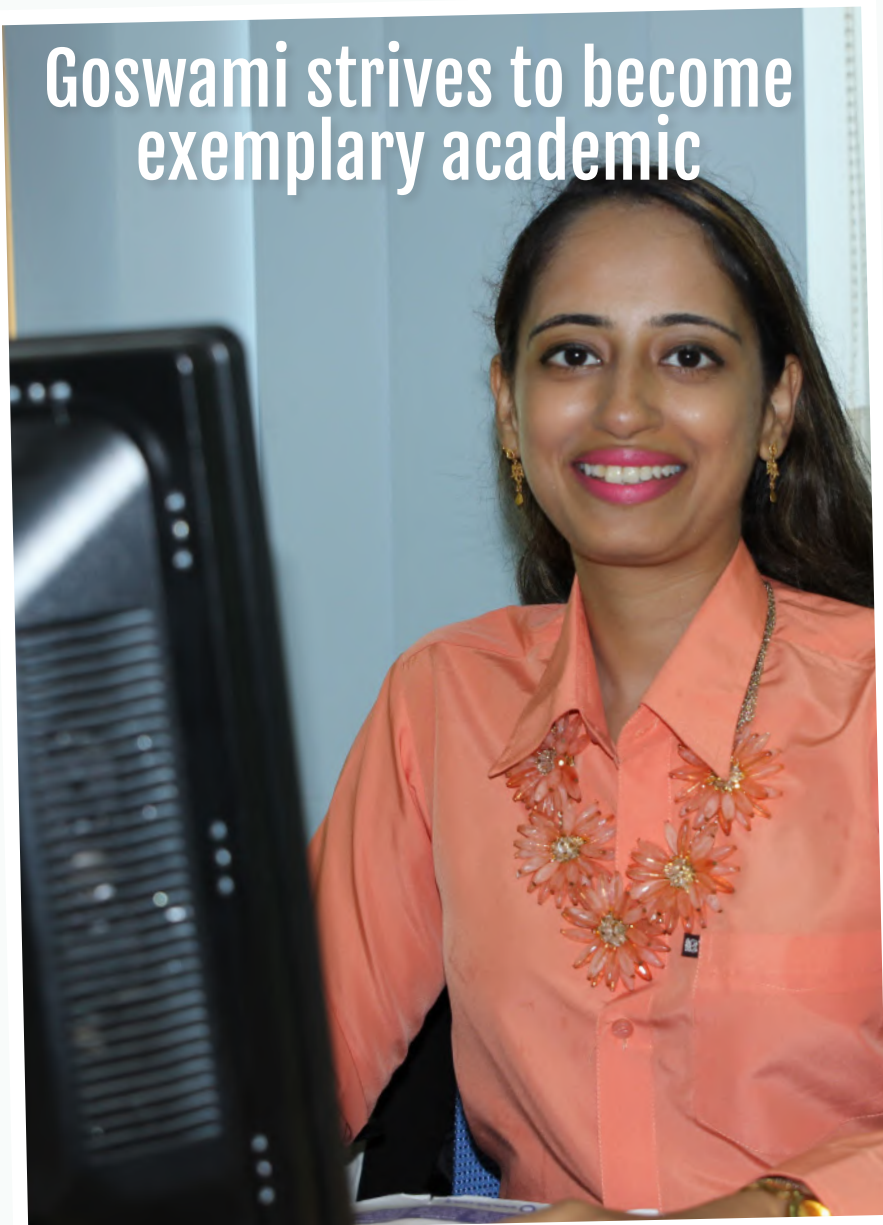
“I have learnt very early in life to be independent and self-sufficient. Growing up, we were always told that we can be whatever we want if we work towards our goals diligently.”

“With the support of my family and the courage of conviction to move forward regardless of past failures, I have managed to reach this stage in my life whereby I am advancing in my career while at the same time helping others to succeed.”

“I believe that one of the best ways to build sustainable female leadership is through mentorship, as mentors help one acclimate quickly to the required operations of any organisation.”

Gaundan, who recently got married, said time management was important in helping maintain a balance between her career, family and social life.

## Goswami strives to become exemplary academic



Twenty-eight-year-old Sugandha Goswami is a go-getter who is determined to complete her PhD in Clinical Biochemistry in the next five years.

Goswami is currently employed as an Assistant Lecturer with Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) and she loves teaching students.

