

UniFiji Watch



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A publication by the University of Fiji's journalism students

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Town council and university agree plan that will boost benefits for islanders

Uni ready to offer services in Levuka

By Shaniyah Khan

YOUNG people, among other Levuka residents, are in line to benefit from a deal between Levuka Town Council and the University of Fiji.

The university will help improve people's skills through new courses to help them into the jobs market.

Facilities offered in Levuka will mean students can attend university courses without having to leave the island.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem said the deal would see the university working with the council on education, the arts and leadership training.

The university and Levuka Town Council have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a range of initiatives, in what is a historic first for Fiji.

The partnership aims to include capacity building, administration support, short and full courses delivered in Levuka, heritage protection and promotion, and planning social and economic development planning.

The chairperson of the Levuka



Working together: Watched by staff and UniFiji Pro Chancellor, Pundit Bhuwan Dutt, centre, Levuka Town Council Board chairperson Ben Naidu and UniFiji Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem sign the deal in Levuka

Town Council Board, Ben Naidu said he was excited to see the university helping not only Levuka town and Ovalau island but also the people of Lomaiviti as a whole.

He added that the people of Levuka were excited about the establishment of UniFiji in Levuka in partnership with the Council. This would benefit both parties.

Professor Shameem said, "Levuka, as the first capital of Fiji and a place where important historical events took place, is

special with an ambience unmatched by any other town in Fiji due to its people and place."

The University will develop and offer short and full courses for LTC staff and, later, the residents of Levuka, including young people, to assist them with increasing the services the council can offer, and upskilling for the employment market. These courses will be offered in hybrid modes to facilitate easy access to programmes without students having to travel.

"The MOU represents an ideal opportunity for the University to work with the Council to support formal and informal education, advocacy for the public good, the arts, and leadership training.

Professor Shameem added that the University's Levuka office, currently in the Council premises would move to Nasova to what used to be the residence of Sir Arthur Gordon, the first British Governor of Fiji, and subsequent representatives of the British Crown.

The role of education in society

Education for enlightenment of scholars or to serve the demands of employers – that was the question Vice-Chancellor Shaista Shameem focused on when she spoke at the Atenisi Institute graduation ceremony in Tonga.

Any education policy that uses employment as its main attraction is a policy for subservience and not for enlightenment, and therefore does nothing for nation-building, she told the guests and graduates in Nuku'alofa.

And our policies in Fiji – illustrated by learning outcomes and the policies that produce them, at various levels leading to the Fiji Higher Education Qualification – indicate that education has been captured by industry, she said.

In a world where we need to reclaim academic and intellectual roots for the good of society and to defend freedom and liberty, we have to ensure that universities have the resources and the freedom of thought to do so.

"It is only at universities that we can strive to rescue education from what it has become – a site of enslavement to the tyranny of the majority or mob rule, and to industry, through sheer terror of the consequences of not complying with the dictates of the tyrants."

Dr Shameem noted the synergies between Atenisi and UniFiji. Atenisi, with the former's roots in the ancient Greek tradition, and the latter's own roots in Indian education dating back 6,000 years at least.

Victim warns fellow students about online scams

A STUDENT who was a victim of an on-line scam has warned others to be alert to protect themselves from ruthless tricksters.

She said she had learned the hard way how important it is to be vigilant and guard against online scammers.

Her case was revealed as the Consumer Council of Fiji reported 239 complaints linked to online shopping in the past year.

"These touch on matters of delivery, product quality, and fraudulent activities – underlining the importance of building trust in online transactions," a council spokesperson said.

And during the recent National Scams Awareness week Shaheen Ali, the Permanent Secretary for Trade reminded his audience of

By Zaliha Ali

the devastating impact of the eBay recruitment scam, described as one of the largest in Fiji history, which cost many Fijians hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The University of Fiji student victim, who did not want to be named, was tricked by a hijab seller on Instagram who advertised a huge sale. After the victim paid for the goods, the scammer disappeared with the money.

"I trusted the site because it had successfully sold hijabs to my friends before," she said. "Those initial customers recommended the site to friends and relatives who then be-

came potential targets."

The scammer worked fast after having lulled his victims into a false sense of security with the initial sales. He deactivated the account within a week of receiving the money – at least \$45 each – from his final victims.

Many families buy clothes online because it is convenient. The sites offer better styles, more choice, and sometimes the perception of better deals or prices during sales. It also allows people to shop from the comfort of their homes.

Her experience has made the student victim more cautious.

"I will be more careful when purchasing online, and will check the legitimacy of sellers before making any payments, she said.

She also urged people to take more responsibility for their own online safety.

