



INSIDE FNU

Celebrating

KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE & MILESTONES



BY SELITA BOLANAVANUA

The Fiji National University (FNU) has made a clear and strong promise, any student or staff member found with drugs will be removed from the university.

Speaking during a Talanoa session at the Nasinu Campus earlier this month, Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba told the Minister for Policing, Honourable Ioane Naivalurua, that the university will take a strong stand.

She announced a firm zero-tolerance policy on drug use across all its campuses, reinforcing its commitment to support national efforts to tackle Fiji’s growing drug crisis.

“We will make sure all the 17 FNU campuses and all 46 FNU spaces in the country are drug free,” she said.

“This confirms we are committed to

“ We will make sure all the 17 FNU campuses and all 46 FNU spaces in the country are drug free

your agenda. If you are found, you are out. We will not entertain it. We know how destructive it is. So, we must not tolerate it.”

“As Vice-Chancellor, that’s my promise to you.”

National Crisis Needs National Conscience

Honourable Minister Naivalurua welcomed the Vice-Chancellor’s commitment and highlighted the urgency of addressing Fiji’s drug problem, calling it a “national crisis” with the potential to become a “national survival issue” if not urgently managed.

“IF YOU ARE FOUND, YOU ARE OUT!”

FNU DECLARES ZERO DRUGS TOLERANCE

“When we realised this scourge was ahead of us. There was a national outcry,” he said.

“When a country’s problem is assessed as a national security issue, a national crisis issue, and heading towards a national survival issue, that is a big worry.”

The Minister said that the answer lies in “national conscience” the awareness and responsibility of every citizen to understand what is confronting the nation and to commit to taking action.

While attention often turns to future threats, the Minister warned that current figures were alarming:

“In 2021, there were 2,400 substance abuse cases in schools. In 2022, it rose to 2,800. In 2023, it reached 3,500. This is our next generation. How do we address that?”

He shared a moment from Parliament

where he asked a direct question about the safety of students in schools. “I asked, are our children safe in schools?” he said.

“Is this what we want? Schools with security gates, cameras, scanners, saliva tests, and drug-sniffing dogs?”

“As a father, I do not want us to go down that road.”

He said the solution lies with parents, families, faith-based organisation, *vanua* and communities who can all work together to tackle this ongoing crisis.

The Talanoa session between FNU and the Ministry of Policing marks the beginning of a united approach to safeguarding Fiji’s future. With strong institutional backing and a call for grassroots community involvement, both parties hope to inspire a national movement grounded in action, accountability, and shared responsibility.



Together, we can shape the future,
ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

- Coffee Forward Initiative
- Veilomani Closet
- Veilomani Food Pantry

After 10 Years at Home, MUM RETURNS to Pursue PhD

Avengeleen is on a Mission to Save Fiji's Iconic Insect, the Nanai



Avengeleen Swamy conducting her research in the highlands of Nadroga - Navosa. The Nanai is the insect featured on our \$100 note.

BY SELITA BOLANAVANUA

After ten years of being a full-time stay-at-home mother, Avengeleen Swamy is making a bold return to academia—this time as a PhD candidate at the Fiji National University (FNU).

Swamy, who is pursuing her doctoral research with FNU's College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, is investigating one of Fiji's most culturally significant but scientifically under-studied species—the *Nanai*, or periodical cicada.

A recipient of the University's Higher Degree by Research scholarship, Swamy said the opportunity has reignited a lifelong passion for biodiversity and conservation that she had temporarily set aside to focus on raising her family.

"I have been a homemaker and stay-at-home mom for a decade post my MSc, and I am back to continue my academic journey," she shared. "This PhD scholarship has allowed me to restart from where I left off ten years ago."

THE NANAI

Swamy's research is centred on *Raiateana knowlesi*, commonly known as the *Nanai*—a species endemic to Fiji and uniquely significant both scientifically and culturally. It is the only periodical cicada in the Southern Hemisphere, emerging in synchronised mass events every eight years. The next emergence is expected in September 2025.

"The *Nanai* is the insect featured on our



Avengeleen Swamy

“This is a once-in-eight-years opportunity. If this study isn't done now, the next window won't open until 2033. That's why the timing of this research is so crucial.”

\$100 note,” Swamy said. “Most people have seen it but haven't noticed it. It has immense cultural importance and is even used in traditional gift exchanges in certain tribes.”