While Goswami’s persona brims with confidence and is fused with a strong focus on academic advancement, the young professional confesses her personality was relatively the opposite as a teenager.

The former Jai Narayan College (JNC) student says she lacked faith and self-esteem as she set-out on the path of pursuing studies in the field of medicine.

“I was always shy because there isn’t much encouragement given to females to pursue the medical field,” she said.

However, after attaining her undergraduate studies in Laboratory Sciences from the then Fiji School of Medicine, Goswami said her confidence level received a massive boost.

“I was always a very nurturing person with an avid interest in assisting people. Medicine is something that I always wanted to do although none of my siblings are in this field.”

Being the youngest of three siblings, she always felt the pressure of performing to the best of her ability in her chosen field.

She worked at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital for three years before joining CMNHS as a Research Assistant.

While at FNU, Goswami secured an Australian Awards Scholarship to pursue a Masters degree in Laboratory Medicine from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Australia.

According to Goswami, returning to undertake full-time studies after four years was a challenge but one that she was able to overcome through determination and perseverance. She completed the two-year programme and graduated last year.

“There were many challenges such as adjusting to the weather, staying away from family and a new study environment but I constantly reminded myself of my goals.”

Goswami balanced her studies and personal time by taking up extracurricular activities, such as martial arts and playing chess with the Melbourne Chess Association.



Undertaking sight-seeing trips, making new friends and professional networking, Goswami said was all incorporated in her weekend schedule.

The soft-spoken young academic said it was important for women to make good use of opportunities given to them. She encouraged women to continue to push-on even if there are no openings in sight.

Goswami said patience and sticking true to your goals would assist in overcoming hurdles in life.

“Women should never underestimate themselves. You need to believe in yourselves to take challenges head on and always have faith,” Goswami said.

“I think opportunities come far and few and when it knocks on your door, you need to make maximum use of it,” she added.

Goswami encouraged women to continue to upgrade their qualifications and work hard to attain their life goals.



# Engineer Swetha imparts knowledge to students



Swetha Priya Darshani receiving a certificate for successfully completing a training in Environmental Impact Assessment for Infrastructure Projects in India.

Challenging stereotypes and taking risks has been the ladder to success for the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) academic, Swetha Priya Darshini.

Born and raised in Warangal, the second-most-populous city in Telangana State of Southern India, Darshini was molded by her parents to always step out of her comfort zone in order to have a successful career.

This upbringing led Darshini to opt for a career in the Engineering discipline despite having a strong passion for Medicine.

## Education Journey in India

“Traditionally in South India, after completion of 10th standard, we have two options; either to choose Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry or go for Biology. The general concept in India is that with Mathematics stream you can go for Engineering and with Biology you can take up Medicine stream,” said Swetha.

“I was interested in Medicine but I decided to take up Engineering because this field was something which I felt requires mathematical capabilities, logical thinking and devising solutions to problems. My capabilities matched with the requirements and so I took up the challenge with effort and dedication.”

This was the 29-year-olds chanciest decision which was wholly supported by her father.

“Nearly 500, 000 students attempt the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) entrance exam but only 8000 students get admission in the seven IITs in different parts of India.”

The soft-spoken Darshini said it was a dream come true when she found out that she was part of the two percent of students who got selected and she made it to IIT Kanpur which is one of the top-notch institutes for Civil Engineering in India.

This good news, however, had other hurdles attached to it. Accepting admission at IIT Kanpur meant Darshini would have to move to the Northern part of India which was 1200 km away from home.

“My father kept encouraging me to do things out of my comfort zone but this time I was very angry with him for pushing me to pursue something which required me to adopt to a completely new environment.”

“Only a few females chose this field of studies either because they felt it was tough or they didn’t want to stay away from home and go to a totally new environment. Most of the times opting for top institutes in Engineering meant going to a different city, cultural, language and climate change.”

It was particularly difficult for Darshini to adjust at IIT Kanpur because of language and cultural barriers. Her mother has always been a source of inspiration and guide throughout her journey.

“Communicating with people in a totally different environment was very difficult to cope and English was the only language of communication. Even asking for assistance from classmates was an issue.”

“In a class of 80 males and only five females, we were not able to ask for assistance from the boys. If the boys helped a certain girl or even spoke to her, they were made fun of – they had such peer pressures.”

“Pampered at home and one day you’re on your own in a different place. These situations made me even stronger and that was when I decided to be independent.”