"Staying informed about the latest scams and learning how they work is crucial. The more you know, the better you can spot and avoid these threats.

"It's also essential to be cautious and always verify the legitimacy of websites, emails, or phone calls, especially if they come out of the blue and ask for personal information or money. If something feels off, it's worth taking a moment to double-check by contacting the organisation directly through official channels."

You can also check out advice from the independent regulator for online safety in Fiji at <https://osc.com.fj/social-media-tips/>

\$1m to help with plans for buildings



The University of Fiji was pleased to receive an unprecedented grant from the government in the last Budget announcement.

While the increase was not as much as we had requested, nevertheless, for the first time, we received a capital grant of \$1m for building the Centre for iTaukei Studies Bure which had been placed on the back burner due to lack of funds. The Facilities Officer has called for expressions of interest from innovative architects to design the CIS Bure which will include a performance space as well as offices and classrooms.

Plans to build student hostel accommodation are also being discussed. We hope both buildings will get underway next year.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with Levuka Town Council the University will help the Council with several initiatives including its five-year Strategic Plan, heritage programmes (Levuka is a heritage site listed with Unesco), informal and formal education for Year 13 graduates as well as adults, and by helping to develop a sustainable economy based on the special character of Levuka, Ovalau, Moturiki and adjacent districts.

This is the first time a university has partnered with a town council to this extent, with heritage as the core feature. The University will establish an office in the town to facilitate its MOU and, through hybrid forms of learning and teaching, will offer university programmes to those in Levuka who wish to attain higher educational qualifications.

The partnership between the University and its student body through the Student Association (UFSA) continues to grow with mutual respect, co-governance and advocacy on behalf of students as the core value of the joint initiatives. UFSA was represented at the MOU signing ceremony in Levuka and its executives were also involved in organising students' activities in the Inter-Tertiary Games, Debating Competitions, Mooting and the festival-like Open Day.

On behalf of Senior Management I wish all students the very best of luck in their upcoming exams. Graduation will take place on November 29 this year which also marks the official end of the teaching period for the Christmas break. I also take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy Diwali.



Some of the writers who contributed to the collection in Moveable Magic at the launch of the book at the Samabula campus: from left, Mason James Lee, artist in residence; Professor Anurag Subramani; Dr Mohit Prasad; Dr Nikhat Shameem; Ms Joanne Vosailagi; and Ms Jane Ricketts.

Authors on the magic of reading

A BOOK launched by the University of Fiji records writers' accounts of how they got into reading, often as children, and how that inspired their writing.

Moveable Magic: Re-making the World was edited by University Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem and academic Professor Subramani.

It is a collection of essays and personal accounts of how the authors discovered books and reading – and how books changed their worlds.

The book was launched by the Pro-Chancellor of the University of Fiji, Pundit Bhuwan Dutt, at the University's Samabula Campus.

Professor Shameem said that to read for pleasure is to move into the world of magical inspiration.

She said *Moveable Magic* should fit in with the Ministry of Education's plans as the Minister had recently proposed a national education curriculum review.

Research had shown that children who were encouraged to read for pleasure in their early years performed better in schools over time and were more likely to succeed in life as adults.

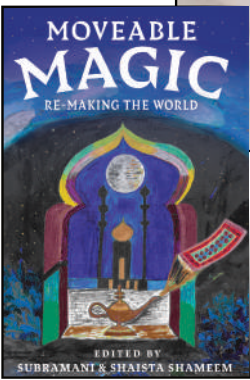
And, Professor Shameem added, adults who had loved to read as children developed a more balanced and compassionate view of the world and their communities.

Fijian authors who contributed to the book

By UniFiji Watch reporters



Pundit Bhuwan Dutt, Pro-Chancellor of the University of Fiji, speaking at the launch of *Moveable Magic*



include Jane Ricketts, Sudesh Mishra, Susan Sela, Larry Thomas, Anurag Subramani, Nikhat Shameem, Kavita Nandan, Rajat Gyaneshwar, Vimal Madhavan, Mohit Prasad, Joanne Vosailagi and Dipak Singh.

In addition, said Professor Shameem, the editors were determined to provide a research context to reading for pleasure in Fiji and, hence, Adi Tubuna Laveti Tikomaimalaya, Bimlesh Kumar, Daneshwar Sharma, Mumtaz Alam and Komal Krishna Lata in their chapters provided additional academic interest by contributing to analyses of who reads in schools and by producing data on the extent of reading for pleasure by teachers and students in primary and secondary schools.

She stressed that reading for pleasure led to nation-building in the most positive way, and any reform of education in Fiji should ensure reading for pleasure is a core part of the educational focus from the earliest years.

