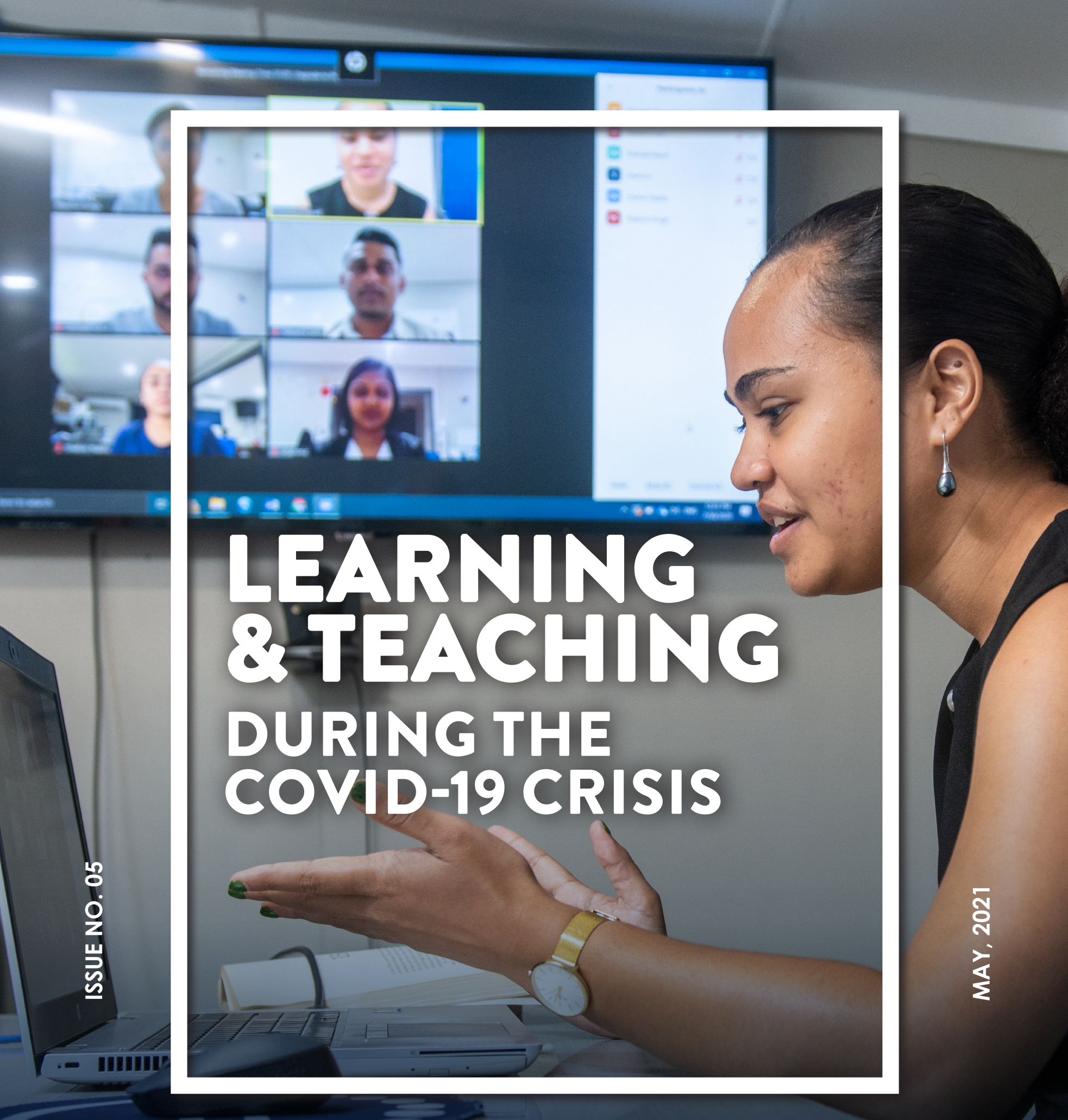


# FNUUNIKUA



## LEARNING & TEACHING DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

ISSUE NO. 05

MAY, 2021

FLEXIBLE & E-LEARNING IN A  
TIME OF COVID-19

STUDENT SUPPORT IS  
A PRIORITY



## Flexible & E-Learning in a time of COVID-19



Associate Dean Flexible and E-learning, Dr Valentine Hazelman (third from left) with CFEL staff.

We are learning, teaching, and working from home. Students can take the entire semester to submit assignments and learn at their own pace. Teachers will be compassionate and understanding. We are connecting solely by technology. This is what characterises our present landscape of higher education in Fiji. This is flexible and e-learning, and it is not a passing phase! 2020 was arguably unforgettable in terms of the panic, pain, and position it placed us in, the whole world for that matter. It was also a lesson in resilience, patience, and empathy, especially for higher education institutions such as FNU. A year on, and it feels like déjà vu, except this time we are prepared as an academic institution to get on with the business of educating despite adversity. Understandably, there are access issues among teachers and students, and this is why FNU has taken steps to ensure that no one is left behind and there are avenues for support.