“The initial days at IIT taught me to be self-reliant, bold, strong and confident. When situations are challenging, as an optimist, I can see opportunities in a problem rather than the problems in opportunities.”

After graduating with a BT-MT Dual Degree in Civil Engineering from IIT Kanpur, Darshini continued to work as a Project Engineer before moving to IL&FS Environmental Infrastructure and Services Limited, Delhi as a GIS Analyst.

She has been an active researcher at IIT Kanpur. Few notable projects are Air Pollution modelling in Delhi (associated with CPCB - Central Pollution Control Board), PM2.5 and PM10 quantification in Himachal Pradesh (associated with SPCB) and Source apportionment of pollutants from Kanpur leather factories.

As a GIS Analyst, she was associated with Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) projects in developing Soil Erosion Modelling and Universal Database Management apart from Telecom Infrastructure Geographic Information Management System.

## Moving to Fiji

Darshini moved to Fiji after getting married and in June, 2018 she managed to secure the position of a Lecturer at CEST’s School of Building and Civil Engineering.

Her first project was contributing towards the development of Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Interdisciplinary studies in Climate Change Resilience and Mitigation.

“I was requested by our Dean, Salabogi Mavoa to contribute towards the Engineering aspect of this course. He had more confidence in me than myself and I am very grateful for the opportunity and I worked really hard on this project which is now completed. I acknowledge the support of our HOS, Rohitesh Prasad in this regard.”

## Empowerment

Darshini said such opportunities and encouragement by supervisors help boost staff morale and motivate them to go the extra mile. She also acknowledged the support from her family.

“I whole-heartedly appreciate the support of my husband in my personal and professional life. Balancing home and work has been easy because of my husband. We discuss everything from technical issues to social, philosophical and political issues around the globe. Fortunately, we have intellectual conversations and that boosts my morale.”

“This has given me more confidence to excel in my career.”

Today, Darshini does not hesitate to change into safety shoes and grab a helmet to assist her students with their projects as well as conduct her own research.

## Gender

When asked about her views on Engineering being a male-dominated field, Darshini said “Engineering is not something that is dedicated to men or women, it is rather about the intellectual capacity, confidence and attitude.”

“I never felt that Civil Engineering was difficult for me because most of the times there were boys who were below my mark scale and there were girls who were above my mark scale also. At the initial phase of my studies, I realised that it was never about the gender. Success depended on your attitude and how you handled things independently and differently.”

## Advice

She stressed that women should not feel inferior, rather they should believe they are capable and should go out and give their best shot at things close to their heart using every minute to improve themselves and excel in every role they are in.

She emphasised that women should not wait for someone to give freedom but rather it was their right.

“Look around – you will find role models all around you. There are women leaders in every field – All Mothers, Politicians, Bureaucrats, World Leaders, Doctors, Accountants, Bankers, Engineers, Scientists, Teachers, Social Activists, Journalists, Architects and the list goes on. They have made their mark with persistence and hard work. Get inspired and move on to excel at your passion.”

Not only is she a passionate academic but is also a strong advocate for gender equality and equity. She is ready to share the story of her journey at different platforms to encourage women to break the barriers and achieve whatever their heart desired.

“I took the risk of placement by choosing Engineering discipline, graduated with flying colors, worked alongside men on different projects, was jobless, but bounced back even stronger with an academic position in the field of Engineering at a different part of the world from where I was born and raised.”

“I am proud to share my journey and I encourage all women to continue working hard and have confidence in yourself to turn your dreams into reality,” Darshini added.



## Sukul excels as entrepreneur in niche medical sector

Growing up in Sigatoka, young Keshvi Lal Sukul’s favourite pass time was watching crime fiction television programs such as CSI: Crime Scene Investigation where investigators deduced crime by analysing evidence in state of art laboratory facilities.

This much loved past-time ritual slowly developed into something more serious as Sukul grew older and began to set her career goals.

“My father is a doctor and because of that I was familiar with the medical field. I knew I would work in that field in the future but not particularly as a doctor. That and my love of crime fiction made me chose medical lab science as a career path,” she said.

Today, Sukul is a multi-awarding winning successful entrepreneur and mentor to budding medical lab techs.

Sukul owns and operates the Health Plus Diagnostic Centre, a Medical Science Laboratory which provides Blood Tests and Ultrasound services. The Centre is based in Nabua with branches in Nadi and Sigatoka.