• “*Moveable Magic*” is available from the University of Fiji Enlightenment Bookshop at Samabula and Saweni Campuses

AI – and how we cope with it



THE Nobel Prize for Physics has this year been awarded to two pioneers in the field of artificial intelligence – another pointer to AI's importance in our increasingly digital world.

New – and especially digital – technology is becoming more and more important in Fiji. And so there is greater use of AI to make learning easier. We need to consider how to accommodate AI in our lives and work.

AI offers a hopeful future, it has made administrative work easier and it provides more help to students that perhaps other sources, such as online search engines, cannot.

At the same time it is wise for people to carefully evaluate the ethics of using AI before fully embracing the technology.

Toronto University's Professor Geoffrey Hinton, sometimes called the “Godfather of AI” – who with Princeton Professor John Hopfield, won this year's physics prize – has warned that intelligent systems could eventually take control from humans.

Students have increasingly been found using it to write assignments. The benefits of AI are obvious, from pointing students toward possible sources of information to getting their work checked for grammar, or rewritten in a certain style.

But AI can reduce a student's ability to think and do things on their own. AI can save time but it gives a shortcut mentality.

Students need to be mindful that there must be a balance when asking for help yet making sure that work they present is their own work.

Universities, with the help of government and the AI industry need to develop clear policies on the use of AI.

AI gives a range of opportunities to students but there must be guidelines on its use so that we can ensure the integrity of education is not compromised in Fiji. Otherwise we risk a generation of humans who have become dependent on getting machines to offer them solutions – and then what do we do when the power gets cut?

– Shaniyah Khan

The editorial team for this edition



This edition of UniFiji Watch was produced by a team of journalism students led by the editor, Shaniyah Khan, left, and including Seran Devi, Zalika Ali, and Simran Dass. It's the sixth issue of the newspaper started tentatively three years ago by a group of students who were the first in the university's journalism

department, and who now plan to graduate as fully-fledged journalists in a few weeks. Publishing the paper gave the students first-hand experience of planning and producing a publication. Earlier editions of UniFiji Watch can be found at <https://www.unifiji.ac.fj/nifiji-watch-student-online-paper/>



From left: Zalika Ali, Simran Dass and Seran Devi



Stay true to your passion and culture, artist urges students

By Seran Devi

Artist Mason James Lee, whose work has been displayed in galleries worldwide, has emphasised the importance of staying true to one's creative vision while maintaining cultural roots.

Lee, a self-taught artist, urged young people to be patient in discovering their passion and purpose.

In an interview with UniFiji Watch, he said that finding one's true calling comes from hard work, experimentation, and creating a strong foundation to build upon.

"It's not about mastering one thing overnight, but about constantly learning and pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone," Lee said.

Acknowledging the societal and family pressures that often weigh heavily on young creatives, Lee encouraged students to remain focused on their own artistic goals.

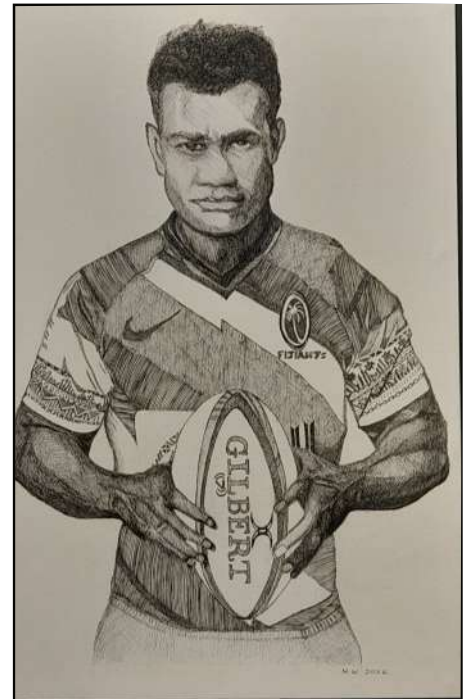
"Being an artist can be tough, but it's in those tough moments that you grow the most. Staying calm and focused is key."

Lee's advice resonates with many students who may feel torn between their own dreams and society's expectations.

A strong advocate for cultural identity, Lee incorporates Fijian and Pacific heritage into his work. He emphasised the importance of staying connected to one's roots in a globalised world that often encourages conformity.



Mason Lee, left, and, above, art work at the UniFiji campus gallery. Top right, *Seven Maestro*, by Nelum Weerasinghe; lower right, *Tributes to Ben Ryan*, by Damayanthi Amaratunga. Below, artists show their work: from left Damayanthi Manike, Nelum Nerañjali, Reshmi Ahalawat, Vindya Fernando. Below left, *Nani*, by Damayanthi Amaratunga



"Globalisation has its impact, but if you stay connected to your roots, your work will always have a unique voice."

