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Projects as diverse as solar distillation systems, a review of the secondary school mathematics curriculum, the feasibility of making breadfruit chips, solar air-conditioning, a history of shipping and a rugged, low cost home alarm system were put up for consideration at a research seminar at the College of Engineering, Science and Technology last week.

College Dean, Dr Surendra Prasad, spoke on aspects of research relevant to engineering and science. He emphasised the need for projects to be relevant and meaningful to society to fulfill the purposes of research.

These he listed as creating knowledge and leading to creation of new products and services or improving existing ones, with the potential for improving people's living standards and contributing to the creation of a more just and tolerant society – because research was essentially about human beings.

"It is no use working on nuclear power for Fiji, a most unlikely prospect, when it is a better cement product or a way to build better roads that is wanted," he said.

It was not to be something of purely abstract value that only the researcher could understand, nor about the researcher going to exotic places to do it. But it was a vehicle to help the careers of the researchers, who could become known through their research work and be invited to international conferences on the strength of it.

The basic requirements were firstly, a thirst for knowledge and an expertise in a certain field, for instance rice farming or a mechanical operation.

The researcher also needed access to background information "to avoid reinventing the wheel", as well as organisational support such as space, equipment, funds and support staff.

Dean Prasad said people should not be negative about what was not available, but to put up a research proposal and get going.

There were sources of assistance, equipment and funding that could be found, apart from the University's research funds, some of which were still available for this year.

Time and energy were also required and researchers had to be prepared to sacrifice personal time and effort.

Dr Prasad advised new researchers to start small and develop basic ideas related to their areas of teaching or work, and to consult their peers and seniors.

"There is good scope to do meaningful research," he said.

Dr Prasad is an engineering physicist and his main area of research is renewable energy.

The College of Engineering, Science and Technology is holding a symposium on 'Renewable Energy Technologies', from 6-8 October on Raiwai Campus and the first call for papers has been issued, with a 31 July deadline for submitting abstracts.

Ms Ravita Prasad is symposium convener and may be contacted on soret@fnu.ac.fj for further information.