Swamy's research aims to understand the life history and environmental interactions of *R. knowlesi*, including its population characteristics, impact

on local ecosystems, and cultural significance to indigenous communities in Nadroga-Navosa, Namosi, and Serua—areas where the species is found.

“This is a once-in-eight-years opportunity,” she explained. “If this study isn't done now, the next window won't open until 2033. That's why the timing of this research is so crucial.”

To carry out her study, Swamy is employing a blend of field research, experimental studies, and social surveys, supported by a supervisory team of experts including Dr Shipra Shah, Dr Chris Simon, and Dr Kaliova Ravuiwasa.

While the first year of research has gone smoothly, Swamy anticipates possible weather-related challenges ahead, given the overlap of key fieldwork months with Fiji's wet season.

NATURAL POLICY

Beyond the science, the implications of her work extend to national policy. “This pioneering study will provide critical data that can help Fiji meet its commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15—Life on Land—and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan,” she said.

Swamy hopes that the findings will empower policymakers, conservationists, and local communities to work together to

safeguard one of Fiji's most extraordinary species.

“This research supports FNU's focus on applied research and national development,” she said. “We are gathering the data necessary to guide sustainable conservation strategies for one of Fiji's truly unique insects.”

Swamy also had advice for aspiring researchers: “Work on something you are passionate about and will stay committed to in the long run. Choose a strong supervisory team—without the right support, it's easy to burn out.”

Looking ahead, Swamy plans to continue her work in the conservation and education sectors, aspiring to teach at the tertiary level and contribute to environmental research and policy.

Her return to academia is not just a personal triumph—it's a timely commitment to conservation science and an inspiring reminder that it's never too late to pursue your passion.

Meet Fiji's First Veterinary Nursing Graduate



Miliakere Dinawa the first Fijian Veterinarian Nurse.



Miliakere Dinawa during her Practical.



Miliakere Dinawa with dedicated staff of Unitec , Education New Zealand representative, Manaaki Pacific Scholars, her family members and whanau.

BY SELITA BOLANAVANUA

When Miliakere Dinawa graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing from Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand, she made history, becoming Fiji's very first veterinary nursing graduate.

Miliakere began her career by studying for a Diploma in Animal Health at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) in Fiji. After working in the field for several years, she recognised a gap in local veterinary services and made the bold decision to further her studies in New Zealand.

"I've always had a passion for challenging jobs. I wanted to be involved in a career that was both unique and demanding," she shared. "Once I saw how few veterinary professionals we have in Fiji, I knew I had to be part of the solution."

Leading the Way at FNU

Now back in Fiji, Miliakere works at the Fiji National University (FNU) as the acting head technician and the sole clinical technician for Veterinary Science. Her role is both wide-ranging and impactful.

She supports practical classes for both veterinary and animal science programmes, helps develop veterinary procedures, and ensures students receive hands-on training through clinics, labs, and farm-based learning. In her leadership role, she also

manages all laboratory operations, ensuring safety, efficiency, and proper Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) compliance.

Facing Fears and Overcoming Challenges

Miliakere's study journey wasn't easy. One of her biggest challenges was working with exotic species she had never encountered before, including reptiles.

"I've always had a fear of reptiles," she admitted. "But I challenged myself by joining a research project involving bearded dragons. It was difficult, but I'm proud I faced that fear and learned from it."

Like many students studying far from home, she also had moments when she wanted to give up. "The study itself was hard. But I always leaned on my faith, God was, and still is, my source of strength. I prayed constantly and reminded myself of my goal: to graduate, return to Fiji, and make a difference. That goal kept me going."

Support That Made a Difference

Miliakere credits much of her success to the people and communities who supported her along the way. The Manaaki Scholarship support network, the Pacific Centre at Unitec, and her scholarship officers all played vital roles.

"Their genuine care made a huge

“

The road won't be easy, but every struggle will shape you. Keep your faith strong, lean on your support system, and never lose sight of why you started. Your future self will thank you.

difference and reminded me that I wasn't alone on this journey," she said. "Their support went beyond academics; it made a lasting impact."

She also thanked CareVets, the veterinary clinic where she interned for three years. "They trusted me with responsibilities and treated me as part of the team," she said. "The confidence and clinical knowledge I gained there have been invaluable."