Sukul is the eldest of two siblings. Her father is a medical doctor by profession while her mother is a retired banker.

**Education and Career**

She attained her primary education from Saint John of Arc Primary School and her secondary education from Sigatoka Methodist College.

Sukul began her journey towards being a Medical Lab Technician in 2007 at the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM).

She came to Suva having left her family in Sigatoka however, it did not take her long to adapt and start enjoying her tertiary days. Being a cheerful soul, it was easy enough for Sukul to make friends and forge lifelong friendships which she still cherishes.

“My uni days were the best. I made a lot of friends with whom I am still in contact with

and it feels great to have a wide network of friends across the Pacific; from the Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands as well as from East Timor,” said Sukul.

She graduated in 2010 and was immediately posted to Lautoka Hospital where she served as a Laboratory Technician for two years. Following this, she was transferred to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva where she worked for an additional three years mostly in the Hematology and Biochemistry departments.

During this time she chose to further her education at The University of the South Pacific and attained a Post Graduate Certificate in Human Resource Management (HRM), a Post Graduate Diploma in HRM and later a Master’s in Business Administration (MBA).

In August 2016, she made a tough choice and resigned from her job. She decided to start her own Medical Laboratory which she opened in September 2016 in Nabua.

Her initial days were challenging.

“All medical labs in Fiji are male owned. As a woman things get challenging. Women are mostly perceived as not knowing anything. People forget that you are an intelligent woman; an educated woman. It took me some time to penetrate the barrier and get people to have confidence in me specially the GPs as these are the people we rely on for recommendations,” said Sukul.

She has immense support from her husband and family which allows her to dedicate time to her business. Sukul is married with two daughters. She met her husband at FSM where both were studying.

Following the success of her Nabua lab, she opened two more labs: one in Nadi in and one in Sigatoka.

Sukul plans to extend her labs providing more services that are technologically enhanced.

“I love to keep up to date with technology so my plan for the next five years is to provide



Keshvi sharing a happy moment with her family

more and better services to the people so that health care is better and more accessible for people,” she said.

“FSM provided a very strong foundation which I have built my career upon. The lecturers were well reputed and highly qualified. I believe when the foundation is strong everything you do after that just falls into place,” she said.

**Business Awards**

Her hard work was rewarded when she received two awards for her achievements. The first award she received was at the Women in Business (WIB) Awards 2018. She was awarded the Women in Business Aspiring Entrepreneur of the Year Award. These Awards honour Fiji’s outstanding businesswomen who have demonstrated excellence and leadership in their business or profession and in their service to the community.

Following this she received another award at the 2018 Fiji Development Bank (FDB) National Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Awards held in February 2019. This award is for the recognition of SMEs that are innovative and those that are community champions. She was awarded the FDB - SME Youth Entrepreneur of the Year.

**Words of Wisdom**

Sukul’s key message to students is to maintain a work life balance.

“While you study it is very important to focus on studies of course as this is the primary purpose but apart from that it is very important to build lifelong friendships because once you graduate and start working, it can become a very lonely world. At the end of the day, you should have someone to sit with or talk to and share your life with. If you don’t you are losing a lot in life,” she said.

For fresh graduates, Sukul has two tips.

“Have passion for the job. If you don’t have that, you will never excel,” she said.

“It is important to realise that everyone starts small. No one can start at the top. You have to start small and go where your aim is. Have an aim and work towards it and you will succeed,” she added.

Her success story is a testament to these beliefs.



Keshvi Lal Sukul receives women in Business Aspiring Entrepreneur of the Year Award at the women in Business Awards 2018

The Fiji National University’s Nikua is a monthly newsletter which aims to promote the University’s activities to the wider community. This newsletter is produced by the University Marketing and Communications team. For views or comments please email [mprc@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:mprc@fnu.ac.fj) or contact 3394000.

Publisher: Fiji National University | Editor: Ranbeer Singh | Design & Layout: Tomasi Korovou | Division Head: Director Marketing and Communications Jenies Mudiliar  
Writers: Kalpana Kaajal, Shireen Lata, Charlene Lanyon, Ronish Kumar, Sharon Chand | Contributors: Paulini Maramaniqali, Professor Nigel Healey

FNU NIKUA wants to hear from you

FNU NIKUA welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to [mprc@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:mprc@fnu.ac.fj)



Published in partnership with