The Centre for Flexible & E-Learning (CFEL) at the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning & Teaching has been at the forefront and background of support for teachers and students during these challenging yet interesting times. The core activities of CFEL include the development of blended and online courses and programmes, and providing support in the delivery of learning and teaching via FNU's official learning systems such as Moodle (learning management system), Turnitin (plagiarism assessment tool) and Mahara (e-Portfolio tool). The team also upskills teachers to use FNU's learning systems to be capable E-Teachers for their students. There is a complexity to online learning and teaching that requires attention well before content delivery occurs, and that is learning how to teach and learn how to learn online first. This is where CFEL is engaged the most – driving the pedagogy ahead of the technology. The development and delivery of

blended and online courses are a coordinated effort by an experienced team of Learning Designers, Learning Technologists, and Multimedia Production Assistants working hand in hand with the Colleges and support sections.

Presently, working remotely, the modest-sized team provides virtual support to all teachers via online workshops, consultations, and regular communication, such as emails and phone calls. Timely support from Vodafone and Digicel in making access to Moodle free alleviates a common access issue among students, as data is a precious commodity in an age of widespread smart device use. Typical assistance sought from the CFEL team by teachers involves using the Moodle tools effectively to get the most from students in terms of online engagement and assessment. Students also refer to CFEL for Moodle and Turnitin issues. At this time, students who contact CFEL tend to worry about submitting or completing online assessments correctly, not being able to access their Moodle course pages properly; or simply not knowing whom to contact for various administrative issues. Students and teachers need a listening ear amid these uncertain times, and whether it is a phone call or an email, connections made with the CFEL team go a long way to ensuring that appropriate assistance is provided. CFEL also offers a wide range of self-help online resources and guides for teachers, which is complemented nicely by the tremendous work of our fraternal Centre, CLTE, that looks after our students' learning needs.

Moving forward into the future and in constant collaboration with the Colleges, CLTE, ITS, and other support sections, CFEL is looking to enabling professional development portfolios for teachers, increasing the use of e-Portfolios for students at FNU to be work-ready, and use Moodle's management tools to enhance learning and teaching by informed analytics. Focused activities that

continue to enhance flexibility and e-learning and build resilience around how FNU responds with agility to changing global events serve to future-proof our local university. The team continues to research and apply new flexible learning design and delivery methodologies and technologies to augment learning and teaching.

Flexible & E-Learning has its benefits for students and teachers in a variety of situations, for example:

- Having a choice over how (mode) you complete your courses and programmes;
- Being able to study or teach from any location with low to no classroom time required;
- Being able to pace how you cover or teach your content over a semester;
- Balancing studies without compromising family time and extra-curricular commitments;
- Attempting and submitting assessments online.

### HELP IS ONLY AN EMAIL OR TEXT AWAY.

- For online teaching support, contact [cfel@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:cfel@fnu.ac.fj)
- For student learning support, contact [clte@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:clte@fnu.ac.fj)
- For general student queries, contact [EOR@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:EOR@fnu.ac.fj) or text toll-free to 857

**Dr Valentine Hazelman**  
Associate Dean Flexible and E-learning



## Student support is a priority



Learning and teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to significant changes in terms of its delivery. The traditional face to face lectures conducted on campus has been exchanged with online sessions and group discussions. This has seen a transition for both students and academics, requiring both parties to become more flexible without compromising on the quality of learning and teaching.

The Fiji National University (FNU) is committed to ensuring that all students are supported during these challenging times and can complete their studies and that no student is disadvantaged.

FNUNIKUA interviewed Dr Kaliova Ravuiwasa, the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) on his experience in engaging with students and providing them guidance during this period.

### 1. What strategies have been implemented to ensure the delivery of learning and teaching remains effective during this pandemic?

We have established strong communication at management, staff and student levels. Various Viber groups are formed at both managerial and staff levels to ensure that everyone feels connected during this pandemic. When staff are connected, the Dean and his managers easily pass down advice and guidelines for action. Apart from e-mails, these connections also include the establishment of a College Viber chat group that is easily accessed by staff from their mobile phones. At school and department levels,

Viber chat groups are also established for quick responses and actions.

Once staff understands their inclusiveness, the College rolls out advice on the learning and teaching delivery. Apart from official communication platforms such as Moodle and e-mails, academic staff also opted for social media such as Viber, Messenger and Instagram to reach out to their students. This saw a steady increase in student attendance for our online delivery during the past few weeks of lockdown.

The delivery of our programmes is unique. It requires a level of face to face interaction with students. This is made possible with practical initiatives such as recorded video demonstrations that are posted on Moodle for students' perusal. In addition to these recorded demonstrations, chat rooms, discussion forums are also adopted to maximise interactions. Students have contacts for all staff to raise course queries as and when the need arises.

### 2. How do you prepare for online lectures?

Every topic has its learning outcomes. The thoughts injected in the preparatory work of delivery is often more tedious than the delivery itself. A course convener needs to be strongly connected to the course delivery team. As in my case, I am the principal convener for my courses. I ensure that I am well connected and constantly communicate with my delivery team which is made up of a practical coordinator and lab technicians. We work together to ensure that that we achieve the learning outcomes required for the course. As a principal convener, it is critically important to be patient, listen, analyse and finally action the items that are discussed with the team. In this online delivery, a lot of time is now spent in researching effective ways to deliver a topic online.