Miliakere is especially thankful to her employer, FNU, for allowing her the time to pursue her studies and for welcoming her back. She also acknowledged several CAFF colleagues who helped her through her final research submission.

Paving the Way for Others

Miliakere reflecting on being Fiji's first graduate in veterinary nursing said: "It feels

amazing and I'm proud not just for myself, but for what this represents. I know I can help develop the veterinary field in Fiji and create opportunities for others."

She hopes her journey will inspire others, especially those from rural areas. "Even if a field doesn't yet exist in your country, you can be the one to introduce it," she said. "Your background should never be a limitation; it should be your motivation."

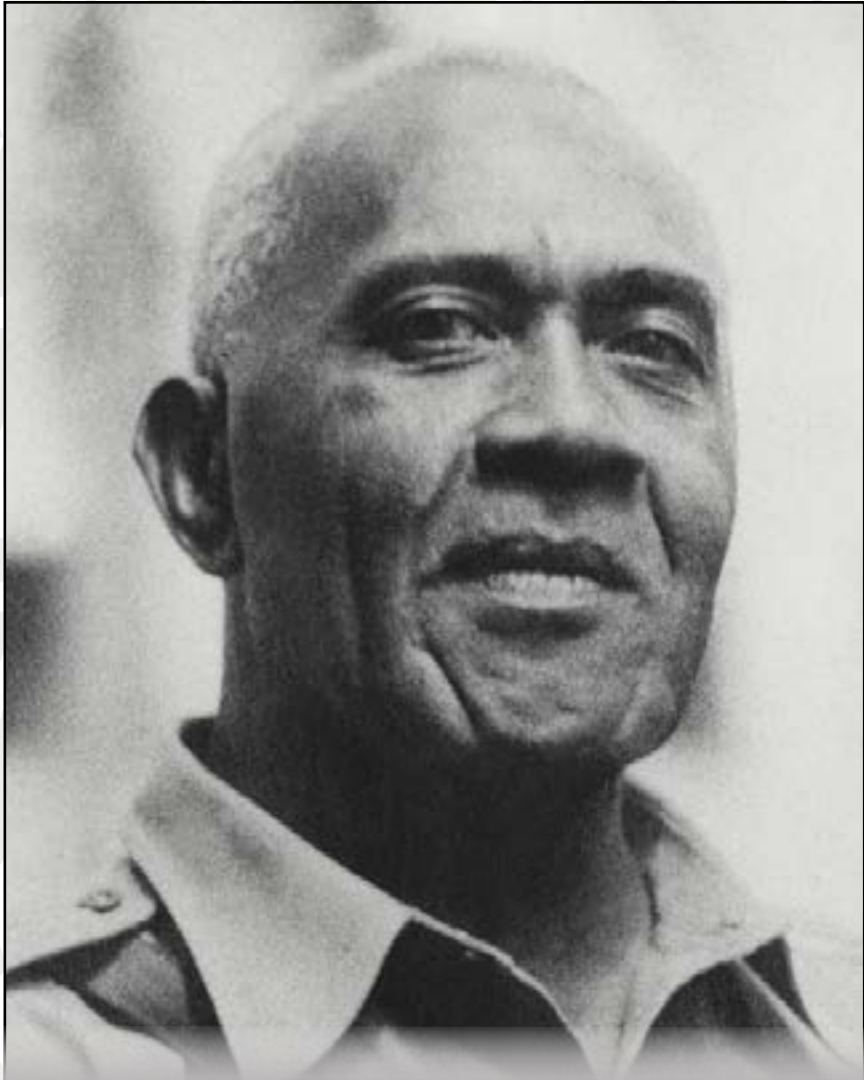
Now, Miliakere is focused on using what she's learned to improve the standard of animal healthcare education in Fiji. She hopes to advocate for better animal welfare practices and develop new initiatives in animal health training.

"My goal is to build capacity and pass on everything I've learned to the next generation of animal health professionals."

To young Fijians dreaming of new or developing fields, her message is simple and strong: "Don't wait for someone else to create the path — be the one to start it. If you're passionate, follow it through. You might be the first, but you won't be the last."

And what would she say to her younger self?

"I'd say: trust the process. The road won't be easy, but every struggle will shape you. Keep your faith strong, lean on your support system, and never lose sight of why you started. Your future self will thank you!"



