

FNU establishes a new centre for students with disabilities



FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey officially opens the new disability centre at FNU

Access to education is a human right and, under the Fijian Constitution, it is an offence to deny someone this right on the grounds of disability. Fiji National University (FNU) Vice-Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey made these comments while opening the newly established disability centre at the Nasinu Campus.

The designed-for-purpose-facility will facilitate access and inclusion for students with disabilities.

“Through this building, we are signalling our commitment to make access to higher education for all students, regardless of disability, central to the culture of our national university,” said VC Healey.

The new Centre is centrally located as it’s adjacent to major teaching facilities, administrative block and food court. The facility will benefit around twenty students currently enrolled at FNU with disabilities.



Students with disabilities, Senimelia Seru (left) and Anaseini Vakaidia (right) at the new disability centre

“I am proud of this initiative that our Office of the Registrar and the team has taken, to be proactive and engage with the students to understand their needs and to work out the adjustments we need to make, to help them succeed and fulfil academic potential,” said Professor Healey.

“It is not enough to say, anyone can study at FNU regardless of disability. If wheelchair-bound students cannot get into our lecturer theatres because there is no access, if blind students can’t read our teaching materials because they are not available in braille, if deaf students cannot have signers to communicate the content of lectures to them, saying that FNU is open to disabled students is an empty promise,” he added.

FNU’s Disability Coordinator Sovaia Coalala said the new facility will

provide a safe, accessible space where students can interact and have a holistic learning experience.

“We assist students during the admission and enrolment process. We also provide reading and writing support to students during class and examination, and whenever the need arises. We also arrange for sign language interpreting services for our hearing-impaired students. There are also provisions for exam materials in accessible formats such as braille,” said Coalala.

Moving forward, the centre will also make provisions for zoom services, which will allow students with disabilities to take their classes from the centre via video-conferencing.

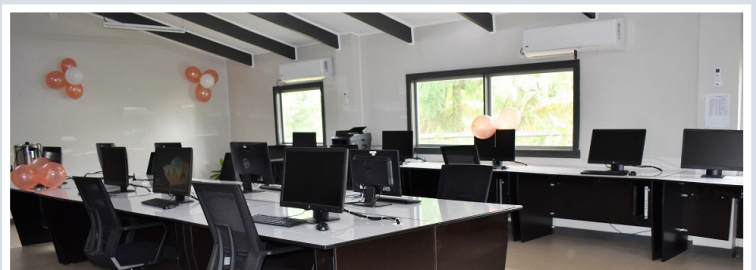
“This will provide relief to those students who are not able to attend their classes due to inaccessibility,” mentioned Coalala.

An elated visually-impaired student Anaseini Vakaidia, who is currently pursuing Diploma in Office Administration studies expressed, the new centre will enable her to study and learn like any other student at the University.

“I would like to thank the University for considering our needs. This initiative will assist us in ensuring that our classes are held at an accessible place,” said Vakaidia.

Diploma in Human Resources and Industrial Relations student, Senimelia Seru described the disability centre as the “home within the university”.

“I can come and do my assignment here, discuss and find solutions to any issues that I might face at the Campus,” said Seru.



An inside view of the disability centre