### 3. Have you adapted well to online teaching mode?

The new method of teaching due to lockdown today is online delivery. While online delivery has a lot of advantages it also brings with it enormous challenges for both the trainers and learners. Apart from the identified challenges such as poor internet receptions, absence of appropriate gadgets, data availability and many more, online delivery itself is an academic culture that the majority of trainers and learners in Fiji are new to. This new culture of learning requires a level of family, societal and industrial support. My family support system is quite strong. Members of my household now understand that the endless time I spend online is all work-related. My challenge though is to do with accessibility and to some extent, technical literacy of newly introduced software's that are used during this pandemic.

### 4. What are some challenges linked to remote teaching and how have you overcome these?

I do not take myself to work and likewise, my professional self does not come home with me. This is a mental struggle that I battle with daily. To resolve this I had to dress for work daily. Despite having sufficient and ample spaces to work at home, my mind still struggles to integrate my personal and professional selves. Eventually, I find comfort in a little corner on my balcony. It has become my little office during this lockdown.

The other challenge I faced was reaching out to my students. Not every student have the luxury of carrying laptops or accessing the internet from their homes. This has delayed most of our course activities. To overcome this, we had to record and sometimes repeat the delivery of some of the course activities. We also turn to social media platforms such as messenger and Viber to reach our students.

### 5. How different is online teaching from face to face delivery?

There is a lot of differences. The traditional face to face teaching was more interactive. This new norm on online delivery reminds me of the movie Avatar where one plays two different characters in two separate worlds. I have noted that students who are generally quiet during face to face delivery are now active participants in virtual chat rooms and forum discussions. Likewise, students who were actively participating during face to face learning have now become quiet in online activities.

Online delivery has a long way to go in Fiji. Ensuring that students practically achieve the learning outcome for the week remains our biggest challenge as academics. Achieving and attainment of skillsets need more in-depth thinking for it to be efficiently delivered and attained online.

### 6. How have students responded to online delivery?

There have been mixed responses. Some students preferred online studies while others preferred traditional face to face learning. The majority of our students acknowledge that we are in a lockdown and therefore online learning is temporarily done, awaiting the lifting of borders for resumption of face to face learning.

### 7. What are your thoughts on the future of remote teaching?

The future looks bright, especially if the right technology and support system is introduced and established in place. However, one needs to also consider the implications that remote online teaching will have on the overall productivity of a nation. Imagine producing doctors, pilots and farmers who never had the chance to practice during their university years and yet graduate to become practitioners.

## Adapting quickly to online learning critical – Sharma



Diploma in Engineering (Electrical) student at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Ba Campus shared his mantra on how to adjust and become successful with the new learning trend.

Reflecting on his transition from classroom-based to distance education, Sharma said his priority was establishing a functional study space.

"I have a dedicated learning environment at home to partake in my online course and study. I make sure I have a specific timetable for each day so I can balance my personal life and education," stated Sharma.

While Sharma loves the new method of learning, he is also aware of the teething problems associated with it. Slow internet connection according to Sharma is the major setback.

"This alongside other distractions such as technical issues with my

laptop etc. I overcome this by liaising with my lecturers and tutors who are very cooperative. They even allow us more time to submit assignments," he explained.

Sharma has urged students to keep their lecturers in the loop if faced with any kind of challenges while accessing study materials and resources online.

"Always communicate with your instructor for they will be able to assist you promptly. Be clear about the expectations that have been set for you during your course. Ensure that you are accountable for the work that you have to complete and do not hesitate to reach out for help from your lecturers and peers," shared Sharma.

"With online classes, I feel the class engagement is just as good as an in-person class. We connect through Moodle, online forums, emails, texts and Viber

and messenger group. Additionally, I can do my class comfortably from home."

Sharma, who is also the Fiji National University Students' Association (FNUSA) Ba Campus President meets with members and office bearers through virtual sessions, which he says has been fruitful so far.

"I have been easily able to communicate with my FNUSA team and update the student issues to the heads at the main Campus. Together, we try to rectify things to allow a smooth transition and communication."

"Being organised is the best suggestion that I can give to other students. Once you get the hang of it, you will adapt well and will notice that online classes are no different from classroom learning. Finally, do not be afraid to ask questions," concluded Sharma.

Kush Sharma believes that adapting to online learning can be a cinch for students if they have the right tools and good internet service. Sharma, a final year



## Finiasi shares flexible learning experience

Being intrigued by the variety of medication that lined the dispensary shelves at pharmacies was an interest Faith Matili Finiasi had from a young age and is the reason she is currently studying in the pharmaceutical field.

The 20-year-old is enrolled in the Bachelor of Pharmacy course at the Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' (CMNHS).

Originally from Lopta, Rotuma with maternal links to Deuba and Nadroga, the second-year student said having a mother who was the first iTaukei locally registered pharmacist in Fiji also gave her extra motivation to venture into this field of medicine.

"Seeing her passion for her work inspired me to take interest in the field of medicine," Finiasi said.

"At such a young age I was exposed a lot to the pharmacy setting, I was very



intrigued at the vast amount and variety of medication that lined the dispensary shelves and the amount of knowledge my mother had about each one of them. I

also thought she was the most intelligent person in the world, and I became driven to become as such, that is why I chose to study this programme at FNU."

The Natabua High School alumna said transitioning to tertiary studies last year was a challenge she overcame during the orientation sessions, which allowed her to meet her lecturers and classmates.

"There were other programmes also provided by FNU that helped bridge this gap, such as the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions. I considered these fun times of interactive learning with seniors of our respective programmes," she explained.