CELEBRATING THE VISIONARY LEADER OF FIJI

RATU SIR LALA SUKUNA
FIJIAN CHIEF, SCHOLAR, SOLDIER AND STATESMAN

Honouring a Legacy of Learning and Leadership

Today, we join the nation in solemn remembrance and celebration of the life and legacy of Ratu Sir Josefa Lalabalavu Vanayaliyali Sukuna, a towering figure in Fiji's history whose wisdom, service, and visionary leadership continue to inspire generations.

We reflect not only on the life of a great national leader, but also on the extraordinary academic legacy he left behind, one that continues to inspire the work we do at Fiji National University.

Ratu Sukuna was a man ahead of his time. He was more than a statesman and chief, he was a true scholar. At a time when higher education for iTaukei was almost unheard of, Ratu Sukuna broke new ground by pursuing his studies abroad.

He rose through extraordinary circumstances to become one of the first Fijians to receive a university education abroad. He studied at Oxford University and served with honour in the First World War. His life journey was marked by perseverance, intellect, and an unshakeable commitment which required both brilliance and courage, paving the way for future generations to pursue knowledge without limits.

His life exemplified the idea that education is the foundation of meaningful leadership and national development. He believed that

intellectual advancement was vital for personal growth and for the upliftment of communities. He also believed deeply in balancing Western education with traditional values, something that remains central to our approach at FNU.

As a university committed to academic excellence, research, and national service, we honour Ratu Sukuna's legacy every day through our work. His belief in nurturing well-informed, responsible leaders resonates with our mission to develop graduates who are not only technically capable but morally grounded and socially conscious.

Ratu Sukuna reminds us that learning is not just about acquiring knowledge, it is about using that knowledge to build, to serve, and to inspire. He modelled the kind of intellectual humility and civic responsibility that we hope to instil in every student who walks through our doors.

In his words and deeds, Ratu Sukuna left behind more than history, he left a roadmap for future generations. Let us walk that path with pride, purpose, and unity.

Vinaka vakalevu.
Unaisi Nabobo-Baba
Vice-Chancellor
Fiji National University

146 Years On: FNU Remembers the Courage of the Girmitiyas

BY NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

The celebration of Girmit Remembrance Day is a time to pause and honour the work of our Girmitiyas."

These were the words echoed by the former Principal of Lautoka Teachers College, Ambika Prasad while officiating as chief guest at the Girmit Remembrance Day celebration at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Natabua Campus in Lautoka.

The theme for the celebration was 'Preserving the Past, Envisioning the Future'.

Mr Prasad highlighted this year marked 146 years since the arrival of the first Girmitiyas to Fiji.

He said the celebration served as a milestone that invited everyone to pause and reflect on the long and transformative journey that took place in 1879.

"As we gather under the banner of Girmitiyas, let us to pause to honour the Girmitiyas. They were the brave souls between 1879 and 1916 who were taken

from their homeland and brought to Fiji under the British Indenture System," said Mr Prasad.

"They were not just labourers, they were mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, who left behind everything dreaming of a better future only to step into a world far harsher than they could ever imagine."

Meanwhile, he added that the spiritual aspect was missing from Fiji's education system.

"Our education system puts major emphasis on requiring skills and knowledge so that children can get a job, that is nothing wrong with this. However, we must understand that education has two aspects – the secular part and the spiritual part," he said.

"Secular education is about worldly things, but the spiritual aspect deals with who we are, the purpose of life and how we should live our lives. It is this part that is missing from our education system."

Girmit Remembrance Day is celebrated annually on May 14 in Fiji.



FNU students and staff during the Girmit Remembrance Day march at the FNU Natabua Campus in Lautoka. Photo: Nicolette Chambers

SAKITI Wins VC's Special Award



Vice-Chancellor's Research Excellence Awards 2024 winners and nominees at the Holiday Inn in Suva on Thursday, 24 April 2025. Photo: Aniket Prasad.

BY ROMEKA KUMARI

It was a historic evening for Viliame Sakiti, who won the inaugural Vice-Chancellor's special award at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Vice-Chancellor's Research Excellence Awards 2024.

The event took place at the Holiday Inn in Suva on Thursday, 24 April 2025.

Sakiti's award represents a strong contribution from the Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) sector of FNU, and was identified by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba after whom the research award is named.

The VC's special award is an accolade for high impact on the community, and Sakiti's award satisfied this requirement.