"It's about showing the world where you come from and what that means through your art," Lee explained.

He encouraged students to innovate, but not at the expense of their cultural heritage. He said that balancing both can allow Fijian artists to stand out on the global stage.

Having exhibited his work in countries as far afield as New Zealand, the USA, and Germany, Lee emphasised the importance of originality when aiming for global recognition.

His advice to students was clear: be proud of who you are and where you come from, and don't imitate others.

"The world doesn't need more of the same, it needs you—your unique perspective and story," Lee said.

Mason James Lee's journey from a self-taught artist in Fiji to an internationally exhibited creator is a testament to the power of passion, perseverance, and pride in one's cultural roots.

His advice to students at the University of Fiji was simple but powerful: stay true to yourself, never stop learning, and embrace the richness of your heritage as you navigate your path.

For students seeking inspiration and guidance, Lee's message serves as a reminder that success isn't just about talent—it's about staying authentic and continuously pushing forward, no matter the challenges.



A classroom on Love Island

The TV reality show Love Island has proved a rich source for training for the University of Fiji's pioneering journalism students.

For the past two years the students have worked with the teams filming the American show learning how the popular TV show is made.

Love Island, which streams on Peacock in the US, films the interactions between a group of single strangers from all around the world confined for six weeks to a villa in Fiji.

Viewers can watch romantic connections developing and dissolving among the contestants, with the accompanying tears and laughter, the highs and the lows. The winning couple can pocket about \$US50,000.

The show's hosts have included Sarah Hyland of *The Modern Family* fame, and American TV personality, Ariana Madix.

The show started life in the United Kingdom but now has many national versions. The US version began its journey in

By Shaniyah Khan

Lami back in 2019 but moved to other locations due to COVID restrictions.

The production returned to the South Pacific in 2023 filming season five at Naisoso Island in Nadi where two high-end villas were rented out for four months. Later an off-shoot called Love Island Games was also filmed in Fiji.

The show was back in Fiji in early 2024 setting up base for the next two years at Anchorage Resort in Vuda which is five minutes away from the UniFiji Saweni campus in Lautoka.

The journalism students began their film and TV journey initially as interns on the show in 2023. Their work ranged from doing stand-ins, carrying cameras and other equipment, to grabbing the crew members their lunches and coffee just like every other intern in any organisation.

The journey had been new since this was

an international production and also was far from their comfort zone.

Simran Dass, a pioneer journalism student at UniFiji, said, "I was hesitant to go for the internship at Love Island but towards the end of it I could remember the fun I had with something new like this."

"My experience on set has pushed me to think quickly and adapt to changes, which has been a great learning experience. The long hours can also be tough, as the schedule is demanding and there are tight deadlines."

"Staying focused and creative during long days has been a challenge, but it's also helped me grow," she said.

The students were invited again at the beginning of this year to be part of the show as they shown how hard they had worked as interns.

This time they returned not as interns but as actual crew members who were part of different departments such as social media or the control room (with the executives and

producers) production where they were offered better pay.

"I had a great learning experience compared to last year, I learnt to multitask and handle things with confidentiality," said Virisila Enikosuna, one of the final-year students of the BJMS programme at UniFiji.

"My biggest challenge was waking up early every morning and the long shifts."

The students felt that the networking skills that they had learnt in lectures and on set was key in getting their jobs back for another season.

The show has been a favourite for many Fijians but after a very successful season becoming more popular than the Netflix original series *Bridgerton* in the US, it gained more fans throughout the Pacific and Fiji.

Peacock is not available in Fiji so viewers usually stream the show on other websites.

The production team is set to return to Fiji next year to film season seven of Love Island and the second season for Love Island Games.



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UniFiji Watch



The University of Fiji
(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)



YOUR SAY – What is the best way to win the battle against illegal drugs?



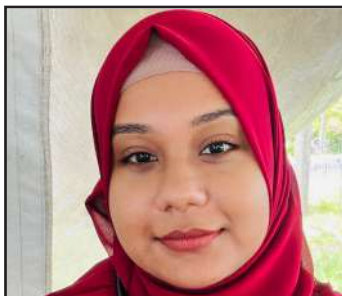
Fulori Tokaiwai, Nursing student:

Education and prevention programmes. Education plays a vital role in preventing drug abuse before it starts. Implementing comprehensive education programmes in schools that focus on the risks linked with drug use, as well as promoting healthy coping mechanisms and life skills, can significantly reduce the likelihood of substance abuse among young people



Rishant Kumar, Bachelor of Agricultural Engineering

One of the best ways to tackle illegal drugs is through a combination of education, prevention, and support. Educating people about the dangers of drugs, especially starting from a young age, can help prevent drug use. Providing support and resources for those struggling with addiction is also crucial. It is a complex issue, but every little step counts.