Despite the current restrictions and lockdowns around the country due to COVID-19, Finiasi said she was no stranger to the online delivery of her units this semester.

She said this mode of learning also allowed her flexibility to study at her own pace.

"If pre-recorded lectures are given, I prefer watching them in the evening or even at midnight," she said.

"Then the following day, I contact my

lecturers about certain questions I might have about the lectures I watched the night before."

"Tutorials are usually done live on Zoom or through the Moodle discussion forum once a week and the lecturers are also quite understanding and accommodative when it comes to submission of assignments, especially in this pandemic."

"They may ask on the progress of your assignments and give feedback and if the need arises, an extension of the due date is made."

Finiasi said she has a dedicated study space in her room and an accommodating family who ensured she had minimal to no disruptions during her studies.

"I also manage my physical and emotional health through early morning devotions and simple exercises, but it is mostly the support from my family that keeps me spiritually and physically in check," she said.

"They do try to create the best environment for me while studying and engage in constructive or humorous conversations with me at the end of a day's online classes."

## Ratumaikoro takes baking classes online

The ongoing restrictions have failed to dampen the spirits of Tutor Akanisi Ratumaikoro, who now takes online lessons for her Baking and Patisserie students, which includes baking demonstration and techniques of making cakes and cookies.

While she misses the busy training kitchen filled with students fused with the sweet aroma of the freshly baked array of pastries, Ratumaikoro tries to capture these in a video which she then shares with her students during her online teaching sessions.

Ratumaikoro, a Tutor in Food and Beverage at Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS) based at the Namaka Campus, said the learning curve during the pandemic has been steepest for her practical lessons, as classroom conditions are challenging to emulate via online sessions, however, with creativity, students are kept engaged and can continue with their studies with minimal challenges.

"I have made myself more resourceful and innovative. I have resorted to Moodle learning tool to communicate effectively with students. The Zoom classes are recorded and embedded in Moodle, and this gives the student an option to pause, rewind and re-watch some of the lessons which they might find complicated," said Ratumaikoro.

"I have also displayed and embedded practical based activities on moodle in the form of quizzes, matchings, essay writings, to name a few. This enables students to

think deeply and imagine being in their training kitchen environment. During Zoom classes and I clearly explain step-by-step details of particular recipes or task until completed. I make sure that the objectives of the course outline are met, and students achieved something at the end of the day."

"The feedback and interaction from students are positive. I believe this is a positive outcome for students despite the challenging times we are in," Ratumaikoro explained.

Bakery is a craft that needs to be developed; according to Ratumaikoro, she tries her best to incorporate hands-on training via online learning.

"Our modules have been modified to be taught online, and most practical assignments were converted to theory assignments. I know it puts a lot of burden on students and me as I cannot taste the goodies. But I have opted for a motto that "The Simpler, the Better." I have simplified activities to help students understand the main idea that I'm driving to them," Ratumaikoro said.

Internet connectivity is the major issue; however, despite this, Ratumaikoro manages to keep track of students through other means.

"I try contacting students through their relatives if I see them offline and provide feedbacks and update them on the course contents."

"Students have also created a Viber group where everyone discusses any issues they may be having



with assignments and deadlines. It is wonderful to see everyone helping each other and encouraging when someone feels lost during these difficult times," she said.

While students and lecturers are coping with the whole shift on online learning, Ratumaikoro encourages all students to stay motivated during this pandemic.

"The pandemic has changed the way we would normally teach students by traditional mode via face-to-face classes. However, since I already taught blended mode courses before the pandemic, I was well accustomed to the move to online mode of teaching due to COVID-19. This also reflects on the efforts of the University's Centres for Flexible and E-Learning (CFEL) and Learning and Teaching Enhancement (CLTE), who have contributed towards the mentoring I received while running blended mode courses before COVID-19.

So, when we went into lockdown mode this year, I easily planned my work accordingly to ensure my

online teaching delivery remains efficient and effective for my students. Online learning offers students the benefit of convenience, as they can access resources in their own time and availability. In addition to that, the flexibility also allows working students to balance family work life as well. I stay connected with my students via Viber, Zoom and through phone calls as keeping everyone on the same page is very important at every stage. Personally, my family at



home has been very instrumental in terms of supporting and giving me space between work and creating family life balance. In totality, my family together with my Superiors support is the ultimate reason for my wellbeing."

**Rajini Kaur**  
Assistant Lecturer  
School of Management  
College of Business, Tourism and  
Hospitality Studies (CBHTS)





## Maintaining good health is critical

can take a physical toll on the body. In addition to the physical toll, mental issues also affect the body – the isolation and the sedentary lifestyle during lockdowns can eventually lead to weight gain and obesity.

**Here are some tips on staying healthy and improving your Immune system during lockdowns and restricted movements:**

### 1. Maintain healthy eating habits

Our households, living conditions and financial situations vary and while some of us may have the luxury of choices some may be trying just to survive on whatever food is available or accessible to them each day. We however need to remind ourselves that eating locally sourced foods can be cheaper and more nutritious alternatives to what we probably have become accustomed to.