His PhD research focuses on the development of innovative building materials, specifically 'eco-bricks.' These are created from a unique blend of sand, clay soil, and cement designed to provide affordable housing solutions.

"The aim of my research is to create building materials that are both costs-effective and sustainable," said Sakiti, who is a senior instructor at the College of Engineering and Technical, Vocational and Education (CETVET) at the Derrick campus in Samabula.

"This initiative is the first of its kind in Fiji, utilising a specific type of clay soil with a required strength of 23 MPa (Mega Pascal). This is significantly stronger than conventional blocks available in Fiji."

"I am constructing a model house in Dreketi using mud bricks combined with bamboo. The project is undergoing a six-month analysis, and this month, I will construct the final model house in Lau."

While eco-bricks are still new to



(From left) Fiji National University Chancellor, Semesa Karavaki presents the Vice-Chancellor's special award to Viliame Sakiti during the Vice-Chancellor's Research Excellence Awards 2024 at the Holiday Inn in Suva on Thursday, 24 April 2025. Photo: Aniket Prasad.

“ This initiative is the first of its kind in Fiji, utilising a specific type of clay soil with a required strength of 23 MPa (Mega Pascal). This is significantly stronger than conventional blocks available in Fiji

many in Fiji, Sakiti believes changing people's perception will take time. "It's very new and we need to change the perception and mindset of community members. I have started to receive some positive feedback as well.

These bricks are a sustainable solution as people from the interior and outer islands won't necessarily need to travel to Suva to buy the cement blocks," he said.

Sakiti also runs a commercial business where he sells each eco-brick at a cost of \$2.50.

"It's much cheaper than the cement blocks which are sold at \$4 each," he added.

"I have got the machines which is used to produce the eco-bricks right where people need it on site. I have been going around Viti Levu and Vanua Levu to produce eco-bricks."

His work offers a sustainable, affordable solution for housing in Fiji, and his award recognises his dedication and innovation.

Awardees and Nominees from Vice-Chancellor's Research Excellence Award

Graduate Student Category

- NOMINEES:**
- **Kunal Abhishek Goundar** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)
 - **Badshah** (College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies)
 - **Divnesh Swamy** (College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)
 - **Yogita Swamy** (College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies)
 - **Dr Jasmine Hussein** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)
- RUNNER UP**
- **Mohammed Iqbal** (College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)
- WINNER**
- **Dr Ashnita Krishna** (College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences)

Early Mid-Career Staff

- NOMINEES**
- **Dr Bimal Kumar** (College of Engineering and Technical, Vocational and Education)
 - **Dr Satish Chand** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)
 - **Viliame Sakiti** (College of Engineering and Technical, Vocational and Education)

- RUNNER UP**
- **Dr Lawrence Sundar** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)

- WINNER**
- **Dr Moshmi Bhim** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)

Established Staff

- NOMINEES**
- **Dr Bhanu Soni** (College of Engineering and Technical, Vocational and Education)
 - **Dr Sakul Kundra** (College of Humanities, Education and Law)

- RUNNER UP**
- **Dr Mumtaz Alam** (Centre for Graduate Studies)

- WINNER**
- **Dr Shipra Shah** (College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)

Guiding the Guides: Mission to Support Career Teachers

BY WATI TALEBULA

Teachers across Fiji are calling it an “eye-opening experience.”

In a powerful move to better support students across the country, the Fiji National University (FNU) recently held a series of Career Teachers’ Workshops at its Central, Western, and Northern campuses. With the aim to give career teachers the tools and confidence to guide their students through the complex world of tertiary education.

For many teachers, it wasn’t just about university programmes — it was about feeling empowered to help their students to dream big and take the right steps towards their dreams.

At the Namaka Campus, 34 career teachers from Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, and Ba gathered to learn more about FNU’s programmes, study pathways, and entry requirements.

Magodro Secondary School Principal, Alumita Tobua Ciwanacagi, said she left the workshop feeling “empowered and inspired.”

“Students need the right information early on, and that starts with us teachers,” she said.

“One thing I didn’t know was that Physics is required for the Bachelor of Nursing programme. This is something students need to prepare for as early as Year 11.”

On the second day of each workshop, a special session was held just for Special Education teachers — reinforcing FNU’s commitment to inclusiveness.

Eleven Special Education teachers joined the Namaka session, and many said they were grateful to be included.

