

(MB)  
LC  
3501.  
P1  
.A316



THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY  
CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z.

# Ala Mai Pasifika

NEWSLETTER FOR PACIFIC ISLAND STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

No. 6

MAY/JUNE 97

**Greetings, Kia ora, Ni sa bula, Kam na mauri, Talofa lava, Fakalofa lahi atu,  
Halo olgeta, Aloha, Malo e lelei, Kaselehlia, Yokwe, Kia orana!**

## Editors Note:

**Hi everyone! Welcome back to University for another busy term. My name is Tara Ross and with Silipa Silipa I am editing *Ala Mai Pasifika* this year.**

With the recent May graduation ceremonies, graduates figure largely in this newsletter. Several Pacific Island students graduated from the University of Canterbury this year and those of us here at *Ala Mai Pasifika* congratulate all those graduates on their successes.

We have profiled some of the Pacific Island graduates in the newsletter and hope that you will enjoy sharing their stories. They are a great inspiration - proof that you can get there in the end!

I was struck by the comments some of the graduates made emphasising how important it was for them while studying to have friends, family, and other students and lecturers to whom they could talk when they needed help. It is an important point to emphasise here. No-one expects

you to be superhuman and you shouldn't feel that you have to work alone.

A lot of you will have work and family commitments outside of your study and sometimes it can be hard to juggle all those things. At times like that, remember, there is always someone you can talk to. You might need a bit of guidance with an assignment, or like me, you may need help in finding your way around campus still! Perhaps you just need to tell someone what a ratty day you've had - all the books you need for your essay are out on loan or the flat's only heater has blown up. Whatever it may be, don't struggle on your own. Come on up to the Macmillan Brown Centre for a friendly chat (and for those of you who come from hillier places than Christchurch, great views!).

So, remember, no matter how heavy your workload gets this term, make some time for friends.

Wrap up warm and enjoy what University has to offer!

## CONTENTS

Editorial Introduction	1
1997 Graduate interviews	2
<b>FEATURE STORY</b>	
Tara Ross interviews award-winning Samoan writer Sia Figiel	5
<b>NOTICES</b>	6
<b>CREDITS</b>	
<i>Photographs by Bubsy Memea-Ma'aelopa</i>	
<b>Contacts</b>	
Silipa Silipa .....ext 7562 (c/o Pacific Studies)	
Tara Ross.....ext 6723 (c/o Journalism)	



*Congratulations to all the 1997*

*Graduates*

## Interviews with 1997 Graduates

**K**IMBERLEY POLATA, who some of you will know as an editor of *Ala Mai Pasifika* last year, graduated in May with a **Diploma of Journalism**. Kimberley graduated in 1996 with a BA in History. After a well-earned break she is looking for work in radio or television broadcasting, and has her sights set on working in the United States at some time in the future.

She says that University has been a great experience for her. "It has been really good in that it teaches you to be disciplined."

She encourages others to make the most of their time at University. Friends of hers, she says, have chosen not to go on to tertiary study because of the expense and she thinks that's sad. She would like to see more Pacific Island students at University. She may even be back herself at some stage. Kimberley still has a hankering to continue her studies in History and doesn't rule out coming back to do a Masters degree in history at some stage.

Whatever direction she takes, we wish her all success.



Kimberley Polata



(R to L) Fealofani, Chris Perfect & Teta Pa'o-Sopoaga

**FEALOFANI FEILO** was born and raised in Samoa. Her dream of becoming a qualified teacher with a degree bore fruit, when she graduated with a **Bachelor in Education** in May.

Fealofani is a former student of Burnside High School. Her aspiration was to embark on university studies. However Fealofani completed a Diploma of Teaching at the Christchurch College of Education before enrolling at University. "I enjoyed everyday of the three years that I spent studying at Canterbury University," she says. Apart from studying, she played volleyball and netball, and was also an active member of the Samoan Students' Association.