- Go back to a diet that is high in fruits and vegetables. Buy green leafy vegetables such as bele, rourou, moca also local fruits and cut down on the consumption of processed foods. If possible grow vegetables at home.
- Avoid buying snacks when you shop. Although they may provide some temporary comfort, they are an unnecessary expense, are of no nutritional value and will only contribute to unhealthy weight gains.
- Eat your carbs at the start of your day rather than at midday or the end of the day so that you can burn the calories off during the day.
- For those facing food security concerns such as reduced availability and accessibility, consider intermittent fasting with whatever is available. Intermittent fasting has been noted to help people lose weight and belly fat, reduce insulin resistance, lower the risk of type 2 diabetes, and in reducing oxidative stress and inflammation in the body.

### 2. Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight

Try and exercise at least 30 minutes daily for at least 3 days a week. Look up Youtube videos on exercises that you can do at or around your home. Involve

everyone if you can and make it a fun and family event.

### 3. Get your dose of Vitamin D

If your homes allow, kill 2 birds with 1 stone and get your physical exercise done outside or while gardening so that you can also get your dose of Vitamin D at the same time. Regular sun exposure is the most natural way to get enough vitamin D. Aim to get **10–30 minutes** of midday sunlight, several times per week. This super nutrient is linked to everything from building and maintaining bone to enhancing your immunity.

### 4. Keep Hydrated

Drink the average 3 litres of water each day to stay well hydrated.

### 5. Improve your lung health

If you are a smoker, try and stop smoking and start exercising to improve the health of your lungs. Smoking is detrimental to health.

### 6. Sleep well

Receiving adequate sleep can boost your immune system and make you more productive during the waking hours. Get between 7 to 9 hours of sleep daily.

### 7. Do not ignore your mental health. Talk to someone if your situation gets too overwhelming

Feeling anxious, depressed, restless, irritable and poorly motivated are some of the effects most will face during the lockdown. Pick up that phone and talk to a friend, family or church member.

**Additionally, do not forget to keep following the safety precautions of handwashing, wearing face masks, coughing or sneezing into your elbows and physical distancing.**

**Dr Henry Waqa**  
*Medical Practitioner*  
UniClinic  
Office of the Registrar

## Focus on studies – Khelan

**D**o not lose focus on your studies and make use of your spare time working on projects, viewing short videos or reading up on topics related to your study programme. This is the advice from Michael Khelan, who is currently pursuing a Diploma in Information Technology through the Fiji National University's (FNU), National Training and Productivity Centre.

Khelan said it is important that students use their time wisely, committing to additional research online and balancing their time while studying from home.

“We are fortunate that we are continuing our studies online and this will ensure that we will complete as per the programme duration. So it is important that students use this time wisely and remain committed to their studies,” said Khelan.

“I understand that the environment at home is fairly different from that studying on campus especially we cannot meet and hang out with our friends. But we can catch up with them via social media and while doing this students can also use this time to work on projects or do more research regarding their studies so they remain

occupied.”

Khelan urged students need to follow the instructions from medical authorities and remain safe with their families.

“It is normal for anyone to have anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. I urge everyone to help each other in this time of need. Stay healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually during this tough time ahead of us.”

The 36-year-old is an Online Technical Support staff for International School Suva, attending to the requests from the 550 students and 150 staff using tools which include Team Viewer, FortiClient, Google Suite, Seesaw, and VMWare.

Khelan said technologies are a powerful tool and urge the student to use the resources.

“Technology is an effective tool in learning, for example, online classes, submitting assignments online, and doing your exams online. Technology is proving to be the most efficient and effective tool today for the people compared to the life before the pandemic. Technologies enable students to maintain connections and support classes to continue in Fiji and around the world. Hence,



they can make the most of the technologies, so they expand their knowledge.”

“The Trainers at NTPC have been very supportive and understanding, flexible with assessment submissions, and continuously keeping in touch through our Viber groups.”



# Mental health & coping during a pandemic

During a pandemic such as COVID-19, the demands made on people can cause them to experience stress. In addition, social distancing, self-quarantine and living in locked areas can have a great impact on mental and emotional health.

## Psychological Impact

Most common is anxiety, an emotional response to an anticipated future threat. In addition, being alone with your thoughts can be more distressing than ever.

Coping strategies can increase resilience and encourage new emotional strengths. At some point in our lives, we have coped with some tough times. The following tips can help you deal with life's difficulties, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic.

## How to Handle Stress

- 1. Stay informed.** Follow updates only provided by local the Fijian Government, medical authorities and/or personal health care providers. Being bombarded with a tremendous amount of information from massive sources can be overwhelming. Therefore, it is important to ONLY listen to advisories and/or read information from credible sources. It is essential to know the facts about COVID-19 and adhere to all safety measures.
- 2. Take care of yourself.** Breathe deeply, stretch, meditate, maintain a healthy diet, get adequate rest and avoid consumption or abuse of alcohol and/or drugs. Seek professional mental health care for yourself or your loved ones if you experience loss of sleep, frequent nightmares or feelings of depression, disorientation or extremely unrealistic thinking or if a previously-identified mental health condition is recurring or becoming worse.

- 3. Take up a new hobby.** As we adjust to the 'new' normal, the idea of adopting and fostering a growth mindset matters more than ever. A growth mindset is about real self-confidence – the courage to be open to changes and new ideas. It is your readiness to grow despite the challenges.
- 4. Connect with others.** Talk about your concerns and how you feel would help normalise your anxiety since others also feel as you do. FNU Counselling Services launched A.L.M.A. An initiative during the World Mental Health Programme last year, 2020.