Reaching Out to the West and North
The Ba Campus welcomed teachers from Ba, Tavua, and Rakiraki.

Veteran careers teacher, Vika Turaganivalu, who has served in education for 26 years, said it was the first time she had attended something so targeted and relevant.

“I thank FNU for bringing this to us. It helps us, and it helps our students even more!”

In the North, the Naduna Campus hosted over 20 teachers, some attending for the first time.

Remavini Wati Tunabuna of Navatu Secondary School said she now feels better equipped to guide her students.

“We finally have prospectuses, the Minimum Entry Requirements, and know

“Being here is not just part of my training, it’s my passion. I’m so grateful to be part of this journey.”

the subject combinations to recommend. This is very useful.”

Central Division Support

At the Nasinu Campus, 59 career teachers from 55 schools turned up.

Tiere Dawn Seru from William Cross College said the workshop gave her a clearer picture of what students need to succeed.

“I’m excited to use charts, videos, and slides to show students what’s out there. They deserve that guidance.”



Career Teachers were encouraged to exchange ideas during the Career Teachers’ Workshop at FNU’s Nasinu Campus on 23 April, 2025.



Career Teachers from the Northern Division taking part in the Career Teachers’ Workshop at Naduna Campus.

Lifting Special Education

The Special Education sessions brought tears and hope.

Maritina Cikobia from Hilton Special School said the workshop reminded her of her calling.

“It’s not just about teaching — it’s about helping students believe in themselves.”

Victoria Elizabeth Filimone, who teaches at Nasavusavu Special School, is also studying Special and Inclusive Education at FNU.

“Being here is not just part of my training, it’s my passion. I’m so grateful to be part of this journey.”

This initiative ties into FNU’s Strategic Plan 2021–2026, particularly Pillar 3: Student Experience, which focuses on making education more accessible, inclusive, and meaningful for all Fijians.

With every teacher better informed, a student stands taller in their dreams — and that’s the real success of FNU’s commitment to education.

FNU Advances Occupational Health and Safety Education

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

The Fiji National University (FNU) is proud to announce a series of innovative developments to its Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) curriculum following the highly successful 2025 Fiji OHS Conference.

The conference, which brought together leading experts from Fiji and beyond, emphasised the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalisation, and psychological safety in modern workplace practices — all aligning closely with national efforts to enhance productivity, innovation, and global compliance standards.

A major highlight of the conference was the focus on integrating smart technologies into OHS, with keynote speakers such as Mohammed Altaab Khan, Nigel Davidson, and Deidre Walsh underscoring the importance of psychological safety, AI-driven hazard prevention, and technology-enabled worker engagement. These discussions resonated strongly with

Fiji’s industry-wide push for safer, more inclusive workplaces.

Building on these insights, FNU will immediately begin enhancing its OHS curriculum to better prepare students for the future of work. New elements students can expect include:

- **Dedicated modules** on AI, digitalisation, and psychological safety.
- **Practical case studies and tools** from leading OHS experts, including frameworks from ACHIEVR and engagement techniques from AusPacific Workplace Safety.
- **Strengthened focus on cultural intelligence and leadership skills**, reflecting the guidance of international OHS specialist Gregory Dearsly.
- **Expanded hands-on training**, ensuring students bridge the gap between theory and practice in real-world environments.

Speaking after the conference, Vicky Narayan, FNU’s Acting Manager Productivity and Innovation, shared an inspiring message for future FNU OHS



Vicky Narayan, Acting Manager Productivity and Innovation

students.

“The future of OHS education at FNU is bold and innovative. The 2025 conference underscored that AI and human connection must go hand-in-hand to create safer workplaces,” said Narayan.

“As students, you’ll be at the forefront, learning cutting-edge technologies, cultural intelligence, and leadership skills tailored to Fiji’s evolving needs.”

The conference also paved the way for new collaborations. FNU is exploring partnerships with organisations such as ACHIEVR, AusPacific, and the Fiji Institute of Workplace Health & Safety, aiming to drive continuous curriculum enhancement and strengthen research opportunities in the OHS field.

With these changes, FNU reaffirms its commitment to producing OHS professionals who are not only technically competent but also agile, empathetic, and ready to lead the future of workplace safety in Fiji and the Pacific.