Fealofani returned to Samoa when she completed her degree last year, and is now teaching English for Years 9, 10, and 12 at Samoa College. She is also a part-time tutor in Education at the University of the South Pacific's Extramural Program. She hopes to do postgraduate studies, get married and get 'a life' in the very near future.

Fealofani's dedicated her educational achievement to her aunt Asiasiga Batcheler, whose invaluable support has been an inspiration for her to do well and become successful in her educational career.

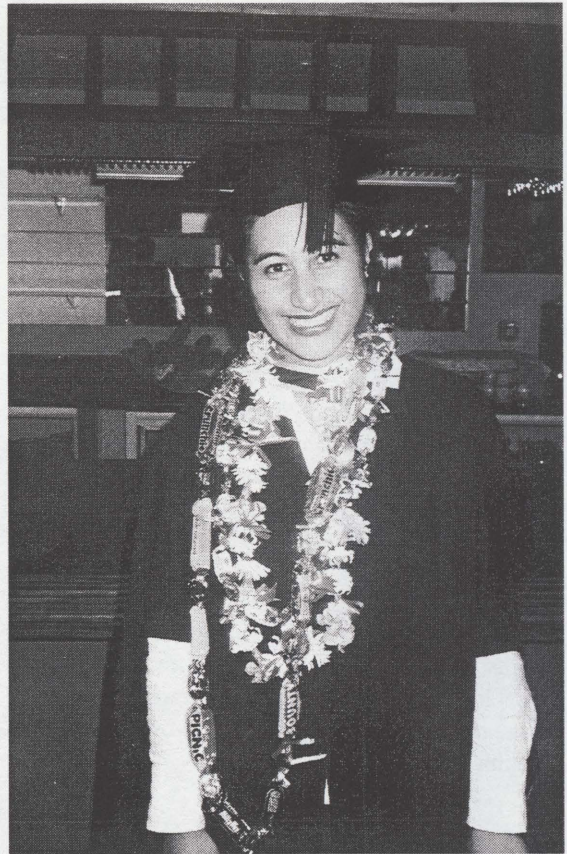
**S**ARA VUI-TALITU probably had further to come than most to attend her graduation in May. Since finishing her **Diploma in Journalism** last year and also editor, Ala Mai Pasifika '96, she has been working at the Institute of Pacific Studies (IPS), University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji as, she says, "a one-woman publications house for the South Pacific."

She made an effort to get back for the graduation, even though she is working in Fiji, because she saw it as a way of acknowledging all the people who have supported her through her study, and a means of celebrating her achievement with them.

Getting her Post-graduate diploma, she says, has changed her life. "I've got my degree, made some wonderful lifetime friends along the way, and the future is a sea of possibilities. I am richer for it and I'm embarking on a career path that I enjoy."

To other students, she says, follow your dreams, do something you enjoy and aim for excellence in all that you do. Most of all, she says, ask for help when you need it. "Keep in contact with others. Networking is important for you to find some support for your studies. Who knows, the people you meet now may be people you will need help from in your future careers."

In five years or so she hopes to be working in the magazine industry or working in an international media organisation. "Journalism is exciting and is something I enjoy and believe I have the talent for. It's such a diverse career that you can get into almost any field."



**Sara Vui-Talitu**

She says she was sad to leave friends when graduation was over, but while it marked the end of a chapter in her life, she sees it as marking a whole new beginning. We wish her all the best as she embarks on that new adventure.