Aalia Ali, Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery

Counselling, teaching, and focused initiatives are important at the university level in Fiji. Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world, as Nelson Mandela once said. Encouraging drug-free, safer lives and peer-led activities can help create such an environment.



Wane Masi, Bachelor of Law student

I think this can be done through more awareness programmes in regards to the negative sides of drugs and through more village visitation from government sectors where they get to inform rural areas on the negative sides of it so that when at times they want to come to towns and cities they have some understanding of what the effect of drugs is to them and to the public as well.



Shayal Sharma, Bachelor of Commerce in tourism studies and management

Winning the battle against illegal drugs requires education, prevention, and treatment, alongside community support and addressing root causes like poverty and mental health to create lasting change.

Focus on journalism essentials

IT'S back to basics for journalism students as Professor Anurag Subramani settles into his new role in the University of Fiji journalism department.

He wants his students to strengthen their English-language skills, and he wants them to do that by reading more.

"Journalism is basically someone going out there in the world and looking for a story, chasing a story," he told me in his first interview in his new position.

"And then, of course, there's the writing bit," he said. Writing a news story, like writing a short story or a film script, requires you to have good English language skills.

"And that is something our journalists are lacking, and this is a direct result of not reading."

"If you want to be a good writer, as I say to my creative writing students, you have to be a great reader. A good writer is a great reader."

"You should be able to use the language creatively. And the only way you can do it is by reading."

"I think this is what I'm going to emphasise to my journalism students. I'm going to get them into reading a lot."

"It's common sense. You are using the

By Shaniyah Khan

English language. If you have very poor competency, how are you going to write, how are you going to express yourself?"

Professor Subramani brings skills from two disciplines – history and English literature – to his work and to the techniques he tries to impart to his students.

"I have always been interested in how literature represents history and historical processes, like colonialism and slavery."

"I came to history via literature. It's the kind of history that most attracts me, and it's the history of the common man, subaltern history it's called."

"I like to write about ordinary events and ordinary people."

Journalism fulfills a need that has remained more or less the same in today's digital age as it was, say, centuries ago – our desire to know what is happening, our

desire for the latest news, our desire for stories, and our desire to tell stories and tell about the news, Professor Subramani said.

However we get our news, whether

from printed newspapers or online, what still remains is that basic impulse to know what is going on.

In his new role Professor Subramani will also be teaching documentary filmmaking, along with reading, writing and story-telling skills. He will also take on a co-ordinating role in the journalism department.

Professor Subramani is also working on a history of cinema in Fiji, putting together a photographic history of the nation, and working on several commissioned works on family histories.

In 2018, he took a break from academia for a research project digging up unique or lesser-known stories about ordinary people from Fiji's past. Some were published in his column in the Fiji Times.

"What I want to do now is to gather all those stories and put them in a book called The People's History of Fiji."

Returning to academia, Professor Subramani taught film-script and creative writing and poetry at the University of the South Pacific until his recent appointment.

"I think at the University of the South Pacific – what has been most enjoyable for me in the past years or so, has been teaching creative writing. I love writing and I love teaching writing, and I get passionate about it."

He could see that the students were fully engaged in what he was talking about, and so the outcome was really good in the strong film scripts, poems or short stories.



Professor Anurag Subramani ... "I like to write about ordinary events and ordinary people."

Concern over impact of porn on student well-being

The nation's Porn Task Force has turned its attention to university campuses, examining the impact of online porn on students' academic performance and mental health.

The focus comes in response to growing concerns about the pornographic material online and its potential consequences.

By Simran Dass

Students have expressed growing concerns over the presence and influence of such content on campus.

Fiji is ranked as one of the top 10 countries for internet searches related to pornography and has seen significant usage of pornography.

Students told UniFiji Watch of their unease about the potential use of pornography among their peers.

One said that knowing there were people around her who used pornography made her feel unsafe, especially in otherwise empty study rooms.

Her sentiments highlight a broader

issue among students who know the potential consequences of pornography addiction. The concerns reflect a growing need for resources to address mental health and safety on campus.

A male student admitted he struggled to maintain a balance between his online habits and schoolwork.

"It's not something I'm proud of. Sometimes, I feel guilty after watching because I know it takes time away from other, more meaningful activities," he said.

The Government has approved the establishment of a task force which will look at restricting the access that under-18s have to pornography.