“The future of OHS education at FNU is bold and annovative. The 2025 conference underscored that AI and human connection must go hand-in-hand to create safer workplaces

FNU Student Thanks ACIAR for Scholarship Support

BY ROMEKA KUMARI

Divnesh Swamy has thanked the Fiji National University (FNU) and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) for their support through scholarship opportunity. Swamy graduated with a master’s research majoring in Forestry from FNU last month. The 29-year-old’s thesis titled “*Market Access Opportunities for Engineered Wood Products Manufactured from Senile Coconut Palms.*”

“Vinaka vakalevu to FNU and ACIAR for the scholarship support which was pivotal in my academic journey,” said Swamy, who is an environment and sustainability officer at Toyota Tsusho (South Sea) Limited.

Swamy explained that ACIAR funded his scholarship, which allowed him to participate in international conferences. It also provided mentorship from leading experts, including his co-supervisor Dr Robbie McGavin and Adam Faircloth, a Principal Technician at Queensland Government’s Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAFF).

“This not only elevated the quality of my research but also enriched my overall learning experience,” he said.

Through ACIAR and it’s “*Learn*” platform (online Library), I gained access to training, resources, and international research networks.”

His thesis explored the feasibility and economic potential of using aging coconut palms for Engineered Wood Products (EWP).

“My thesis specifically determined suitable plywood products and markets and developed marketing strategies for coconut plywood to enter the market,” he said.

I was inspired by the need to find sustainable uses for senile coconut palms,



which are abundant in the Pacific and often underutilised due to various factors.”

He was motivated by the need for sustainable use of senile coconut palms, which are common across the Pacific but often underutilised.

“This not only supports the forestry and wood processing sectors but also reduces agricultural waste, promotes climate-resilient practices across the Pacific through

replanting and uplifts rural economies through improved coconut production,” he said.

While he faced several challenges during his studies, FNU was always there to support him.

“FNU provided a great platform for international collaboration through projects like ACIAR. I believe that research in agriculture and forestry is not just academic,

it is transformational at FNU.”

He left aspiring students with a final message: “Stay curious, be resilient, and never hesitate to ask questions. A research degree is demanding but incredibly rewarding, especially when your work contributes to solving real-world challenges.”

Gold Through Grit

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

In a world where balancing a full-time career, study, and self-growth can often feel overwhelming, Prashnil Prashant Dass defied the odds and proved what resilience, purpose, and heart can achieve.

Born and raised in Rakiraki, Dass’s journey has taken him from Fiji to prestigious academic halls like the University of Queensland in Brisbane. Most recently, he added another milestone to his impressive list of achievements: earning a Gold Medal in the Certificate in Teaching of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) from the College of Humanities, Education and Law during the 2025 April Fiji National University (FNU) graduation.

But this award wasn’t part of some meticulously planned outcome.

“To be honest, I didn’t expect to win a Gold Medal Award,” shared Dass.

“I was focused on learning as much as I could from the programme. While I worked hard, I never imagined the recognition would come in such a significant way.”

With years of hands-on experience in Occupational Health and Safety, Dass recognised a key gap in education, the disconnect between technical skills and effective teaching.

“I’m passionate about bridging the gap between technical skills and education,” he says. “TVET plays a crucial role in equipping learners with those competencies,” Dass emphasised that his time at FNU wasn’t just about acquiring knowledge, it was about transforming how he could share it.

Dass credits his instructors, Laisa Tifere, Mosese Natuilagilagi, and Miriama Loanakadavu, with shaping his learning journey.

“They were experienced and supportive, providing real-world examples. The emphasis on student-centred strategies made me more confident in adapting my teaching style.”

Dass juggled full-time teaching while studying and had to develop ironclad time management skills to keep up.

“Balancing the study load with my personal and professional commitments



was tough,” he admits.

“I started using planners and digital tools, and I also spent time observing more experienced educators. In the end, these challenges taught me the importance of perseverance, time management, and continuous learning.”

For Dass, his motivation has always been clear – his students.

“My biggest motivation throughout this journey has been the desire to make a meaningful impact on the lives of my students,” he says. “Education changes lives, especially in TVET, where practical skills can open doors to sustainable careers.”

His family, especially his mother and sister in Australia, have also played a vital role. “They have always believed in me, even when I doubted myself,” he reflects. “Their guidance has been invaluable.”

To other aspiring scholars, Dass offers grounded yet powerful advice: “Stay committed to your goals, no matter how challenging the journey may seem. Success isn’t just about the result—it’s about the process, the lessons you learn, and the growth you experience.”

He urges students not to shy away from asking for help and to trust in their journey.

“Take pride in every small step forward because at FNU, we truly weave your dreams into reality!”

Health & Hustle

HEALING Hands GO RURAL

BY WATI TALEBULA

A dedicated team of the Fiji National University (FNU) medical students successfully led a rural health outreach mission aimed at delivering critical healthcare services to the communities in Naitasiri allowing them to undertake basic research.

Organised by the College of Medicine, Nursing, and Health Sciences (CMNHS), the week-long initiative brought together 36 Year 5 Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) students from diverse backgrounds and countries, including Fijians, Solomon Islanders, Kiribati, Vanuatu, and Korea, and supervising faculty members.

They provided free health-check ups, health education, and referrals to residents in remote villages with limited access to health care facilities.

The students were divided into four groups and were stationed at one of the villages. The four villages are Naivucini, Waikalou, Navatukia, and Nairukuruku. During the trip, they conducted interviews on livelihood, offered screenings for diabetes and high blood pressure, and addressed pressing health topics such as drug abuse, cervical cancer, prostate cancer, HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections. (STI's)

The experience provided valuable insights into the healthcare needs of rural populations.

Dr Eseta Vakasigaleka, a lecturer at the School of Medical Sciences and Coordinator of the community medicine course, explained that the trip is undertaken twice a year, with one group participating each semester.

“Our goal is to cover one province annually. Last year, we visited Ra, and this year, we are in Naitasiri. Initially, with the assistance of the Subdivisional Medical Officer and the provincial office, we identify the villages that may have



FNU's Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) students and staff during their outreach programme in Naitasiri. Photo: CMNHS

“It not only expanded our knowledge of rural areas but also gave us a better understanding of life in the village.”

significant health issues,” Dr Vakasigaleka said.

“The students typically arrive on Monday and depart on Friday morning. On Monday, we present our *sevusevu* to the Provincial office, after which we proceed to the assigned villages. On Tuesday and Wednesday, we visit homes in the villages, conducting interviews using a set of questionnaires. In the evenings, we perform screenings for diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as measure weight and height. On Thursday evening, we present our findings to the villagers and conduct health awareness sessions.”

In Naivucini, the focus was on drug abuse; in Waikalou, cervical cancer;

in Navatukia, prostate cancer; and in Nairukuruku, HIV and STIs. These topics were selected based on their relevance to the region, and the students aimed to assess the villagers' knowledge of these issues.

“On Friday, we return to the provincial office to present our findings and submit our *tatau*. Our students come from diverse backgrounds, including Indo-Fijians, Solomon Islanders, Kiribati, Vanuatu, and Korea,” Dr Vakasigaleka added.

Eye Opening Experience

Student Medinella Sauliga described the outreach as an eye-opening experience.

“I believe this has been a great experience for us. We are typically based in Suva, where the population is more urban, so it was a unique opportunity to visit rural areas. It gave us a deeper understanding of the needs within these communities. Unlike working from a distance, we were able to engage directly with the people. We stayed with families, learned about their culture, and interacted with people from various age groups—ranging from

children under five to individuals over 60. It was an enriching experience,” Sauliga said.

“One of the main challenges we encountered was the language barrier. However, as we became more comfortable in the community, we received help from local children and high school students who were on break. They assisted with translation, which greatly improved our communication, especially with the older generation who predominantly spoke the local language. Their support was invaluable in overcoming this challenge.”

Tongan student, Sakopo Vaka'uta, also expressed how valuable the experience was.

“It not only expanded our knowledge of rural areas but also gave us a better understanding of life in the village. It was an eye-opening experience for us as medical personnel. We immersed ourselves in the community, learned about their culture, and saw how they live,” Vaka'uta said.



FNU Gym Opening Hours

Monday to Friday, 5am to 9pm
Saturday, 6am to 6pm
Sunday, 6am to 2pm
Public Holiday, 6am to 2pm

Multi-Purpose Court Operating Hours

Monday to Thursday, 5am to 9pm
Friday, 5am to 10pm
Saturday, 6am to 10pm
Sunday, 6am to 6pm
Public Holiday, 6am to 6pm

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INSIDE FNU 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

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