---

### **Samoan athletes and administrators are to receive special support with the formation of the Samoan Sports and Leisure Association in Aotearoa - Canterbury at the weekend.**

*Association chairman Tamati Faletanoa'i said it was set up to support the professional development of Samoan players, administrators, coaches and other officials in Canterbury and to promote fitness and good health in the Samoan community.*

*Mr Faletanoa'i said there was a definite need for the sports association. The association would be able to help young Samoans participating in sport and leisure activities, as well as encouraging the development of top-level Samoan athletes.*

*"Sport is now professional and an employment opportunity for our young people so it is even more important for us to help our kids' development in sport," Mr Faletanoa'i said. He hoped the association would soon be able to host its own tournaments, perhaps in kirikiti (Samoan cricket) in Christchurch.*

**It will hold its first meeting Sunday June 8 at 6pm in the offices of the Sulufa'iga Trust, 580 Colombo Street. All interested parties are welcome.**

**A**NERIUETA TETA PA'O-SOPOAGA'S (Teta), graduation was perhaps a little more special than for most as her son-in-law was capped on the same day that she was capped for a **Bachelor of Education**. It was a joy for her, she says, to receive her degree on behalf of those who have been a part of helping her to get there. "This is OUR degree," she says, "not just mine."

Teta had only three years of secondary schooling when she applied for Teachers Training College in 1987 and the idea of undertaking tertiary study terrified her. She needn't have worried for she has gone from strength to strength. She completed her Teacher's training and has been teaching at the Christchurch Polytechnic and Mairehau High School. She continued to teach at both institutions while studying for her Bachelors in Education at University.

Since graduating, Teta has moved on to the next challenge and is now studying for an Honours degree in Maori. She hopes that one day, "before [her] hair turns white," she will complete a PhD. "I want to do the best I can while I'm still alive and kicking."



(LtoR) Teta Pa'o-Sopoaga & Fealofani Feilo

She says she could not have completed her study without the support of her husband and the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, which she regards as her family.

"I have to be responsible for my own study and I have to be a good organiser but it is good to have a support when you don't know something....There are fences that without the help of the people at Macmillan Brown Centre we can't get over." She is excited to see several Pacific Island students in post-graduate study this year and it is her dream to see even more. She

urges young students to make the right choices while they are still young. "Don't break away from education while you are young. Extend your wings and fly higher than secondary study." We may have all sorts of other skills, she says, but it is important that we balance those with a good education. "You can always fall back on your education."

Undoubtedly, Teta's example is an inspiring one and we can be certain that with future achievements she will continue to be an inspiration to those around her.

---

## GRADUATE PROGRAMME IN PACIFIC STUDIES

**Are you interested in doing a graduate degree in Pacific Studies in 1998?**

**Courses offered:** Issues in Pacific Studies (core course), Geography of the Pacific, Politics of Oceania and South East Asia, Education in the Pacific, Rangatiratanga and Sovereignty; the interface, Coastal Studies, Cross-Cultural Education in Aotearoa, Geography of Tourism, Indigenous Land Rights, Te Mahi Taonga, Issues in Nineteenth Maori History, Art of the Pacific, Art Theory of the Pacific & Nga take: Maori Social and Political Issues

**For further information contact the course co-ordinator:**

**Dr Ueantabo Neemia-Mackenzie, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, Ph 364 2957**

**I**ATI IATI graduated this year with a **Bachelor of Commerce** at the end of what seemed to be an endless journey. Last year he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Politics, this year he is doing a BA (Hons) in Politics. He is planning to do a law degree next year. The combination of an Arts and Commerce degree will equip Iati with the skills appropriate for the next task on his agenda.

"It is the icing on a cake, and I don't see varsity as a means to an ends" he says.

Iati's educational achievements have been prompted by total commitment, enthusiasm and organised routines. His positive attitude and motivation to study has determined his success. The support from his family members, colleagues and the holism of varsity networks has been tremendous.

Iati is a good role-model for Pacific Island students. He is a dedicated Seventh-Day Adventist, a Sabbath school teacher, husband and father. Iati and his wife, Fara, share caregiving responsibilities for their small daughter Eden. His Christian principles and religious beliefs are first and foremost.

"Enjoy your work and do things that are more enjoyable" he says.



IATI IATI



Award-winning Samoan writer **SIA FIGIEL** was hosted by the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies recently and she spoke to Tamara Ross about her novel *Where We Once Belonged*.

Sia Figiel spent six months questioning whether to publish her book "*Where We Once Belonged*" because she knew it touched on so many people and layers of society.