**A.L.M.A** is a suicide prevention initiative where we empower everyone to create meaningful conversations with those around us. There is no need for expertise – just being a good listener and having a desire to help others. It is a genuine effort to show that we care for each other and that help is available for everyone. The "R U Ok" program, which has been quite successful internationally, inspired the A.L.M.A. initiative.

The acronym A. L. M. A. represents:

**Ask:** Become someone who cares enough to ask others if they are fine and if possible, offer to help.

**Listen:** Listen, do not judge. Listen patiently without interrupting or rushing. Seek explanations allowing the person to open to you.

**Motivate:** Offer your support and motivate them to manage the situation, encouraging them to see the FNU counsellors or any professionals that can surely help them.

**Ask again:** Remember to follow up and ask again. Be supportive, positive, a friend and a caring person.



- 5. Journal your thoughts.** Writing down your worries can help identify realistic concerns, making it easier for problem-solving and eliminating obstacles. It is also an excellent outlet for unexpressed feelings.

Take decisive action in protecting and preparing yourself and your loved ones, rather than letting the pandemic situation make your choices for you. Know the facts about COVID-19, avoid overload of fake information, follow safety protocols diligently and make the necessary changes to daily life.

The FNU Counsellors are providing essential counselling services to all FNU students and staff. Face to face counselling sessions is postponed until further notice due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, Counsellors are available through phone, Zoom or Viber using the following contacts:



**Kantha Mani**  
Natabua Campus  
Mobile: 8910854  
Email: [counsellor-km@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:counsellor-km@fnu.ac.fj)

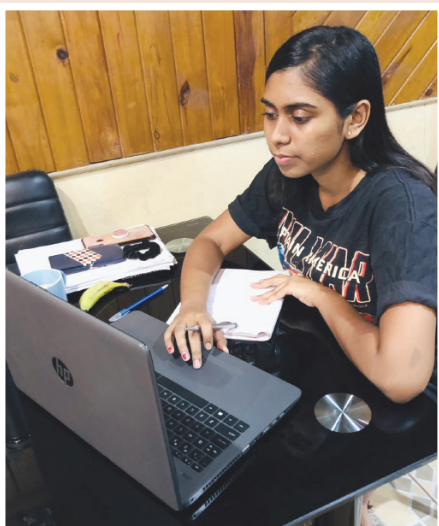


**Varsha Naidu**  
Nasinu Campus  
Mobile: 8960857  
Email: [counsellor-vn@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:counsellor-vn@fnu.ac.fj)

## You can also contact any of the following Helplines:

Lifeline Fiji (Toll Free) - 132454 | Fiji Women's Crisis Centre - 331 3300 / 920 9470  
Domestic Violence Helpline (Toll-Free) - 1560  
Empower Pacific (Toll Free) - 5626 | Medical Services Pacific (MSP) - 991 0894

Ministry of Health  
Stress Management Ward-  
CWMH: 331 3444 | Lautoka: 666 0399 |  
Labasa: 881 1444



## Kumar adapts to Online Learning mode

has also taken up some hobbies that enable her to balance time with studies family and, catch with friends and get adequate rest.

She admits that on the plus side, she also doesn't have to wake up early daily to get ready and commute to the FNU Natabua Campus. For the past month, Kumar attends the classes from the comfort of her home, as the traditional face to face lectures and labs have been replaced with online learning.

Currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Secondary - Biology/Chemistry) offered through the College of Humanities and Education (CHE), Kumar said she has more time on her hands for research work and polish her cooking and baking skills.

"Though online learning is not as effective as face to face learning, especially for science subjects, I am coping well. I now find online education as the new normal since last year we had online classes too," shared Kumar.

"At first, coping up with the change was hard since things were going quite well, and having four majors as full-time online classes are demanding. When we had face to face classes as final year

students, our timetable had continuous classes daily. Thus having those classes online back to back at home is challenging to manage since I get distracted easily. Being connected online in zoom is also frustrating as the internet connection keeps dropping. I have been coping up pretty well to this new normal," she said.

The former Natabua High School student utilises social media tools to keep in touch with her lecturers and tutors.

"It's easy to keep in touch with our lecturers and classmates as we have groups in Viber for our units. The lecturers update us with the lecture time, and any other important notices, moodle, and student email is also there. One of my lecturers has created a Facebook page for the students where she uploads videos related to our Biology unit. We can post anything that will help other students and give a smile on the face in this lockdown, so special thanks to her (Ms Rupantri Raju)."

Sharing her online learning journey, Kumar recommends other students allocate different times for the various subjects and follow the zoom classes timetable.

"I would say its essential for students

to know when they are most energetic and when they get their own space to study, knowing when your body and mind is most active. I can vouch that this helps a lot. We should take full advantage of that time to finish off our assignments and complete other tasks. The time when I'm most active is from 5 pm to 7 pm, so this is when I complete my work and have my own learning space," she highlighted.

Kumar adds that it can be difficult for students to stay positive during this transition but advises students to accept the 'new normal'.

"Being positive is hard at times since we all are not used to staying at home, and being confined to our house can be a drawback for our mind. So I encourage fellow students to talk to their loved ones through video conference, which is the best and safest way to connect to your friends and know about the well-being rather than stepping out of the house."

Despite the intermittent network issues, Kumar is making the most out of the online learning and is looking forward to completing her programme in December.

Alaavi Kumar loves attending lectures, interacting with fellow students and lecturers, but since the restrictions, classes face to face classes have been moved to the online mode, which has meant adjustments to her student life from the normal norm.

According to the Fiji National University (FNU) student, there's both pros and cons for the new situation, however, being safe during the pandemic is paramount, and she's happy to attend classes via the virtual mode.

Kumar said online learning more convenient, adding the transition allows her to spend more time with family. She



## COVID-19 restrictions prove the idea of working from home is practical – Matakasa

A professional services staff at the Fiji National University (FNU), Aviola Matakasa believes that the COVID-19 restrictions have reshaped our work culture and environment. Matakasa believes the pandemic has shown that despite not being in the office, working from home is not only a practical option but a safe and productive one as well. The results are seen daily as many organisations continue operations without major disruptions.

Matakasa, a Senior Executive Officer at FNU's College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS), highlighted the work from home concept minimises travel and the risk of COVID-19 infection and also presents several benefits to employees.

"It has been almost a month since, we, the staff have been advised to work from home. I must admit that I am enjoying this change of work environment," she said.

"I feel more comfortable, energized and motivated to complete my daily tasks from my comfort zone whilst enjoying the extra family time that I usually miss out when I have to report to the office."

"Many working parents know the struggle of balancing family and work. Spending quality time with family can feel difficult as the hours just slip on while the office demands the majority of your day."

"With the current situation, I can successfully perform my work duties and at the same time attend to the needs of my family, particularly, my children. I attend my meetings, complete the tasks and then take breaks in between to communicate with the family members."

The SEO mentioned that the short breaks in between help her to maintain physical and mental health.

"While work can be stressful and frustrating at times, taking a short break and socialising with the family members rejuvenates my mood and attitude towards the tasks that I was trying to complete."

Matakasa, who has been working at FNU for the past 14 years, said it was amazing how

technology has kept everyone connected during these difficult times, whether it be for work or personal engagements.

"It is because of portable technology that working from home has become a reality. I have been able to carry out my tasks successfully just with a desktop, network connection and a few apps like Zoom, Viber, Facebook, Office 365 Suite while working remotely."

"Through the College Acting Dean, I organise regular meetings through Zoom with other department staff to ensure everyone is on par with the tasks assigned to them. This also allows us to discuss the difficulties faced by staff in performing their tasks and propose solutions to achieve the best outcomes."

After completing her day's work, Matakasa spends two hours with her family outdoors.

"On a normal working day, I spend almost two hours travelling from work to home. With the current situation, I utilise the travelling time



to quickly finish my house chores and commit myself to backyard gardening."

"It helps in maintaining my physical health during this restricted movement period," she added.

## Technology plays a crucial role in a pandemic – Chand

Technology plays an integral part in everyone's daily life and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created havoc worldwide. This is the opinion of Praneel Chand, the Head of Information Technology Department at FNU's National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC).

Chand is one of the senior staff members of NTPC with his 17-years of a dynamic career in teaching students and developing courses relating to Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

He holds Graduate Diploma in Management, Bachelor of Science (Computing Science and Technology), Advanced Diploma in IT Project Management, and Certificate IV Training and Assessment. He has also attended Management and Leadership workshops and completed IT certifications in Microsoft, CompTIA and Fortinet.

According to Chand, the developing technology has made life easier as it provides a wide range of excellent educational and business tools for everyone.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic began last year, most of our courses have moved from face to face to online learning. It made technology an essential part of life in universities and schools. Online platforms have enabled continuity of learning assuring comfort and flexibility and also supporting other business operations," he said.

"Majority of the training is conducted online using Moodle and Edmodo. Apps for these are also available for use on mobile devices. These are very effective in delivering courses online. Students are assigned activities with time limits, so they are engaged. Trainers conduct online video classes using Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Practical tools such as Packet Tracer and Virtual Box are used to conduct IT-related practical classes."

"Participants can benefit from online training due to the convenience and flexibility of training offered. Geographical locations, transportation worries, and limitations of time would not be relevant anymore for short course training. Our students get the chance to do their training at their own time, pace and location," Chand added.

Chand said he has adapted well to the work from home concept and can prioritize both work and his family time.

"I had to prioritize my time to have my work-related activities completed first and then was engaged in other activities such as assisting my kids with their studies. In addition, gardening and fitness exercises were my daily routine to ensure that I remained active," he said.

In his spare time, Chand engaged in learning new skills by keeping a tab on the new advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) so he can pass this knowledge to his students..



## Singh manages work-life balance at home



To ensure she completes her daily tasks on schedule while working from home, Simardip Kour Singh breaks her day into 'blocks' and ensures she takes regular breaks in between.

Singh, who is a Revenue Coordinator at the Fiji National University's (FNU), Division of Finance, said this ensured she followed a routine similar to when she is in the office.

"I follow a schedule and take small breaks in between. At work, these breaks would normally include tea breaks and talking to colleagues, at home, my breaks mean spending time with my family and attending to my personal needs as well," Singh shared.

"I have good bursts of productivity and it breaks up the day and makes it feel manageable."

While COVID-19 national restrictions have resulted in nearly a month of work from home operations for the University, Singh said time management and a balance between work and family life was crucial.

"Some of the approaches that I have undertaken is that firstly, I create a quiet space with my desk away from family members as this is an excellent way to stay productive and properly manage my time."

"Secondly, I track how I spend my time in a day by taking note of everything I do, whether that's working, relaxing, socialising, or sleeping. Knowing the shape of my existing work-life balance is the first step towards adjusting it."

"A decent work-life balance gives us greater control over our schedule, freeing up parts of our day to spend on exercise and meal planning. With less time spent working late, and with more energy and fewer work-related distractions in the evenings, I can cook at home more often rather than relying on last-minute takeout meals."

Singh said her normal role and responsibilities included providing customer service to internal and external customers through phone and email

and assisting them with finance-related queries, processing withdrawal of units and enrolment adjustments, tagging students under relative sponsors, assisting in the Collection and Debtors reconciliation, receive and verify applications for refund and authenticating payment plan applications.

She added that working at FNU provided her with the skills and knowledge she needed to develop her experiences in the field of accounting and economics.

"At the same time, working at FNU enhances my personal, professional and educational development," Singh said.

"One of the areas that I'm passionate about is self-development and self-improvement in both my personal and professional life. I'm always looking to challenge myself and learn new things."

Singh said whilst working from home, she continues to receive the support required from her managers, and stays in touch with her team through Zoom meetings, Viber and email.



## Nurses have a duty to help the sick and needy – Rawaikela



Healthcare workers around the world are on the frontlines and leading the charge to fight the COVID-19 pandemic through selfless care for patients despite placing themselves at risk daily. While all healthcare workers play a central and critical role in improving access and quality health care for the population, nurses are the heart of health care.

Registered Nurse (RN) Akosita Rawaikela believes that the nursing profession is unique as it requires a high degree of kindness, compassion, commitment, discipline, courage

and patience. Rawaikela said she became a nurse because of her passion to care for others and improve the lives of the sick.

“For me, nursing is the most rewarding, diverse and flexible career. It is a profession that never stops giving. It is so rewarding to make a difference in someone’s life. It’s beautiful when you look into a person’s eyes and see the window to their soul when just a caring touch or word can make a connection,” said Rawaikela.

### Tertiary Life and Career

After completing high school, Rawaikela

enrolled in the Diploma in Nursing programme at the Fiji School of Nursing (FSN), now known as the Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) in 2009.

“Choosing a university was based on the field I wanted to study and while everyone is different, I knew I wanted to be away from home to be independent but still close enough to see my family in the weekends and FNU allowed me that. Also, as most tertiary students know, each university has its own vibe, there are some universities you step into and immediately feel you could call that place home. I found that in FSN.”

Rawaikela graduated in 2012 and was posted to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) as an Intern Nurse.

“During my one year of internship, I worked in the General, Gynecology, Obstetrics, Surgical, Orthopedic, Medical wards, Accident and Emergency Unit and Intensive Care Unit (ICU)/ Burns Unit doing both day and night shifts,” explained Rawaikela.

In March 2013, she became a full-time Registered Nurse at CWMH and worked in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

A few years later, she enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing programme at FNU while still working. She completed the programme and graduated in 2018. In October of the same year, she was transferred to the Pediatric ICU where she currently works.

“One of the main reasons why I love working in the Pediatric Department is because of my desire to care for children. I believe being a pediatric nurse would allow me to not only teach children to better care for themselves but also enable me to act as a role model. Being a pediatric nurse requires me to have a high level of responsibility because the patient depends on me to make sensible decisions for their care.”

Rawaikela has also completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Child Health from the Sangam School of Nursing on a New Zealand Government Scholarship in 2020 and is working towards becoming a specialised pediatric nurse.

### Inspiration

Rawaikela reveals her parents are her inspiration.

“They inspired me a lot in many aspects, teaching me values such as hard work, goodness, humbleness, social skills and parenting. They have given their whole life so that I will be successful. Apart from this, my father was always my biggest inspiration as he is always motivating me to go further and try to reach the level of education that he has reached which is a PhD.”

The mother of two hopes to complete her master’s degree and relocate to the UK, to join her husband who is in the British Army.

### COVID-19 care

During the coronavirus pandemic, Rawaikela’s role has had some changes.

“Nurses are on the frontline and they have a significant role in fighting this pandemic. I have been a pediatric nurse for nine years now and during this pandemic my roles had to change transferring my pediatric intensive care skills to nursing pediatric and adult patients in an isolation unit.”

Giving her advice to the public regarding COVID-19 she said, “Be mindful of where you go and whom you interact with; it is best to stay home in your own bubble unless it is absolutely necessary to go out for food or medical reasons. Ensure that you wear your mask the proper way that is, cover your nose and mouth to help protect yourself and others. Masks alone will not protect you. To fight this virus, you should also practice social distancing and wash your hands frequently with soap and water.”

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.

Published in partnership with



Publisher: Fiji National University | Editor: Ranbeer Singh | Design & Layout: Shelvin Naidu | Division Head: Director Marketing and Communications Karen Lobendahn

Writers: Kalpana Kaajal, Shireen Lata, Charlene Lanyon, Salesni Chaudhary, Pravin Narain & Sharon Chand | Contributors: Dr Valentine Hazelman | Dr Henry Waqa | Varsha Naidu

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