In the end, however, she decided that "people needed shaking up."

She believed she followed a path already set by Samoan writer Albert Wendt whose books also "shook people up."

"My book isn't new. I share similar themes to Albert's, BUT from a woman's perspective," she says.

'*Where We Once Belonged*,' Figiel's first novel, was officially launched by Albert Wendt at the 7th South Pacific Arts Festival

in Apia, September 1996. Since then Figiel has won the South East Asia and South Pacific Region Commonwealth Book Writers Prize, 1997 in the best first book category.

Figiel says she has tried to juxtapose the process of westernisation with Samoan culture. Stories deal with ideas of identity, particularly the traditional Samoan collectivised identity and the Western sense of being an individual.

"The whole book focuses on that and an awareness of the 'I,'" Figiel explains. "What does someone do once they've discovered the 'I'. Can they go back to the 'we'?" '*Where We Once Belonged*' is about 13 year old Alofa Filiga's struggles with identities as she

comes of age in the fictional community of Malaefou.

The structure of the book is based on a traditional Samoan song form called *su'ifefiloi* in which distinct verses or stories are woven together, like flowers on a lei. "I had the metaphor of a necklace in mind when I was writing," Figiel says. "I have stitched together different levels of consciousness and different stories and the threads are carried through the novel."

Woven into the stories also are patches of Samoan song. Figiel explains that she has used a lot of Samoan language in the book to more fully incorporate the songs of the *su'ifefiloi* and to emphasise the oral nature of Samoan culture.

She passionately defends her use of Samoan in the book. "My language is just as important as the language I am writing this book in." She says the poetry of Samoan is difficult to translate into English all the time, and there are things that would only be meaningful to Samoans. "Perhaps it is a privilege and only Samoans should know what I am talking about."

Figiel aims to give palangi the same feeling they should have when they visit Samoa; the feeling that they can only go so far into a culture. She resists making the book a short cut to Samoan culture. However, the Samoan shouldn't be a barrier to the English-only reader, she says. The careful reader should be able to glean from the context what is said.

She is steadfastly resisting appeals from publishers working on German and Dutch editions of *Where We Once Belonged* for a glossary of the Samoan used in the novel. It

is important to her to leave the language as it is. "We don't have to tell the reader everything," she says.

One of her motivations for writing the book was to challenge Western perceptions of the Pacific. When she was growing up in Samoa she was not exposed to a lot of Samoan writing. "One never saw one's image reflected in the novels we were reading."

Similarly when she enrolled in a course in Pacific literature during her university studies she was shocked to discover that it included almost no writing by Pacific Islanders. "I felt we could not continue with this," she said.

She is pleased her book has gone some way to correcting such imbalances. "A lot of people come up to me and say that's me in the book. Those are the reactions that move me."

When asked what readers here might expect from her book, Figiel was quite clear. "It gives New Zealanders an insight into a place they thought they knew."



'Where We Once Belonged' is published by Pasifika Press, Auckland. Price is \$29.95. Copies can be ordered through the University Book Shop or orders can be sent to Books Pasifika, P O Box 68446, Auckland.

Sia has also written *The Girl in the Moon Circle* published by the Institute of Pacific Studies (IPS), Suva, Fiji. Price: \$

Orders can be placed with the University Bookshop or direct from Books Pasifika.

---

## NOTICE

### PACIFIC ISLAND YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRUST SCHOLARSHIP

It is regrettable that the Pacific Island Youth Leadership Trust will no longer be offering scholarships for Pacific Island Students. Successful recipients for the 1997 round should have received their letters from Rosie Brown by now, advising them of what documents should have been sent to Auckland.

Some scholarship notices will appear in the *Achievers* magazine due out about

September/October of this year. Copies can be obtained from the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies and Ataga'i Esera, Pacific Island Liaison Officer, CHCH Polytech.

**This newsletter is sponsored and published by the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies**